LABOUR
BRIEFING
40p FORTNIGHTLY
NO.77 FEB 8-21 1989

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- Part-time workers
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40p

NEC DROPS CHARGES AGAINST MANDY MUDD

WITCH-HUNTERS BACK DOWN!

On Tuesday January 31st, Labour's NEC withdrew the baseless charges against me.

These charges arose from our struggle against Council cuts in Haringey, North London. They included the allegation that I was "a ringleader of organised violence" at the Local Government Committee meeting held on December 10th 1987, and that my conduct was therefore "prejudicial to the Party".

After the first (and only) sitting of the NCC panel hearing the charges, it was obvious that the NEC case couldn't stand up.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Mandy Mudd speaks at the second Socialist Conference, June 1988 in Chesterfield.

By MANDY MUDD Tottenham CLP

Two of the four "prosecution" witnesses had testified — and done such a poor job that it was clear their testimony had to be rejected by the panel.

The NEC was unable to submit any evidence in support of its bogus allegations. The charges themselves were so sloppy, vague, and illogical that any impartial tribunal would have had to dismiss them.

But the NEC, represented by Joyce Gould, Labour's National Director of Organisation, wants to save face.

Unable to complete the process which it had initiated, with its case in tatters, the NEC now claims the case was prejudiced — because the statements against me were circulated at the March 1988 meeting of the Tottenham GC (and, it is alleged, details appeared in *Labour Briefing* — which they didn't).

Joyce Gould has also made a vague reference to seeking legal advice. If this is a veiled threat, it just won't wash.

I have written to the NEC demanding a statement from them exonerating me of all accusations, confirming that I am a member of the Labour Party in good standing, and apologising for the harm these trumped-up charges have caused — to myself, to many other socialists in Haringey, and to the Labour Party itself.

Political

We have defeated this witch-hunt because we mounted a political defence. We raised the issues in our local Parties and received support from CLPs, trade unionists, and individuals up and down the country.

We organised lobbies. We disseminated bulletins so that rank-and-file Party and trade union members could make up their own minds about the case.

Above all, we insisted on our right to oppose the cuts in Haringey and on the right of all Party members to dissent from local or national leaderships. We relied on the truth, without evasions or equivocations.

In our evidence to the NCC, we had submitted over 30 separate statements from local people who witnessed the events in question. We had planned to call six additional witnesses in person, including two local Councillors, two officers from a local Party branch, and an elected member of the NCC.

In contrast, the NEC submitted five written statements and planned to call four of the authors to testify in person.

It was quite obvious from the dating of the statements and from the testimony of the two NEC witnesses who were allowed to appear that the entire case had been planned by a small clique in Haringey.

Continued on page 6

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Letters

WRITEBACK!

We welcome your letters!

Disagree with something? — write in.
Agree with something? — write in.
Want to raise a new idea? — Write in.

Let's hear your views!

Write to: Writeback, Labour Briefing, 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB.
Please send letters for the next issue to arrive by Wednesday, February 15th if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

Left out? Labour in?

Dear *Briefing*,

Should the left be in local government at all?

In my opinion, the controls which now exist on finance, together with the new restrictions on powers being introduced on an almost daily basis, plus CCT, plus the hiving off of many education functions, make it at least questionable as to whether the left should continue to participate in a system which is designed to be a transmission belt for the ideas and obsessions of Thatcherism.

It used to be said that there was political space in local government to implement some of the left's most cherished dreams, and to show that there was an alternative to Thatcherism.

No person in their right mind could argue this position now.

The second-tier London organisations have been abolished and the London Boroughs impoverished.

The political response there has been to hang on and on, making further and deeper compromises with the legislative demands of the government, shedding all pretence of principle.

Outside London, the process of radicalisation in local government was always more shallow and has now been put firmly into reverse.

Two questions arise for serious socialists: should the left participate in this charade any further; and should the Labour Party participate?

I answer tentatively that the organised left should pull out of local government and concentrate on more productive areas of activity.

There are two that immediately come to mind: arguing for socialism and socialist ideas in the movement and the class (which has been subordinated to the running of the local state since at least Attlee's time); and mounting a serious challenge to the domination of the PLP by the right.

These two activities seem to me to be intrinsically more useful for the left than an attempt to influence the degree of collaboration and capitulation by a specific local Council.

Whether or not the Labour Party itself should pull out of local government work is a more difficult question. As the Party is an electoral one, it would be inviting marginalisation to leave local government contests to the Tories and the centre parties.

These matters need extensive and serious debate throughout the left.

Yours,
Reg Race,
Sutton Scarsdale,
Derbyshire

The fetish of "staying in office"

Dear *Briefing*,

Greg Tucker's defence of "staying in office" (*Where next in local government?*, *Briefing* no. 73) makes only two points, neither of which face up to the enormous crisis facing Labour in local government:

•that those arguing for resignation are disillusioned in local government's inability to achieve world socialism and are now so demoralised they just want to opt out;

•more seriously, that for the immediate future there remains an important role for Councillors in "the global fight for socialism".

Of course there exists a high level of demoralisation, but what Greg signally fails to understand is that the strategy of resignation is based on a political analysis, not an emotional reaction to a third Thatcher term.

In fact, the die was cast a long time ago, when Labour Councils first capitulated to rate-capping and the threat of surcharge.

Greg points to the Poplar Councillors to back up his main argument. This is not a valid analogy. They had real power because they were united in the fight against the Tories and therefore *were* part of the wider struggle for socialism.

In fact, Greg unwittingly gives the game away, his position being based on the slogan "Staying in *office* — part of a wider struggle for power" (my emphasis), accepting that Labour no longer has power in local government.

The juxtaposition of photographs in the original centrespread may have been a subtle attempt to bolster Greg's argument.

Ironically, the picture of tenants demonstrating against HATs doesn't advance his position one jot. The Tories' climbdown over HATs had absolutely nothing to do with action inside Council Chambers or action on the part of Labour Councils.

Up till now *Briefing* has been correct to try to organise the left in the Council Chambers.

But "the global fight for socialism" does not — and should not — include a role for Councillors at *every* moment in history. This should always be a tactical question.

Greg advises us "to use the contradiction between the demands made by local people on [Labour] Councils, and the role being forced on [Labour] Councils by the Tory government."

This approach may be able to retain credibility till the 1990 elections, but certainly not after.

Committed as they are to staying "legal", Labour Councils will be on the wrong side of the battles to prevent the widespread deterioration and privatisation of services and huge loss of jobs, massively high Council rents, Council estate sales, etc.

And crucially, Labour Council will collect and police the Poll Tax.

All *Briefing* supporters agree partial collaboration is out of the question — the New Realist strategy will only delay Labour implementation of the Tory programme, allowing it in piecemeal instead.

Surely then, all agree this is exactly the "strategy" the Tories want Labour to adopt as it has the practical effect of seriously undermining resistance at the same time as smashing the Labour Party in its heartlands.

All of this leads us back to the question of resignation. The Labour Party has no option now but to extricate itself as quickly as possible from local government and give a political lead in the fight against the Tories.

Though this involves paying a political price, the Tories don't want Labour to pull out of local government, because the price Labour will pay for staying in and doing the Tories' dirty work for them will be far higher.

The Tories don't want us to resign, the New Realists are against resignation, and *Briefing* is in danger of making a fetish out of "staying in office".

John Turkie,
Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP



Study the background to the debate! Watch Neighbours, Monday to Friday, 1.30 and 5.30pm, BBC1.

Popularise, not paternalise!

Dear *Briefing*,

I was quite surprised at the outraged response to the article on *Neighbours*.

One of the letters merely trots out paternalistic socialist attitudes that working class people who watch Neighbours are not intelligent enough to watch without becoming influenced into adopting the roles portrayed in the series.

It implies that working class people should be protected from such influences.

The other letter focuses on people's need to escape from reality.

I would suggest that there is no greater escape from reality than watching *Children in Need* or *Telethon*, programmes which give the impression that sending off cheques can solve society's fundamental problems.

Briefing should print articles on *Neighbours* and other soaps because they are of interest to the working class. It is not the fault of the soap for its lack of interest in socialist issues and "reality", but the fault of a largely ineffective Labour Party to revive people's interest in society and in popularising socialism.

Yours in socialism,
Sally Clements,
Tottenham CLP

Contact Briefing

Contact Briefing at 39, Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB. We hope to bring you the nextu issue of Briefing on Wednesday February 22nd; deadline for copy and letters is Tuesday February 14th.

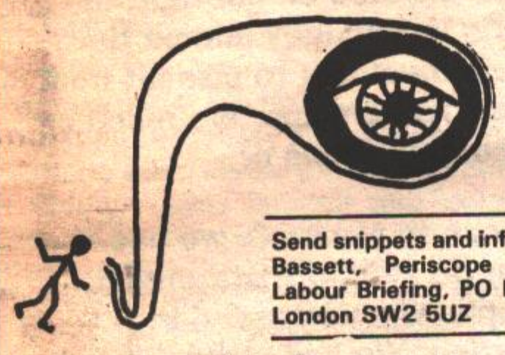
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500 Club Winner

Neville has randomly generated number 84 as this week's winning share. The holder of the number is Sue Arnall of Bury. Contact *Briefing* for details of how to join the lucky number 500 Club.

Donations have started arriving for our £1,000 appeal. Thanks will be published soon: watch this space for details of the *Briefing* Spring Draw.

Periscope



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

Cosy COHSE

Thousands of **COHSE** members currently locked in struggle with the Tories over regrading will be delighted to know that their union is offering them a wide range of "COHSE comforts" — including COHSE care bears, teddy tea towels, shirts, mugs, etc.

"This new service for members has really caught the imagination," declared General Secretary **Hector MacKenzie.**

"COHSE's leather-bound personal organisers are rapidly becoming essential equipment for all our branch secretaries."

Watch out, Hector, careless talk costs... well subsequent notoriety if there's a Labour Party dignatory's speechwriter about.

Satanic Vs.

Spotted at a Socialist Conference fund-raiser: novelist **Salman Rushdie** and MP **Bernie Grant**, who supported Max Madden's attack on Rushdie's latest book in the House of Commons.

Rushdie and Grant seemed to be chatting amiably enough, but Grant did not join in the general applause which greeted Rushdie's brief but powerful speech about censorship and repression in the Muslim world.

And when Grant was approached to sign a souvenir card to mark the occasion (along with all the other celebrities present) he refused — because Rushdie's signature was already on the card.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Bernie Grant

Class divide widens — it's official

Inequalities in income between rich and poor households have widened in the past decade even after taking account of taxes and benefits, according to official estimates released by the Central Statistical Office.

The proportion of income going to the poorest 20% of households fell between 1975 and 1986 but the share going to the top 20% rose.

The top 20% now take over 51% of total pre-tax incomes. The bottom 20% take a minute 0.3%.

Taxes and benefits effect some redistribution, but not much. The top 20% still take home 42% of total final incomes (after tax and benefit), while the bottom 20% take only 6.3%.

Filofax fetishists

December's *Marxism Today* carried a weighty treatise by **Beatrix Campbell** and **Wendy Wheeler** on the Filofax.

Two pages were devoted to the Filofax "as a social commentary", and the Filofax as an organiser of "the social citizen".

What's more, the Filofax, it appears, is a weapon against women's oppression — witness the cynicism of **Arthur Scargill**, who rejects the Filofax, because he is serviced by "an army of secretaries and wives".

"The revolt against the Filofax masquerades as a revolt against new times," states the article, in a thinly veiled attack on any roving brontosauri that haven't yet purchased a personal organiser.

The LCC, who usually borrow their ideological cover from *MT*, will no doubt be pressing for an expansion of the NCC's remit to cover all those found guilty of *not* possessing a Filofax.

Armchair socialist?

A *Briefing* comrade trying to contact National Steering Committee Member **Steve Reicher** in Exeter, concerning a possible fringe meeting at the Labour Party South West Regional Conference, was given his phone number by the ever-helpful **Graham Bash.**

Unfortunately, upon dialling the number, the comrade found himself talking to the **furniture department of Debenhams** in Exeter.

They seemed unenthusiastic about holding a *Briefing* fringe meeting on the premises.

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Saving the NHS

The Tories' plans to introduce market forces into the NHS were previewed in the last two issues of *Briefing* and should have come as no surprise to anyone in the labour movement.

Robin Cook was right to lambast the plans in parliament as major steps towards the privatisation and ultimate destruction of the NHS. The problem here is that this battle cannot be won by a "war of words" in parliament.

The Tories have steamrolled through local government, education, housing, and public transport (with the vital assistance of the Labour and trade union leaderships), but even they have had to wait nearly a decade before tackling the NHS.

The majority of the population supports universal, comprehensive, free of charge health care. If a substantial part of that majority can be mobilised — above all, if a majority of health service workers can be mobilised — the Tories will be forced to beat a retreat.

To begin with, the Labour Party and TUC should call a national Day of Action — strike action — in defence of the NHS. Fact sheets, posters, badges, leaflets... all need to be produced, pronto. NHS unions must agree a plan of industrial action — and stick to it when the going gets tough.

In the short run, the best way to press our leaders into action is through local activity on the ground. Here, joint union, Labour Party, and community campaigning is already underway in many areas.

Where it is not, the new proposals may well provide the necessary spark. Specific targets — every general hospital large enough to "opt out", every specialist unit tempted to compete in the "internal market", every GP large enough to seek "independent" funding — should be singled out and used as a focus for bringing together health workers and health service users.

In all this it is unlikely that we will receive much assistance from the leaders of our movement. But the best answer to their timidity is our determination.

Hands off our hospitals! Patients, not profits! Save our NHS!

NEC: dilemmas for the left

The *Campaign for Socialism*, the national left network set up in the wake of the Benn-Heffer challenge, is now consulting local and regional left groups about the shape of this year's left slate for the NEC.

This is a long overdue development, but the time allowed for it is woefully inadequate. The search for new names, new faces, hardly has time to get off the ground, and last year's candidates obviously start with a big advantage.

Nonetheless, it is vital that as many local, regional, and national left groups as possible participate in the process and submit their views to the *Campaign for Socialism*.

The *Labour Briefing* National Steering Committee discussed the whole question at its last meeting and will be making the following points at the next *Campaign for Socialism* meeting in March:

•The political basis of the slate should include support for last year's Benn-Heffer challenge (and all the policies associated with it), opposition to the witch-hunt, and a clear Parliamentary record (most of the likely candidates are MPs) on the Alton Bill, the PTA, the defence estimates, and the notorious attempts to extend the blasphemy law.

All candidates should have a strong record of participation in building the left at local and national level.

•From last year's candidates in the CLP and Women's Sections, we call for support for Abbott, Benn, Heffer, Livingstone, Skinner, Wise, and Osamor.

•New names and faces are needed in both sections. MPs and non-MPs with an interest in standing should come forward now (or be pushed forward, if necessary).

•We are in favour of the principle of annual leadership/deputy leadership contests. Despite the new 20% rule on PLP nominations, we believe the process of campaigning for those nominations will help advance the left — and will prepare us for the future, which may bring a genuine leadership fight sooner than many expect.

Economic Notebook

1992 is just around the corner

By the end of 1992, capital will be free to organise as it pleases throughout the European Community, the largest market in the world.

For capital, this represents a new organisational base for global restructuring.

The head of Olivetti predicts that the European telecommunications business will be run by three or four pan-European majors, instead of the 12-plus producers currently running the system.

Ford, GM, and other motor majors intend to acquire or squeeze out competition, leaving the running in Europe to a mere handful of producers — and Ford, for instance, sees Europe as the basis for a renewed effort to create a "world car".

There will be a reckoning in the oil and chemicals sector, with excess capacity squeezed out, regardless of individual countries' policies or preferences.

Meanwhile, many smaller companies are being bounced into European collaboration or merger deals. Employers are looking for a mixture of pan-European market domination and production in low cost European countries.

Japanese-based producers have only a few years in which to establish a commercial or production base in Europe before "external" trade barriers are put up around the European Community.

By FRANK SCOTT

The debate about whether the EC becomes "Fortress Europe" will undoubtedly be dominated by political pressures to maintain "national champions" — such as France's Renault, or Germany's Mercedes Benz.

As a result, trade barriers against Third World suppliers and producers are likely to increase.

There is already a tendency towards regional concentration, with banking and financial services, for instance, congregating around Northern Europe. The periphery (Scotland, Greece, or Portugal) will increasingly be seen as a source of cheap labour and cheap production.

The freeing up of cross-border controls will *accelerate* the trend towards regional differences.

Countries with low pay and poor employment protection legislation — like Britain — may "benefit" from the placement of cheap assembly-type work, whilst other regions with high investment and high skill records will gain more high level employment.

At the moment, the so-called "social dimension" of European integration is separated into a ghetto.

Apart from some basic health and safety regulations, the rest — minimum wages, employment and trade union rights — is subject to veto by any single EC country. Thatcher has used that veto many times already.



PHOTO: Martine Stead/Jim Thain

Ford workers on strike last year: making common cause with fellow European workers. Soon they will have an even commoner cause: the Common Market changes of 1992.

The Single European Act (i.e. "1992") also introduces compulsory competitive tendering for all public procurement on a pan-European basis. Several large European corporations are already setting up international arrangements to exploit this area of deregulation.

Just how a local Direct Labour Organisation will be able to compete with a transnational corporation remains to be seen. It's certainly not far fetched to envisage a future in which migrant Greek workers will be forced into competition with local workforces in Britain, France, or Germany.

For despite the much vaunted opportunities for workers to move and work throughout Europe after 1992, the top earners will be given nice carrots to work in Rotterdam or Brussels, whilst unemployed people or low earners may be *forced* to migrate elsewhere and follow wages across Europe.

Inequalities of income, job availability, and working conditions will be exaggerated. The opportunity to "level up" social conditions may well be sidelined by the sheer force of transnational capital's power.

Campaign!

EVENTS

FEBRUARY

Wed. 15th. London Health Emergency urgent meeting: *Stop the NHS White Paper! Hands off our hospitals!.* To discuss full implications of the White Paper and the possibilities of a united campaign to defeat it. Representatives and individuals from all interested bodies welcome. Speakers: Frank Dobson MP, Judith Carter (COHSE national officer), Cllr Annette Barrett (Chair, Greenwich Health Sub-Committee. 7pm, Camden Town Hall, Judd St, London WC1, (Kings Cross tube). Details: LHE, 335, Grays Inn Road, London WC1, (01) 833 3020.

Sat. 18th. South East London Policy Review Conference. 10.00am. Registration. Policies for the 90s, plenary with Ken Livingstone MP, Bernie Grant MP, Carol Hall, SOGAT. What Kind of Party?, plenary with Jon Lansman, Diane Abbott MP. Workshops. 10.00am-5pm, Thames Polytechnic Students Union, Thomas St, London SE18. Creche provided. Disabled access difficult, but help provided.

Year of Action on Ireland

Haringey Irish Working Group Dayschool

Injustice: the price of Britain's rule

Saturday February 18th, 10.30am-4.30pm

A day of events: discussion; information; practical planning for the coming year

Speakers from Sinn Fein and Haringey Irish in Britain Representation Group

Videos: Off our Knees (made by the '68 Committee in Belfast); Mother Ireland (banned from television)

Many different campaigns have been invited to attend and speak in workshops including Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign, the Construction Safety Campaign, the Guildford Four, Campaign Against Strip-Searching.

Food; Creche; Stalls;

Haringey Irish Centre, Pretoria Road, London N17 (off White Hart Lane)

Access: Please phone 609 1743 for full details

Registration: £2 (waged); £1 (unwaged)

Further information: 609 1743

MARCH

Weds. 4th. Miners' Strike, 5th Anniversary Event. Supported by Manchester City Council. Morning: three major workshops on privatisation, victimisation, women in struggle. Afternoon: Rally in the Great Hall. Evening: Top class entertainment hosted by Mike Elliot (of Albert Hall Heroes Concert fame). Speakers include: Arthur Scargill, Peter Heathfield, Tony Benn, Dennis Skinner. Manchester Town Hall.

Sat. 14th. Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign. *Second anniversary of the Tottenham three convictions.* March through Wood Green, Tottenham, to rally on the Farm. Quash the Convictions!

Socialist Conference

Democratic Rights — a call to action

The following is the text of a "call to action" on democratic rights issued by the Socialist Conference. It is hoped that this will be the first step towards building a movement that can unite all the disparate groups struggling on the ground behind mass protest action in defence of democratic rights.

Without democratic rights, enshrined in law, adhered to in practice, and respected in the community, no society can develop the full potential of its members, collectively or individually.

In Britain in recent years we have witnessed increasingly ominous attacks on these rights — many of them initiated or condoned by central government.

The catalogue of repressive acts grows day by day: censorship, unjust imprisonments, deportations, harassment in the streets, in prisons, in the home and the workplace, restrictions on freedom of information and discussion, denial of rights to assemble, to dissent, to organise.

Among the targets for these attacks have been black people, trade unionists, journalists, the people of the North of Ireland and the Irish community in Britain, lesbians and gay men, peace campaigners and other political activists.

But by their very nature, these attacks affect the whole of our society. Until this trend is checked and reversed, our society can make no honest claim to be just, fair, or democratic.

Nor is democracy solely a question of individual political rights, essential as these are. For democracy to become a real force in the lives of millions, it must be extended into the social and economic spheres.

Collective rights are just as vital as individual rights. Indeed, the existence of one cannot be guaranteed without the other.

Isolated

Too often our protests against the growing wave of attacks have been stifled, isolated, or confined only to whichever group is immediately under threat. Too often concern about democratic rights has been consigned to the fringe. We need urgently to bring this concern from the fringe into the mainstream of political life.

The response to Charter 88 has shown the widespread concern which exists and the readiness of many people to take a stand. We believe that concern and readiness can form the basis of a vigorous movement which will take action to defend democratic rights in practice.

Angered

Therefore we urge all those affected or angered by the attacks on democratic rights to join us at a National Convention for Democratic Rights.

At this Convention, we will work together to build united resistance to the attack on democratic rights — and launch a sustained, national campaign for a radical extension of democracy throughout British society. We hope to share information and resources, and to coordinate and mobilise protest.

Infringement

Any and every infringement of civil rights must be met with organised, visible, nationwide political resistance.

We also hope this Convention will become a national advocate for democracy in general.

We hope it will develop a statement of democratic principles, a strategy for the democratisation of British society, and a programme of democratic demands which can serve as the basis for a serious, long-term national campaign.

Too much ground has been lost already. The time has come to demand full political, civil, and human rights. Pleas join us in sponsoring this call.

An open meeting for all organisations and individuals interested in building the National Convention for Democratic Rights will be held in London on May 13th. Details from: Democratic Rights, c/o Reading Matters Bookshop, Box 35, Wood Green High Road, London N22.

Socialist Conference

Scotland Report

The first event organised by the Socialist Conference in Scotland proved a great success, attracting over 450 people, far more than the organisers expected.

The speakers in the opening session were Sheila Maher (Aberdeen Against the Poll Tax) and MPs Tony Benn and Dennis Canavan.

Canavan praised the steps taken by the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly towards setting up a constitutional conference. He asked SNP members present to work to reverse Gordon Wilson's statement of intent to withdraw from the conference.

He also outlined a strategy for winning home rule, which included extra-parliamentary activity, such as non-payment of the Poll Tax, and a push for a referendum, even if it had to be unofficial.

Sheila Maher outlined a strategy of opposition to the Poll Tax and argued strongly for non-payment and non-collection.

Benn called on those present to undertake "a massive task of socialist reconstruction" based on four main points: liberation from the Cold War; democratisation, including a Scottish Assembly; rebuilding Britain's industrial strength; and a defence of civil liberties.

By Alan Green and Gordon Morgan

The Conference had lively workshops on women's liberation, the Poll Tax, Scotland and the EEC, green economy, trade unions, taxation and benefits, and other topics.

The last session was a forum on "socialists and Scotland", with SNP, SWP, Scottish Greens, and Scottish Labour Action speakers.

There were also contributions from the floor reflecting a wide range of backgrounds. Further events of interest to Scottish socialists are planned for the future.

West Midlands Report

Two hundred and fifty socialists of variouys shades came to Coventry on February 4th for the West Midlands Socialist Conference.

They heard three Campaign Group MPs call for a renewal of comrades' socialist commitment.

Dave Nellist described the antics of the Party Leadership in the "palace of varieties" at Westminster. He emphasised the need to turn outwards and build campaigns on the ground around issues such as the Poll Tax.

Jeremy Corbyn spoke of the need to fight for our international socialist values, including unilateral nuclear disarmament.

By JOHN WILTON

Betty Heathfield got the Conference off to a rousing start with an attack on today's capitalist Tory values.

In the morning, ten workshops were held around Socialist Conference policy areas (internationalism, democracy, and the economy). After lunch, eleven workshops concentrated on building links between campaigns across the West Midlands on housing, health, education, green socialism, the Poll Tax, and trade unionism.

One of the initiatives to come out of the afternoon workshops was a Socialist Conference Trade Union Dayschool, to be held in Birmingham on May 6th. For details contact John Wilton, 25 World's End Ave, Quinton, Birmingham B32 1JF.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Betty Heathfield

Other initiatives included calls to set up Socialist Conference Groups in towns across the West Midlands.

Reg Race opened the final plenary by outlining the crisis facing British capitalism and the failure of old-style social democratic labourism to provide an answer.

He emphasised the need to build a national movement such as the Socialist Conference to link comrades and campaigns inside and outside the Labour Party.

Labour Briefing held a successful, well attended lunchtime fringe meeting at which comrades heard Bryn Griffiths from the *Briefing* National Steering Committee and Pauline Purnell from *Women for Socialism* outline ideas for organising and strengthening the left.

London Health Emergency

Stop the NHS White Paper!
Hands off our hospitals!

Urgent meeting to discuss the full implications of the government's NHS White Paper and the possibilities of a united campaign to defeat it.

Representatives and individuals from interested bodies welcome.

Speakers:

Frank Dobson MP; Judith Carter (COHSE national officer); Cllr Annette Barrett (Chair, Greenwich Health Sub-Committee)

Wednesday 15th February, 7pm

Camden Town Hall, Judd St, London WC1, (Kings Cross tube)

Details: LHE, 335, Grays Inn Road, London WC1, 01-833 3020.

Blair Peach march



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Memorial march after Blair Peach's death ten years ago.

Euro-action called

Following last year's successful co-ordination of marches and rallies against fascism in seven European countries, April 23rd will see a memorial march and rally for Blair Peach.

Blair Peach was an anti-fascist who was killed by police on a mass demonstration against a National Front General Election meeting ten years ago in Southall.

On April 23rd 1979 more than 700 people were arrested and many, including members of the band *Misty*, injured in police charges.

The struggles continues today with black people

By DAN CARTER

bearing the brunt of racial violence, oppressive policing and fascist activity.

April 1989 also marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Hitler, and the associated "celebrations" of fascist groups across the world.

The Southall demonstration will assemble at 1pm, at Southall Park, Uxbridge Road, Southall, and march to a rally at the Fenner Brockway Centre, South Road, Southall at 3pm.

Sponsors include Anti-Fascist Action, Black Sections, and Afro-Caribbean Focus.

Pensioners

End poverty in retirement

In the third week of January, Jeremy Corbyn introduced his Bill for the Elimination of Poverty in Retirement into the House of Commons.

This Bill is the sixth which Jeremy has presented, all of which have evolved from his original Bill to abolish standing charges.

The newest Bill has been developed by Jeremy in consultation with pensioners and pensioners' groups.

Although the Bill will be read again on March 3rd, Jeremy has no illusions as to its outcome:

"I have no doubt that the fate of this Bill will be the same as all the others. On March 3rd the Bill is blocked if there is a shout of 'object', even if it is anonymous.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

No problems for the world's richest pensioner.

"I am sure that at least one Tory MP, hoping to remain anonymous, will shout 'object'. In the past the objector has sometimes been identified and has been exposed to the wrath of pensioners locally and nationally."

Viraj Mendis

A reply to media lies

The capitalist media have intensified their campaign against Viraj Mendis by publishing vile distortions of statements he has made since his Home Office kidnapping and forcible return to Sri Lanka.

These press reports have been designed to undermine the Defence Campaign and Viraj's own credibility.

Clearly, the popular support for Viraj Mendis and for a growing number of anti-racist, anti-deportation campaigns frightens the Tories and their supporters in the media.

By Mike Shryder
VMDC

Despite assurances from the British Home Office and the Sri Lankan High Commissioner in London, the Sri Lankan government is refusing to issue Viraj with a passport, thus making him a prisoner on the island.

Father Henry West, who accompanied Viraj to Sri Lanka, commented: "The political situation there is a great deal more volatile than we had appreciated in Britain. Continual warfare between the political parties' armed gangs and, worst of all, the "anti-subversives" has led to killings which are reported daily."

Below, *Briefing* reprints a statement by Viraj, made from hiding in Sri Lanka, which answers the disgusting media lies:



PHOTO: Tim Nolan

Picketing Downing Street on the eve of Viraj's deportation

The media has cynically twisted my statement to give it a meaning exactly opposite to that intended.

I have not used the troubles in Sri Lanka as a device for staying in Britain. I have not invented these troubles. They are real and severe, and they do in fact place my freedom and life at risk.

I love this country and I want the world to know the way in which oppression and political extremism have undermined its peace and stability.

It is these troubles which have taken the lives of thousands of people and threatened the lives of thousands of others, including my own.

When I said that some of the claims I made were wrong, I was referring to the intricacies of the political situation in Sri Lanka and not the general pattern.

Violence

Everyone can feel a storm of violence brewing in the run up to the elections on February 15th. My earlier statements about the dangers in Sri Lanka were inaccurate only in that they under-estimated the number of people who are under threat.

When in Britain I believed that the main chauvinist force came from the JVP. I now believe chauvinism to be more widespread. I now realise that the situation in Sri Lanka is even worse than I believed when I was in Britain.

Don't listen to the British media. They have always attacked black people. Why should they change now?

The British media have not reported the 50 black people deported from Britain every week or the racism that runs through every institution in the country. They will not defend me even if I should die here in Sri Lanka.

Stop the deportations!

Francis and Moji must stay!

Manchester NALGO is backing plans by Francis and Moji's Defence Campaign for a national labour movement conference on immigration and nationality.

The conference will now take place on Saturday, April 15th. It is sponsored by NALGO and the FBU, and supported by NUPE.

Francis Okanlami is a NALGO member in Manchester under threat of deportation. Since his campaign started a year ago, NALGO has given full support, as has Manchester City Council, Francis's employer.

A demonstration in support of the right of Francis and his wife Moji to stay gathered several hundred people in October.

By FINN JENSEN

The Defence Campaign decided to organise the national labour movement conference not only to broaden support for the campaign but also to support all trade union members under attack from the immigration and nationality laws.

For many trade unions, this is a new area of work. At the conference, immigration lawyer Steve Cohen will explain how the laws work. There will also be workshops on organising anti-deportation campaigns.

Alistair Darling MP, Labour's new spokesperson on immigration, will speak on Labour's alternative to the immigration laws. (The Labour Party plans to publish a new policy document on immigration in April.)

The conference will start at 10am in Manchester Town Hall and will continue at 1.30pm in the Mechanics Institute. For details contact Rena Wood, NALGO Manchester Branch Office, First Floor, Elliot House, Jacksons Row, Manchester, tel. 061-234 3226. There is disabled access to both buildings.

Finally, North Manchester Anti-Racist Support Group has organised a benefit social for the Defence Campaign on February 24th, at the Yugoslav Club, Miles Platting, Manchester.

Deportation Update

This column is an update of deportation cases featured in previous *Briefings*.

Carlos Calderon (*LB* 75). Peruvian refugee. Expecting adjudication hearing in May. Campaign supported by the TGWU; now holding meetings with TGWU-sponsored MPs and Bishop of Southwark. Contact: Carlos Calderon Defence campaign, c/o 25 The Chase, London SW4 0NP. Tel. 01-249 3768.

Dora Oppong (*LB* 76). Ghanaian. Three children, all British citizens. Appeal against deportation on compassionate grounds has been adjourned until March 6th. Case supported by Newham Council. Contact: PO Box 273, Forest Gate, London E7.

MANDY MUDD

Witch-hunters back down!

Continued from front page

Assistant Regional Organiser Margaret McDonagh, called to support the "prosecution", gave a miserable performance as a witness.

Her report of events in Haringey was shown to be full of omissions, distortions, and inaccuracies and her evidence against me boiled down to her personal "impression" that I was misbehaving.

If these people had tried a stunt like this in a court of law they could well have become liable to prosecution for perjury and contempt of court.

For over a year I have had these charges hanging over me. For over a year this witch-hunt has absorbed precious resources and divided and demoralised the local Party.

I was prevented from standing as a duly selected Labour candidate in a local by-election. My personal and professional life has been repeatedly disrupted.

Now the NEC has in effect admitted that there never was any case for me to answer.

An apology is owed not only to me but to Party members everywhere for allowing a handful of LCC mischief-makers to pursue this ugly vendetta and give credibility to allegations for which there has never been the slightest scrap of proof.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Mandy Mudd in the audience at the Chesterfield Conference

It is this sort of thing which is truly "prejudicial to the Party" — not the honest politics of Party members who have thrown themselves into campaigning against the damaging cuts made by Labour Authorities.

Our campaign against the witch-hunt is far from over.

•We will not relent in our demand for an acceptable statement from the NEC.

•We will tell comrades everywhere the truth about what happened in Haringey when Party members struggled to defend Labour's manifesto commitments.

•We will expose the undemocratic, unscrupulous methods of the witch-hunters.

•And we will wholeheartedly support all Party members or trade unionists who find themselves at the sharp end of witch-hunts or victimisations.

A reply to Bash and Griffiths

Yes to PR, No to pacts and coalitions!

It's a long time since I've seen an article in *Briefing* as wide of the mark as that by Graham Bash and Bryn Griffiths on Charter 88, PR, *et al.*

For Graham and Bryn, the Charter raises the spectre of "a popular front". And what makes this obvious to all — why, its support for PR, the crunch issue.

By Richard Kuper
Socialist Society

The reasons given for hostility to PR are varied. First, the demand for PR comes from the small centre parties and the defeatist elements on Labour's right wing. By that token, the left will always have its agenda set by other forces.

Surely we judge issues on their merits and not in reaction to what other forces want.

Second, since bourgeois democracy is a fraud. *"PR would only serve to perfect that fraud."* It's this kind of absurd statement that makes ordinary people doubt the left's commitment to democratic rights.

Majority

Third, with PR we would never have had a majority Labour government, since Labour has never achieved 50% of the poll. But, by the same token, we'd have had only *one* Tory government since the First World War — the one headed by Ramsay MacDonald in 1931!

In my view, the worst scenario for the left would be to oppose PR to the bitter end and the get landed with an imposed variant of the Single Transferable Vote system, rather than a democratically controlled List System.

What could the left gain from PR? First, the suspicion that we don't really believe in democracy could be hammered once and for all.

Graham and Bryn give hostages to this suspicion when they ask whether the present system is unfair and then answer the question by saying yes, it is — because *"real power ... doesn't lie in Parliament but in the City boardrooms, etc."*

Of course, that's true, but the present system is *also* unfair at the simple level of electoral representation. And it is increasingly *perceived* as unfair. A left defence of it sits uneasily with our attempt to project a vision of socialism as consistently democratic.



As Shirley Williams found out, the right can always defect...

While I find David Owen every bit as odious as the next person, I am still waiting for a justification on *democratic and socialist grounds* for the electoral marginalisation of the centre in British politics in the 1980s.

Of course, what the current system accomplishes most clearly of all is the marginalisation *of the left*. Surely the belief that we can simply capture the unions and the Party machine and force the right to do our bidding looks a little frayed.

After all, Foot and Healey made it perfectly clear in 1983 that they would prefer to *lose* the election rather than win on Labour's programme.

The inevitable pressure for unity in a "first past the post" system, in order not to rock the boat and to attract the centre ground, weighs most heavily of all on the left.

The right don't buy that argument because they don't have to. They can always defect (MacDonald, Owen, *et al*).

Outflanked

How the terms of the debate would be changed if Labour were in danger of being outflanked *from its left* — by socialist greens, for example, if it failed to respond to the need for a radical programme on the environment and the economy, or by the peace movement if it abandoned unilateralism!

What PR would give is the opportunity of fighting, inside or outside the Labour Party, for policies we believe in, in the certain knowledge that we won't need to compromise them in advance.

Graham and Bryn would no doubt say that they aren't tempted to compromise and that our task is to prevent others succumbing.

I agree, but note that we have never been very successful at that. Why? It's not so much because people on the soft left lack our moral fibre but more because of the logic of the British electoral system.

Under this system, if you want office, policy considerations by and large must be subordinate to electoral calculation.

Of course, you can argue that *"however inadequate, a Labour government represents a gain for the working class and vital experience on the road to real power."*

But in my view an even more vital experience could be gained by having a clear and unambiguous socialist voice — an independent socialist party — at large in the country.

Its ideological and organisational independence would give it a strength and influence far beyond its immediate electoral support.

It could be a material factor in assisting groups of workers in struggle and other oppressed groups in society. It could frame programmes of radical reform this side of socialism.

It could support other parties campaigning or legislating for policies it regarded as desirable. Above all, it could offer clarity in place of the fudge which the present electoral system virtually imposes on Labour.

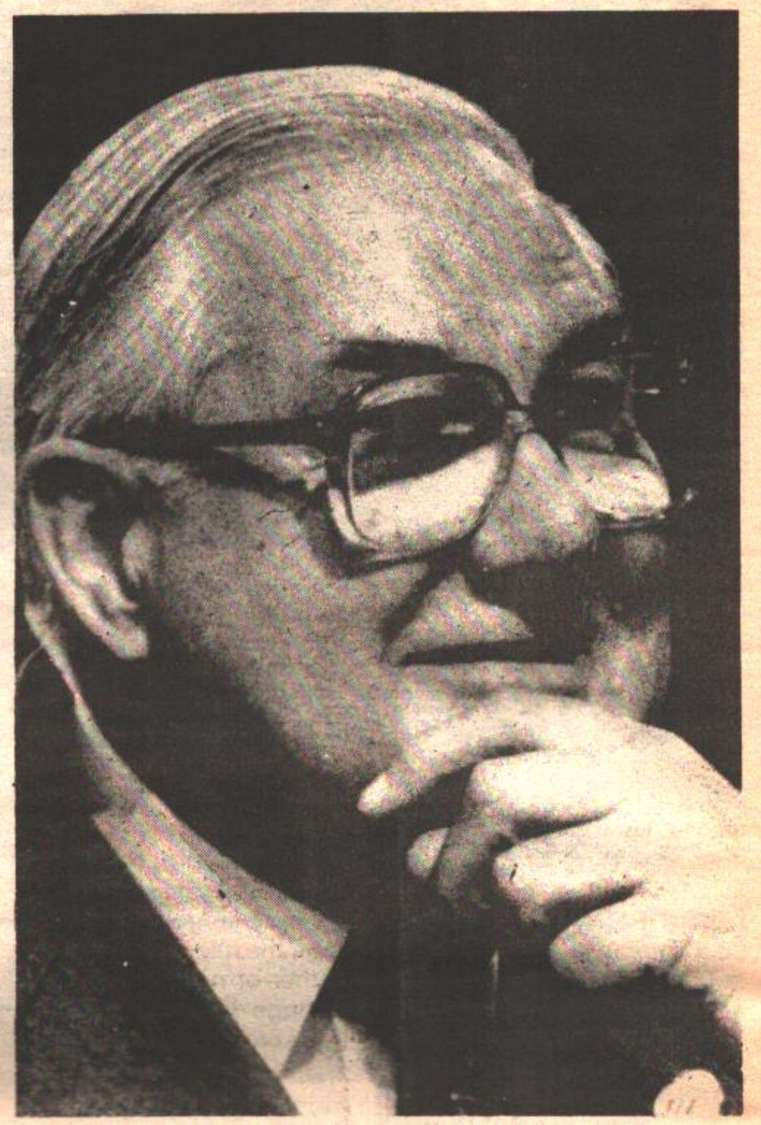
I doubt that such a party could emerge outside the Labour Party unless an attempt to transform Labour had been mounted and decisively defeated. Nor do I believe that it need be defeated.

If the battle within the Party were to be won, we might end up with 30% of the electorate behind us in the first instance. If it were lost, we might be down to 15%.

Even that would give us around 100 seats in parliament (not the *"dozen or so"* which is all that Graham and Bryn feel the left could aspire to).

What is clear to me is that the battle for the Labour Party would be fought out very differently if we had PR. In present circumstances, the left will never gamble all on winning because of the threat to its existence should it lose. PR would change all that at one blow.

In any event, the effect on the self-confidence of the working class and the social movements of an independent socialist axis would be profound. And without widespread belief in our strength and our ability to refashion society, any dream of socialism will remain just that.



Callaghan: the right uses its control of the Labour Party to suffocate the development of socialist policies.

Unilateralism

Getting organised

By Pete Firmin
Briefing National Steering Committee

The meeting called by *Briefing* of organisations supporting unilateralism was attended by representatives of *Tribune*, Labour CND, *Socialist Action*, *Socialist Organiser*, *Socialist Newsletter*, *Socialist Outlook*, and Workers' Power as well as *Briefing* and individuals who supported the initiative.

While there was agreement on the importance of defending the policy this year whemn it under attack from the leadership under the guise of the policy review, and on supporting initiatives already underway, there was no consensus on forming a short-term campaign that could go beyond this.

It was agreed to seek further consultation from supporting organisations before taking a decision on this. The next meeting will be on Monday March 13th.

Left Slate for NEC

Out for consultation

•Who do you think should stand on the left slate for Labour's NEC?
What do you think should be the political basis for the slate?

Yes, the national Campaign for Socialism wants to know your opinion. Discuss the matter in your local *Briefing* or other left group and send your recommendations to Jon Lansman, c/o Jeremy Corbyn MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA. And don't forget to forward a copy to *Labour Briefing*, c/o 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB.
Letters to *Briefing* on this subject are also more than welcome.

Deadline for submission of recommendations: February 27th

Parliamentary Selection



Prescott, Radice, Hattersley, Ruddock, Smith, Kinnock... food for reselection thought?

A guide to the new procedures

The changes in the Parliamentary selection process carried at Labour's 1987 and 1988 Annual Conferences were clearly intended to minimise the influence of the left.

But much will depend on the extent to which the new procedures are understood and used to best advantage by the left.

Below, *Briefing* offers an outline of the new procedures.

1. The Executive Committee (EC) of the Constituency Labour Party (CLP), in consultation with the Regional Labour Party Office, draws up a timetable.

This timetable needs to be approved by the National Executive Committee (NEC) — in practice, the Regional Organiser will give a seal of approval (or not).

2. The EC will also determine the way in which the CLP will carry out the procedure.

By REG RACE

For example, it may decide to make key Party officers responsible for certain tasks, e.g. examination of postal vote applications, production of short-listed candidates' statements, etc.

It may also decide to encourage trade union and other affiliated branches to hold formal nomination and/or selection meetings (under the rules, the decision whether or not to hold such meetings lies with the affiliated organisation, not with the Party).

3. Invitations to nominate ganisations.

4. At the EC meeting, a decision will be made as to candidates are then sent out by the EC along with a copy of the timetable for selection to all Party and affiliated ordure.

the percentage of the electoral college allocated to trade unions and other affiliated organisations.

EC must comply with a complicated set of rules which mean that certain kinds of candidates automatically go on the shortlist, including:

a) any individual receiving 25% of the nominations, as long as one nomination comes from a Party branch;

b) the sitting MP, if standing again;

c) at least one woman on the shortlist (where one woman has been nominated).

Shortlist

8. The GC then meets to consider the EC's proposed shortlist; the GC has the final say on the shortlist, within the rules of automatic inclusion noted above.

9. The EC distributes shortlisted candidates' election addresses, in a uniform format. The address must be no longer than 600 words.

The rules say that candidates "must be informed that the production of other material designed to influence the vote is not permissible. No other promotional expenditure will be allowed." It remains to be seen just what this means in practice.

10. The EC/GC approves arrangements for the conduct of the ballot. This may be held at a single CLP-wide meeting or at branch meetings. In either case, all shortlisted candidates should be invited.

Individual Party members who are on each branch's electoral roll then cast their votes.

Postal votes are available on the same basis as for Parliamentary elections, with the addition of those individuals who have to "care at home for the sick, elderly, or children." (Applications for postal votes are made to the CLP EC; there is right to appeal against refusal, with final decision given to the NEC's designated representative).

11. Affiliated organisations are sent one ballot paper each. It is entirely up to each organisation how it decides whom to vote for. It may decide to hold a proper selection meeting or delegate power to the branch officers or otherwise.

12. Votes are cast on the basis of the *single transferable vote*, i.e. Party members will vote for candidates in order of preference. The same principle is used for votes from affiliated organisations.

13. Votes are then counted. (There is no traditional style selection conference). Votes cast at branch meetings have been kept in sealed ballot boxes by the NEC representative.

Scrutineers are appointed, one from each Party branch, plus two from affiliated organisations as a whole.

The NEC is expected to issue guidelines on the new procedures. This is welcome, as some of the rules are very imprecise.

It is still not clear whether Women's Sections and Young Socialist branches will be treated as "branches" or as "affiliated organisations" or otherwise.

The NEC has agreed to a general timetable for Parliamentary selections:

➢Labour-held seats: January-July 1989

➢Marginal seats: June-December 1989

➢Safe Tory or SLD seats: January 1990 onwards.

It is clear that the left needs to get its act together quickly. The next *Briefing* will carry practical suggestions for left organisation in the CLPs and steps needed to make best use of the new procedures.

A modern history of the Labour Party

How Labour paved the way for Thatcher

In February 1974 a minority Labour government was elected.

Heath had gambled on beating the miners at the ballot box and failed.

Wilson called another election in October, and although this time Labour won a slim Parliamentary majority, the government was dogged throughout its 1974-79 terms by the absence of a stable, working majority.

This enabled the ruling class to put enormous pressure on the government, particularly in the 1974-76 period, when the Tories used their control of the Lords to frustrate progressive legislation.

The ruling class also staged an investment strike and presided over a massive flight of capital from the country. Within three years unemployment had doubled from its pre-election level of 680,000.

In the face of capitalist pressure, the government had two choices.

On the one hand, it could seek to implement its "radical" 1974 Manifesto, with pledges to extend public ownership, repeal reactionary legislation, and extend workers' rights and benefits.

Down that road lay a confrontation with the ruling class. It would undoubtedly have meant that real steps would have to be taken against capitalist property, the banks, and the House of Lords.

By KEN STRATFORD

On the other hand, the government could drop its manifesto, get the working class under control, and stifle its demands — until the Tories had recomposed themselves under their new leadership.

The advances of 1974 and early 1975, including the repeal of the Industrial Relations Act and new equality legislation, were followed by the Social Contract. This was a voluntary agreement between the government and TUC to limit wage rises.

In theory, wages were to be held down so that the "social wage" — the Welfare State — could be preserved and state funds directed to tackling unemployment.

In practice, however, unemployment continued to rise. In July 1976, Denis Healey, as Chancellor of the Exchequor, imposed £1,000 million public spending cuts at the behest of the International Monetary Fund.

By 1977, the Social Contract had burst at the seams. Neither Hugh Scanlon nor Jack Jones, "left" leaders of the AUEW and T&GWU, whose support underpinned the whole strategy, could impose a third year of wage restraint. Their union conferences voted for "a return to free collective bargaining".

A wave of industrial battles broke out. The Grunwick workers demanded the right to trade union organisation and the Leyland toolmakers defended their pay differentials.

In the famous "winter of discontent" of 1978/9, low paid public sector workers took action against Healey's attempts to limit pay rises and cut public spending.

Meanwhile, the long-running battle over EEC membership had come to a head. The Party had promised in the October 1974 Manifesto to hold a referendum on EEC membership. The right wing supported membership; the *Tribune* MPs, along with Scanlon and Jones, were opposed.

The majority of the NEC opposed the Common Market and a special Party Conference in April 1975 voted by 65% to 35% to recommend a "no" vote in the referendum which was held in June 1975.

The majority of the cabinet came out in favour of a "yes" vote and the "left" NEC acquiesced by agreeing that both sides could campaign openly for their preferred option.

The left missed its chance to mobilise the widespread working class opposition to the EEC on a class basis. The result was predictable: a two to one majority for EEC membership.

In the process, Wilson sacked Eric Heffer from his Ministerial post for speaking against the EEC before the Referendum campaign was underway. He further strengthened the right by moving Tony Benn from the Industry Ministry into the Department of Energy.

Callaghan replaced Wilson in 1976. The same year the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act was first introduced by Home Secretary Roy Jenkins.

The government also maintained the Official Secrets Act and used it against journalists, as well as operating and refining the racist immigration policies enshrined in Heath's 1971 Immigration Act.

In retreating before capitalism rather than confronting it, the government had undermined itself, alienating rather than mobilising its own working class base. The result was a string of by-election reverses which cut back the government's majority and in 1977 reduced it to a minority in the Commons.

Callaghan resorted to wheeling and dealing in increasingly desperate attempts to cling to office, notably backstage manoeuvres with the SNP and Ulster Unionists, and the "Lib-Lab Pact" of 1977.

Meanwhile, within the Labour Party, at Constituency level, the left was advancing.

The gap between Conference and government grew ever wider, not only on the EEC and economic strategy, but also on nuclear disarmament.

Coupled with this was the growth of a movement for democratic reform of the Party's decision making structures. The issues of mandatory reselection of Labour MPs and the election of Leader and cabinet were pushed to the forefront and given a focus by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy.

The Tories returned to power in May 1979, under Thatcher's leadership, a powerful indictment of a Labour government which had been a disastrous experience for the working class.

Education



Women on an NUT demonstration — facing a bleak future in the new ERA.

Life in a new ERA

The 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA) has major implications for equal opportunities for women, both as teachers and learners.

Although the various Working Parties on the National Curriculum and the Task Group on Attainment and Assessment all pay lip service to equal opportunities, nowhere does there appear to be any understanding of what this actually means in educational practice.

The way in which girls and young women in schools are disadvantaged has much to do with how classrooms are organised. It also reflects the extent to which teachers are conscious of ensuring that girls and young women are enabled to take a full part in the education which is on offer.

This applies as much to nursery schools — where there is ample evidence to show that boys receive more attention, take up more space, and have more experience of practical play — as it does to secondary maths or science classes.

But the National Curriculum militates against, where it does not actively prevent, the kind of positive action needed to help overcome the sexist socialisation which affects all children in our society.

Baker has responded to every Working Party report so far published with the demand that attainment targets be defined ever more narrowly. With each narrowing down of the curriculum, anti-sexist education becomes that much more difficult.

For teachers, the provisions of the ERA are far-reaching. Local Management of Schools (LMS) and "opting out" will mean changes in conditions of service damaging to the employment rights of women.

By Debbie Epstein
Selly Oak CLP

Governing bodies will have vastly increased powers, among them the hiring and firing of teachers. Not many governors are likely to have any kind of training in equal opportunities.

How likely is it, for example, that Governing Bodies, responsible for managing limited resources, will respect the right to maternity leave? This would be a considerable expense to the employing school, and governors would certainly be tempted simply to ask for a pregnant teacher's resignation.

Local Authorities might pick up the tab for grant maintained schools, but for teachers in "opted out" schools, the financial position will be serious indeed.

The question "Do you intend to have children or marry and have children?" will become increasingly common at job interviews.

LMS will also lead to an increasing number of temporary contracts. There is already a trend, detectable in the advertisement columns of the *Times Educational Supplement* for certain posts to be advertised for a limited period.

This is particularly the case for advisors and advisory teachers, whose pay will have to come out of the small proportion of education funding which LEAs will be allowed to retain for central funding.

It would be surprising if schools did not follow suit, once they have to manage their own, increasingly limited finances. After all, if a school can't afford as many teachers next year as it had this, it would be much easier simply not to renew a contract than to make a permanent employee redundant.

This will be damaging to all teachers, but especially women and most of all those returning to work after a break for child-rearing.

Casual supply work is also likely to become increasingly difficult to obtain as LEAs seek to minimise spending.

Well over 90% of supply teachers are women with childcare or, increasingly, elderly parent care responsibilities. Already, in Birmingham, the Authority is suggesting ways of cutting down on this expenditure in secondary schools.

Another feature of life under ERA will be the closing down of all in-service training for teachers during school time. Daytime in-service training was one of the very few gains made during the teachers' action.

Now this is about to disappear with hardly a squeak from the teacher unions. Thus teachers wanting to develop their teaching skills will have to do it after school or at weekends.

Already, in Birmingham, induction courses for probationary teachers are taking place during "twilight" time. These courses are "voluntary", but woe betide any probationer not attending them.

Of course, the DES has no intention whatsoever of funding courses which help teachers understand and address equal opportunities issues of any sort.

The new ERA is bleak for women involved in education. So far, neither the NUT nor the Labour Party leadership has made any strong response to these particular implications of the Act (though it's difficult to think of any part of the Act to which they *have* responded strongly).

It's time for them to take a stand, and for everyone interested in the future of education to demand that they do so.

For a socialist fem

Together we a

The founding conference of *Women for Socialism* is to take place on February 25th and 26th in London.

For socialist feminists this conference provides the first opportunity for many years to meet and organise with women from different campaigns and experiences.

A decade of Thatcherism has left its mark on us all. The Labour Party leadership and *Marxism Today* may believe that the biggest problem facing most women is whether to have a live-in "nanny", but the fact remains that the economic and social reality of most women's lives is appallingly grim.

Women's choices about sexuality, work, and housing are under increasing ideological attack and are being drastically restricted in practice by a variety of Tory policies.

By Barbara Green
Islington South & Finsbury
Women's Section

Struggles against the Tories have been widespread. Some have been more successful than others and some have been wilfully sold out by the leadership of the labour movement.

The political isolation of some campaigns and of industrial disputes has weakened the whole labour movement; it has also weakened the women's movement.

Since the election of the first Thatcher government, many women have felt it necessary to join the Labour Party. In the early 1980s, much was achieved through the Labour Women's Organisation.

Local Labour Councils also established Women's Committees to work with women in the communities.

But predictably, as the Tories gained in strength and the pressure on Labour Authorities increased, the Party leadership buckled.

Two issues spring to mind. Lesbianism and the freedom of women to express their own sexuality worried Mr Kinnock no end. Walworth Road let the media in on their worries about lesbians and gay men taking over the Party, and how this was

Sisterhood ar

Anti-imperialism a movement

Women are the majority of activists in most anti-imperialist campaigns, but not all feminists are supporters of national liberation struggles.

Some feminists have taken a sectarian attitude towards women involved in liberation struggles, laying down preconditions for their support, e.g. what is your position on abortion? what are you doing about the men in your organisation? etc.

Behind these attitudes lies a tradition of white western supremacy, reflected in the attitude of superiority adopted by some women's groups to black women in the industrial and developing countries.

There is also much sheer ignorance as to how women are organising within liberation movements — for example, on abortion, divorce, and prisoners' rights in Ireland, or fighting for survival and self-determination in occupied Palestine and Lebanon.

Women need to confront the international role of the British state, its support for the Apartheid regime and enormous economic involvement in South Africa, its war in Ireland, and its reactionary political influence in many parts of the world.

Over the years the face of racism in Britain has changed — from post-1945, when black people were encouraged to immigrate to provide a reserve army of labour, to today, with institutionalised racism through immigration controls, police, and courts.

To back all this up, the Tories and the media are leading an attack on the ideological level — whenever they say we must deal with the inner cities it is a coded way of saying "black problem" (particularly youth).

Under the guise of "parental choice" they are popularising segregation in schools (as with the Dewsbury case).

Anti-Irish racism is not often recognised, because the majority of Irish people are white and therefore it is assumed that as Irish people they do not suffer racism.

Identity politics (what you are, not what you do), ethnicity, and multi-culturalism have been posed as strategies for fighting racism — but none of them really tackle state racism.

Many women's groups, trade unions, and Labour Councils took up Racial Awareness Training (RAT), thus reducing the problem to a question of individual racism. RAT is very successful in producing guilt in individuals and guilt becomes a cop-out, an excuse for not doing anything.

Amongst women's groups this has led to women either becoming paralysed with guilt or wanting black women to tell them they're all right really. How do we move beyond this?

To begin with, black people must speak for themselves. But if white women remain silent, if they do not challenge racism, then they end up colluding in its perpetuation.

The responsibility often falls on black groups and individuals to confront racism. It should belong to us all.

With diverse women's groups organising around many issues — anti-imperialism, health, housing,racism — can we speak of a women's movement today?

Is it enough to continue working the way we have been or do we need more unity if we are to challenge and defeat the attacks against us?

As Martha Osamor has often said, we should look at our involvement with other groups of women and activate and mobilise women in the community. We must always be in touch with the grass roots and we must make alliances.

•This article is an abridged version of a draft report written after the *Sisterhood and Solidarity — towards an anti-imperialist and anti-racist women's labour movement* weekend discussion school held in June 1987.

PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Women for Socialism
Conference: February 25th-26th
Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, Kingsway, London WC2 (nearest tube Holborn)
•Full disabled access•creche•
SATURDAY (open to all women) includes: Betty Heathfield, Martha Osamor, Mouna Salem, Sandra Plummer. SUNDAY: Open to members of *WFS*.
There will be space for Black women, women with disabilities, and lesbians.
For further details, contact Women for Socialism, c/o Ruth Clarke, 7c Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY; tel. 01-992 0945.

...inist movement

...re powerful!

...utting off the fictional £400-a-...eek docker.

This attitude directly or in...irectly led to the closure of ...esbian and Gay Committees, ...nd a general retreat on the ...sue. Only the Labour Party ...ould time this sort of backlash ... coincide with the major ...obilisation and radicalisation ...f lesbians and gay men against ...lause 28!

David Alton didn't have to ...orry too much about the ...aders of the mass organisa...ons of the working class vi...ously attacking his anti-abor...on bill, because they didn't!

Either they kept quiet and ...ped it would go away, or in ...me cases they actually came ...t in support of the Bill, though ...rty policy was clearly op...sed to it.

The defeat of Alton's Bill was partly down to the fact that he could not rely on all Tories to tow the line and partly down to organisations like the National Abortion Campaign and women's groups around the country, which had not disappeared and had kept links with local trade union branches and Labour Parties.

Labour Briefing Women wholeheartedly support *Women for Socialism* and appeal to all women to participate in the conference. On these pages we look at just a small part of the topics which will be discussed there.

We are still in the Labour Party, battling to save the Labour Women's Organisation and defend any progressive policies that still exist. But many of the women we work with have either left the Labour Party, or would never have touched it with a bargepole in the first place.

We want to ensure that a movement like *Women for Socialism* exists, so that there is a place for discussion and joint activities involving all socialist feminists. A movement of women which represents only one section of women or one political experience will be of limited use.

The combination of anti-imperialist, lesbian, and black women working together is a powerful one. We must bring the pressures of these women's struggles to bear on the labour movement leadership.

But this does not happen on its own; it must be organised! See you at the Conference!

...d Solidarity

...nd the women's



...omen in the forefront of the anti-imperialist struggle — on an Anti-Apartheid demonstration

Join Women for Socialism!
Send £5 To Ruth Clarke, 7 Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY.

Lesbians and Socialism



PHOTO: Martine Stead

Lesbian strength on the April 30th Stop the Clause demo.

Sexuality at the centre of debate

Socialist feminism has frequently failed to deal with the questions raised by lesbianism and lesbians.

The issues of sexuality and heterosexism have been avoided, marginalised, positively dismissed.

The field has been left open to radical feminism, with its theory focused on sexuality, while completely ignoring the class nature of our society.

This failure played a part in the demise of socialist feminism as a current in the women's movement and the alienation of lesbians from socialism more generally.

It is essential that *Women for Socialism*, in its attempt to rebuild a dynamic, socialist feminist current in the women's movement, ensures that it is a socialist feminism *for all women, including lesbians.*

This is not only a practical necessity if we are to develop the broadest possible movement, relevant to and able to take up the demands of women in struggle everywhere.

It is also a theoretical imperative if we are to create a coherent socialist feminist analysis of society on which to base a realistic strategy for achieving women's liberation.

The centrality of issues of sexuality and lesbian liberation to the socialist feminist project will be the theme of the workshop on "Lesbians and Socialism" at the *Women for Socialism* Conference later this month.

By Rebecca Flemming

At the heart of this must be a complete challenge to the crude biological determinism of the left establishment — the idea that sexuality is somehow given and immutable, that it can be expressed or repressed but never altered.

This theory is not only scientifically, historically, and politically untenable, but also alien to the personal experiences of many lesbians.

Sexuality is (like most things) constructed by the society we live in. A person's sexuality is therefore not static and may change and develop. Moreover, an element of choice, of positive interaction between the individual and society, may enter the process.

Critically linked with this process is the concept of "compulsory heterosexuality".

This phrase was first coined by radical feminists such as Adrienne Rich, but is nonetheless an apt phrase for describing the way in which modern society directs individuals exclusively into the patriarchal, heterosexual family so essential for that society's survival, and ruthlessly suppresses and oppresses any alternative.

This is the material base of lesbian oppression.

The heterosexual, patriarchal family, with its efficient reproduction of labour and effectiveness as an instrument of social control, is a linchpin of capitalist society as we know it.

While one should not be reduced to a mere function of the other, sexism and heterosexism are inseparable in their historical roots and current manifestations.

In addition, lesbians may face struggles against racism, ablism, and class oppression, all of which intersect with theories of and experiences of heterosexism and sexuality.

For instance, racist conceptions of black women's sexuality serve not only to fuel ideas of white superiority, but also to re-enforce heterosexuality. Another example is the flat denial of any sexuality to women with disabilities.

Our task then is to ensure that these concepts and theses are discussed and understood by socialist feminists (and the left as a whole) and that the inseparability of theory and practice becomes more than a truism.

It will not be easy. These ideas challenge all sorts of assumptions and power relationships not only in society as a whole but in the women's movement itself.

But after all, this is the stuff that great movements and revolutions are made of!

From this flows the ideology of heterosexism — the superiority of heterosexuality — which permeates every aspect of our society.

It is important to stress that lesbians are also locked into the reality of women's oppression in its global sense and thus face sexism as well as heterosexism.

The Women's Page

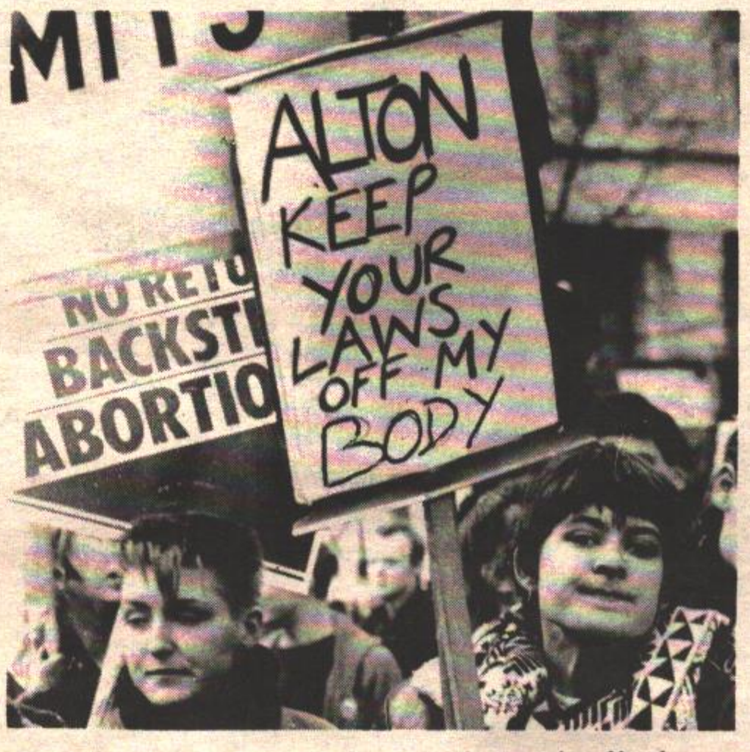
Abortion rights

Parliamentary update

Ann Widdecombe, Tory MP for Maidstone, has drawn seventh place in the Private Members Bill draw, and announced that she would be reintroducing the Alton Bill.

Normally, only the first six Bills have any real chance of success. However, Widdecombe is using every parliamentary tactic in the book to get her Bill through.

By Leonora Lloyd NAC



The fight wasn't over with the demonstrations against Alton!

She drew first place in the ballot for Private Members motions, which MPs usually use to draw attention to problems in their Constituencies. Widdecombe chose instead to use her motion to call for an extension of time on the day of her second reading, March 3rd.

Luckily pro-choice MPs, led by Dennis Skinner, came to the rescue. Skinner spoke for three hours, trying to move the writ for the Richmond by-election and so blocked Widdecombe's procedural motion.

Widdecombe has also publicly admitted she was behind the defeat of John Brown's Private Member's Bill.

When the closure vote was taken (to allow the second reading), she was in the lobby urging her supporters not to vote at all — 100 MPs must vote on closures, otherwise the Bill falls.

She could be doing this for two reasons: to punish MPs putting Bills who do not support her, and to create more time for her Bill to be taken.

Widdecombe has chosen to present her Bill on the same day as Lawrence Cunliffe, NUM sponsored MP for Leigh, who himself considered taking an anti-abortion Bill, presents his on injury compensation. Widdecombe knows Cunliffe will do his best to get his Bill through quickly to give her time.

The National Abortion Campaign (NAC) is organising a lobby of MPs on Thursday February 16th. The lobby will begin at 3pm and run into the evening. A meeting in the House of Commons is also planned.

Meanwhile, the Pro-Choice Alliance, recently set up by NAC and the Abortion Law Reform Association, will be officially launched soon, when an early day motion calling for changes in abortion law to allow women to refer themselves for abortion in the early months is put before Parliament.

This is the first step in our programme of offensive activity, which includes a major event in late April, the 21st anniversary of the coming into effect of the 1967 Abortion Act.

Sympathetic MPs should be approached now and asked to be in the House to vote against Widdecombe on March 3rd. Once the Early Day Motion has been published (this is planned for the week of March 3rd), then they should also be asked to sign it.

An essential tool to help find where your MP stands is a new pamphlet: *How MPs Vote on Abortion*. It also shows trade union sponsorship, and is available from NAC for £1.72 including postage.

Finally, if the anti-abortionists' continuing onslaughts on abortion rights are to be fought back, never mind our offensive to change the law in the way we want, then it is essential that NAC continues to be supported.

It is currently going through a severe financial crisis which threatens its very existence. An immediate step that you can take is to join the campaign and ensure that your organisation also affiliates.

All CLPs have recently been circulated — make sure this is taken up in your party if it is not already affiliated. Details are available from NAC, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU, tel. 01-405 4801.

nac news

Affiliate to NAC!

Join the National Abortion Campaign and get *NAC News* and our internal bulletin regularly. (Separate subscriptions to *NAC News* also available).

Affiliation rates:
Under 18, £1; Unwaged, £3; Low-waged, £5; Other waged, £7.
Youth Groups, £5; NAC, Women's Groups, Trades Councils, FE Colleges, £10; Trade Unions, Student Unions, political and other local groups, £15; National Organisations, £30.

Subscription rates for four issues:
£3.50; multi-user rates, £8; overseas rates on request (state airmail if required).

Please make cheque payable to National Abortion Campaign and send to NAC, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU.

I/we wish to affiliate to NAC/subscribe to *NAC News*.

Enclosed find £ .....

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Age if under 18 ..... Donation ..... Phone .....

Decisions on sterilisation

Whose choice?

Recent press publicity over sterilisation of women of low capabilities has raised major issues for socialists. Where do we stand when parents or relatives request that judges give consent for less able women to be sterilised?

PAULINE BIRCHLEY, as a social worker, has had to confront the issue.

All working class women face major hurdles in negotiating their right to discontinue an unwanted pregnancy or to ensure by sterilisation that they can no longer conceive.

We face many physical and emotional barriers, including ever present lack of resources, society's attitudes, and the male-dominated professions of law and medicine.

When I requested the surgeon carrying out my abortion also to sterilise me, he refused, saying I would have to go on the waiting list of about nine months!

Women considering who should or shouldn't give birth are bound to be influenced by their own experiences and values.

Women who found giving birth a beautiful experience would wish all women of whatever ability to share that experience whether or not they could give the care needed to bring up a child.

Women for whom giving birth was an intrusive, painful medical procedure would not wish it on anyone, especially someone unable to give informed consent.

We also have to consider whether, when parents ask for their less able children to be sterilised, is this because in Thatcher's Britain they will be expected to support the new child?

If as socialist women we could develop a society that freed women from the exclusive care and responsibility for children, judges would be freed from some of the pressure of agreeing to sterilisation.

Then perhaps less able women would be given the same consideration as more able women when it comes to the right to give birth, to get birth control, and to be sterilised.

As a social worker with over 20 years experience of working with children and families, I have worked with several women that could have been labelled as of very low ability.

Many spent most of their lives in colonies or huge old psychiatric hospitals, often being taken before magistrates' courts under the old Mental Health Acts to be certified as defectives.

Joan was illegitimate, rejected by her married mother during the War, and brought up in various "cottage" homes until she was eight, when she was sent to a local "colony".

She could not read, add up, or understand the concept of time. She ran away from the colony when she was 20.

Luckily she met Harry, an ex-inmate of the colony who worked as a gardener. He was 36, and had his own flat. Joan moved in with him and caused chaos for the next 20 years.

She gave birth to four children. Harry did his best to look after his "five children". Joan needed as much care as the children. She could not cook or handle money.

Considerable support was given to this family by health visitors, nursery workers and social workers.

The first child came into the care of the Local Authority when at eight he was found on a bus at night in nightclothes, having run off from home.

He stayed in care, returning home occasionally, and now works as a garage mechanic.

The second child was given away to a friend. He is now a professional footballer. The third came into care at four, and now works on a farm.

The youngest managed to stay at home until she was ten, when the education department decided she would benefit from residential education. She is now a chemist!

All children have at times rejected their childish mother, but have remained in contact.

Should Joan have been sterilised? At 17 she could not have given an informed consent, she would not have understood the implications of the operation, but she may well have agreed if she thought people would have been pleased with her.

Would Joan's life have been better had she been childless?



Briefing Women

Please send me further information about the activities of Briefing Women.

Name: .....

Address: .....

.....

I am particularly interested in: .....

.....

Send to; Leesa Herbert, 101 Vartry Road, London N15 6QD.

BOOK REVIEW

Whatever happened to...

New York Intellectuals — The rise and decline of the anti-Stalinist left from the 1930s to the 1980s, by Alan M. Wald, *University of North Carolina Press*, (available from Compendium Bookshop, 234 Camden High Street, London NW1).

New York Intellectuals is a well researched and fascinating account of the non-Stalinist intellectual left and the political paths travelled by its key figures.



Trotsky may have read "Militant" at his desk: how much longer would those attracted to his ideas follow Trotskyist journals?

By Woody Haut
Hampstead & Highgate CLP

They tried to corner the market in modernism — but without bothering to address basic questions, like the one Wald poses, as to "whether modernism is an authentic anti-bourgeois tendency or ... a decadent phase in bourgeois culture."

Their aesthetics, politics, and careers inevitably came into conflict, resulting in a contradiction so blatant that it gave liberalism in America an even worse name than it might have otherwise deserved.

The fallout from this was recently seen in the Hamlet-like contortions of Michael Dukakis when it came to the dreaded "L-word".

Wald goes out of his way to be fair to each writer, examining political, social, and psychological reasons for their respective shifts.

Though always commenting from a radical socialist perspective, Wald (an admirer of Ernest Mandel) dismisses no one out of hand and tries to weigh each writer's positive and negative qualities.

This is particularly apparent when it comes to figures like Howe, Wilson, and Rahv.

Conversely, Wald offers strong criticism of Harvey Swados, whose work is more in line with a revolutionary socialist analysis.

The book provides a comprehensive narrative of the US revolutionary left, with summaries of its various splits and their effect on the intellectual community.

Wald also effectively juxtaposes historical fact with "the politics of memory".

The ideology that emerges from the way these writers misrepresent themselves and their past is often at variance from the actual positions, which at one time they expressed with a high degree of cogency, but can now barely bring themselves to articulate.

The book ends with more recent renegades, including David Horovitz (a self-confessed Reaganite, formerly the editor of *Ramparts* and author of a homage to Isaac Deutscher and a radical indictment of American foreign policy).

Also mentioned in this context is novelist, film-maker, and critic Susan Sontag (once an ardent campaigner against the war in Vietnam, she has since gained even greater notoriety for her "Communism is fascism with a human face" speech).

At least the New York intelligentsia of the 30s had the defeat in Spain, the death of Trotsky, World War II, concentration camps, McCarthyism, and the Cold War as an excuse for turning to the *Readers Digest* (Max Eastman), *Fortune* (Herbert Solow), or to Reagan himself (Podhoretz, Kristol, Hook).

Our present day backsliders merely have, "It's morning in America."

Seeking security, notoriety, and power, Wald's intellectuals not only swallowed the myth that they constituted a class unto themselves, but, in following their new class interests, became willing victims in a culture that was exerting a maximum amount of pressure on the left.

No wonder there were so many casualties (suicides, psychological breakdowns, political senility, etc.) and that individuality, alienation, etc., became the jargon of the day.

New York Intellectuals is a readable and valuable narrative concerning an era that has been all but erased from the history books in what seems an act of conscious cultural amnesia.

After all, this is not merely a book about a group of "deep thinkers"; it's also the story of the US Section of the Fourth International, and of the many struggles with which it was linked.

New York Intellectuals offers an important window on the past, and, in Britain, where a new class of intellectual is running amok in *Marxism Today* and *New Statesman and Society* a considerable amount of meaning for the left now and in days to come.

POETRY REVIEW

A lyrical revolution

Nicaraguan New Time, Poems by Ernesto Cardenal, translated by Dinah Livingstone, *Journeyman*, £3.50.

Has there ever been a government as packed with accomplished artists as the Sandinista Front in Nicaragua?

Following the recent publication here of Vice President Sergio Ramirez's beautiful *Stories* and his masterpiece, the novel *To bury our fathers*, we now have a new volume in English of Culture Minister Ernesto Cardenal's remarkable poetry.

Cardenal's poems are simple and expressive. They observe and evoke moments and moods from before and after the Sandinista Revolution of 1979.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

In his capacity as a government minister, Cardenal has been involved in the massive development of poetry workshops across Nicaragua. No other cultural phenomenon more graphically reflects the new society in construction.

The best comment on the book is simply to reproduce its final selection, *For those dead our dead.*

FOR THOSE DEAD OUR DEAD

When you get the nomination, the prize, the promotion,
think of the ones who died.
When you are at the reception, delegation, commission,
think of the ones who died.
When you have won the election and the crowd
congratulates you,
think of the ones who died.
When they clap as you go up on the platform
with the leaders
think of the ones who died.
When they come to meet you at a great city airport,
think of the ones who died.
When it's your turn to take the microphone,
be on television,
think of the ones who died.
When you are the one giving out certificates,
passes, permits,
think of the ones who died.

See them stripped, dragged,
pouring blood, hooded, smashed,
kept underwater in troughs,
electric shocked, eyes gouged out,
throats cut, riddled with bullets,
flung to the roadside
in holes they dug, common graves,
or simply lying on bare earth
as future wildflower food:

You represent them.
They delegated you,
think of the ones who died.

BOOK REVIEW

Bible belt international

The Missionaries, by Norman Lewis, *Secker and Warburg*, £10.95.

From 1797 until 1850 Tahiti and other islands in the Pacific were run as virtual "missionary protectorates".

Local customs were suppressed. People were forced to wear European dress. "Pagans" were put to death.

After disease and terror had taken their toll, the population of Tahiti dropped in a 30 year period from 200,000 to 6,000. The London Missionary Society had, however, "saved the souls" of the savages.

Astonishing as it might seem, the same process is going on today. With carefully controlled rage Norman Lewis describes the activities of the US-based Summer Institute of Linguistics and the New Tribes Mission.

Funded from the USA's Bible Belt, these organisations are at work in scores of countries.

Their aim is the conversion of "primitive" people to fundamentalist Christianity. Their methods, as Lewis amply illustrates, range from the ruthless to the corrupt.

In Paraguay in the early 70s the New Tribes Mission engaged in "Indian hunting". Herded into a missionary camp, many died in epidemics.

By Andrew Coates
Ipswich CLP

Visiting one such institution, Lewis notes the total apathy of one tribe, the Achés. It seems that many of them were sold off to ranchers to raise money for the Good Cause.

In Venezuela, a tract was issued stating "God wants us to wear pants. He wants us to use money. He tells us that we have to work hard to get our food. He does not care to see us lying around in hammocks."

By using fear, and trying to build up relationships of dependency, the religious brethren have attempted utterly to erase Indian culture.

In some countries, such as Guatemala, right wing sections of the military see in US fundamentalism a bulwark against the left. Although not detailed in Lewis's book, fundamentalist conversions, accompanied by bribes and threats, have been used to some effect against the guerrillas.

With the growth of satellite broadcasting, these people are being roped directly into the New Right's war against "Godless Communism".

The more sophisticated missionaries argue that Indians are bound eventually to be integrated as "wage earners and consumers". To socialists there is a half truth in this assertion — but *only* a half.

It would be wrong to take too lyrical a view of Indian life, as Lewis sometimes does. Some kind of integration is inevitable.

But how? By forcing down their throats an impoverished and tyrannical religion? By rounding them up in tightly run camps? And what is it they are being integrated into?

***The Missionaries* presents us with a horrifying spectacle. The pennies of US bigots are being used to exterminate ways of life and whole peoples.**

In a memorable passage, Lewis addresses those who would ignore the religiously obsessed: "We laugh, turn away and pass on, dismissing what may seem to us to be mere ravings from our mind.

"This the tribesman in his jungle cannot do. When the missionary arrives he may never even have seen a plane before.

"Then suddenly a missionary air fellowship Cessna — which may even boom an amplified message to him in his own language — drops out of the sky."

Fortunately, Lewis's Survival International organisation is now trying to be on hand when the missionaries arrive. All socialists should be by their side.

Trade Union Briefing

GCHQ

A look back in anger

On GCHQ Day, November 7th, I was a speaker at the Wrexham rally.

I explained that I had been, until quite recently, one of the GCHQ trade unionists and had been Chair of the Group for 18 months.

I left GCHQ in 1987 when I accepted a transfer to the Welsh Office. (I am now NUCPS Branch Secretary at Ruthin, North Wales).

I have great admiration for those who have kept fighting at GCHQ, five of whom (at the time or writing) have paid with their jobs.

But an important reason for my leaving was my conviction that the "campaign" being waged by CCSU and the TUC had for some time, despite the endeavours of individuals at GCHQ, been drifting into a Bermuda Triangle of its leaders' making.

Despite fine words that have been spoken and the money spent (probably approaching £1m), five of our colleagues have now been sacked, and probably more to come, with only a helpless and ineffectual response from ourselves and the trade union movement.

We are in this position because none of our leaders had the foresight or the courage in 1984 to organise a proper response to the ban in those crucial five weeks which the government allowed for GCHQ workers to comply.

By Dave Gallop, ex-chair of the GCHQ trade union group (reprinted from *Open Left*, the voice of the Broad Left in NUCPS)

Gerry Gillman, Bill McCall, Tony Christopher, John Sheldon and the rest went crawling to Downing Street to negotiate away one of the most hard won rights of all those achieved by workers over the years.

The Prime Minister laughed in their faces and sent them packing. You can't expect to win a campaign from such a position of abject weakness.

Neither do you win a campaign based on the Lowest Common Denominator acceptable to all the participating unions.

In the case of the GCHQ ban, it was fixed at the level of a Public Relations exercise — a campaign hopelessly inclined towards the creation of mugs, badges, slogans and, most recently, a grotesque artefact of indeterminate animal appearance which I believe is intended to serve as a money-box.

For too long CCSU and the TUC put money into the pockets not only of the PR consultants but of fat-cat lawyers who paid them back with incompetent and half-hearted performances.

All this was done at the expense of the more difficult option of mobilising the massive amount of latent support and allowing events to come to boiling point instead of constantly damping them down.

To give a recent example: when the Civil Service unions started to organise for November 7th, did they go all out to maximise support? No, they circulated a list of those areas of the public sector which would be *excluded* from the industrial action, lest they should risk upsetting the government.

Was that the action of unions convinced of their moral rightness and determined to defend and support their victimised members with all means at their disposal?

The people who like to run our unions as PR consultancies rather than fighting machines continue to control tightly the flow and emphasis of information in order to manipulate people and events to suit their own ends.

Whilst Mike, Alan, Brian, and Graham (the first four to be sacked at GCHQ) were rightly being feted for their courage, a fifth dismissed member was languishing in anonymity. The moguls of the CCSU and TUC did not consider his case as deserving as the others.

What was its weakness, in their view? They had wanted him to accept GCHQ's offer of a phoney transfer. He took the view that such a course would betray the principle he had upheld for so long and would compromise his colleagues.

He turned down the transfer and was given a month's notice on November 5th. Four days later, others amongst the 17 trade unionists at GCHQ still did not know it had happened. Fourteen days later the IPCS (of which he is a member) still had not bothered to inform its Branch Secretaries by circular.

CCSU and the TUC have striven (over the entire course of the GCHQ ban, but especially since the latest disciplinary measures) to "tug at the public heartstrings" instead of conducting a fighting campaign.

What better confirmation can there have been than the chintzy little display put on at Cheltenham on the day the four were sacked? Here was the present-day equivalent of the Tolpuddle Martyrs being shipped off to Australia — and what happened?

Members all over the country were sounded out about going to the demonstration. Then our leaders started to manipulate events again.

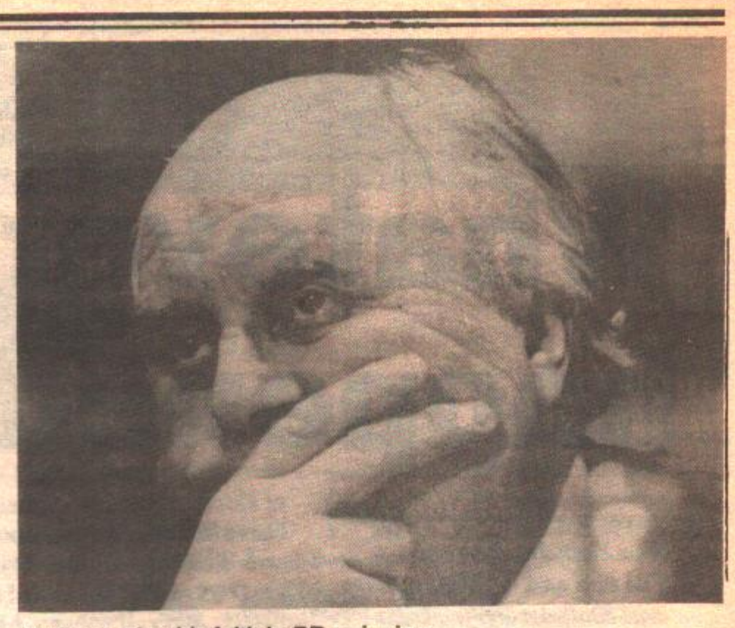


PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Willis: putting his faith in PR-unionism

From CPSA HQ came an all-union circular advising that "CCSU cannot be responsible for any individual that takes unofficial action on that day" and claiming that "ultra-left political groups within the Civil Service have been calling on members to take indefinite strike action — this is unconstitutional."

NUCPS stepped in with a diktat that "the demonstration will be attended by NEC members and senior full-time officers only", to ensure that the flavour of the demonstration would be as sugary as possible.

This, of course, was in keeping with the current line being trumpeted by the TUC — that trade unionists at GCHQ wanted nothing more than to exercise their right to belong.

The last thing they had ever wanted was to cause inconvenience to their employers, disruption of the intelligence activities they carry out, or to assist in any meaningful way with the campaigns that their colleagues in other departments were waging to achieve better pay and conditions.

I hold up my hands and admit to getting out, which is something the five who have paid with their jobs would never contemplate. I did so at a time when, we were told, the solution lay in the election of a Labour government.

Today, that is still the only salvation the TUC can promise.

I foresee (but rather opaquely) the day when the Leader of the next Labour government approaches the Director of GCHQ, who is flanked either metaphorically or in reality by his US paymasters, and requests the restoration of trade unions.

I hear the point-blank refusal, with the subtle threat that the flow of intelligence might be interrupted if the PM persists. The only audible sound thereafter is the shuffling of feet to accommodate the status quo.

NHS

Nurses victimised in Huddersfield

In Huddersfield, nurses may no longer be working to grade, but that hasn't stopped management victimising staff.

In the last few days nine auxilliary nurses have received letters from Storthes Hall management informing them that their contracts won't be renewed and that instead each will be offered a temporary week-to-week contract.

In other words, they are to be re-employed as casual labour.

By Graham Hellawell SHH psychiatric hospital COHSE 237

The hospital is due to close in 1992, but there are signs that it could be shut down much earlier, even within the next 12 months.

Management is also trying to impose a system of 24-hour cover, effectively abolishing the night shift, which had recently taken strike action in protest at the lack of consultation by management.

Two members of staff had been told that they must move to another ward in the hospital. They were told verbally, without written confirmation, and in response they formed a picket, joined by all but two workers.

Management had to back down and allow the two nurses to work as normal.

Balloted

At the moment, COHSE members are being balloted on 24-hour cover and COHSE stewards are organising action against management attempts to impose week-to-week contracts.

Management informed me that all auxilliary nurses now on short-term contracts will be offered these so-called new "contracts of employment" — and if they don't like them, they can leave!

This week I received a letter from management telling me to sign a week-to-week contract or action would be taken against me. I told them to stuff it. Other auxilliary nurses should do the same.

NUR Broad Left

National Conference

Open to all NUR members

Saturday February 25th 12-5pm

Steve Biko Suite, Nelson Mandela Building, Sheffield Polytechnic

(opposite Sheffield BR station)

With: Tony Benn MP and a speaker from the Union of Communication Workers

Broad Left Women's Meeting

11am-12 noon, same venue

There will be a pooled fare. Please notify requests for childcare arrangements in advance. For accommodation or local details: Keith Simpson, 63 Waller Road, Walkley, Sheffield, 0742-333910

Registration is from 11am at venue. No registration fee, but register in advance to receive documentation. Send name, address, phone no., union branch, grade to A. Henderson, 8 Annette Street, Govanhill, Glasgow, G42 8XZ; or A. Richardson, 102 Church Road, Locks Heath, Southampton, SO3 6LQ.

Organising part-timers

A priority for the unions

The Tory government wants to create an economy where labour is bought on the cheap.

To get this, the trade unions must be tamed, if not smashed; waged rates depressed; and collective agreements torn up.

Thatcherism therefore has a vested interest in using women as a cheap source of labour.

Women now make up 43% of the workforce and over 20% are employed part-time. The employers benefit enormously from the use of part-time workers.

In retail, they provide cover for busy parts of the day, particularly at late-night opening and weekends. In most cases, employers do not need to pay National Insurance contributions or shift and overtime pay.

The workers have no pension rights and in some cases get paid a lower hourly rate than full-time staff.

The unions are now beginning to recognise that the steady growth in part-time labour, used by employers to undermine wages and conditions, can pose a threat to full-time jobs.

USDAW, the shop workers' union, with a quarter of its membership employed part-time, recognised this at its 1985 Conference:

"The benefits of 100% trade unionism will be lost if we fail to recruit and mobilise part-time workers, as will our opportunities for membership development if we fail to capture the major growing source of new trade union recruits.

"Unquestionably, the best way to win part-time workers into our ranks is to be seen as speaking up on the issues that they see as relevant to their particular situation."

By JANET KNIGHT

Of course, it's hard to recruit part-timers, partly due to the type of work they do, the particular difficulty of contacting them because of the hours they work, and their lack of regular contact with the full-time workforce.

Obstacle

But the biggest obstacle to recruiting part-time women workers has been the traditional bargaining objectives of the trade unions, orientated towards the needs of full-time staff, particularly male full-time staff.

This is why it is vital that the unions put into practice the final words of the USDAW resolution. They must be seen speaking up for and *acting* on the issues these workers care about.

Some unions now offer reduced subscriptions. Even better, NUPE and the civil servants union, IPCS, base their subscription rates on the individual's pay.

The unions must do everything they can to involve part-time women workers in their activities. This means arranging meetings at times and in venues that are convenient for these women and making sure their views are heard.

It means the unions must encourage part-time women workers to become shop stewards and lay officials. They must also increase the number of women full-time officials, who will be more likely to understand the problems of these workers.

Finally, the unions must educate their full-time officers and their rank and file on the need to organise part-time workers.

Unfortunately, officers and activists are still indifferent or even hostile to part-timers. Such attitudes help no one but the bosses and that arch-enemy of working women — Thatcher herself!

PS: Have you had any experience trying to organise part-timers in your union? Have you had any help from your full-timers? Write in and share problems and possibilities with other *Briefing* readers.

Dagenham Victimisation

Ford's real agenda

On February 2nd, Ford confirmed its decision to sack TGWU activist Mick Gosling.

A strike ballot of Mick's area is being held as we go to press.

By MARK SEATON

Support for Mick among Dagenham workers is strong, especially since the announcement by Ford Europe of the transfer of Sierra production away from Dagenham. Until he was sacked, Mick worked on Sierra production.

However, a number of union officials, including Jimmy Airlie, Communist Party stalwart and member of the AEU Executive, are putting the fightback in jeopardy. They will tell workers that the company would simply sit out any strike in defence of Mick.

But the fact is that a strike in Mick's section could cost the company £5 million a day, and would be the best preparation for fighting the scheduled Sierra transfer.

Airlie is telling shop stewards that Bill Hayden, Ford Europe's Director of Manufacturing, hasn't totally closed the door on retaining some part of Sierra production at Dagenham.

This is nonsense. Quite clearly, the decision has already been made and if industrial action isn't taken to stop it, there will be no Sierra production in Dagenham by early 1990.

Rumours are also rife about impending changes in Genk, Belgium and Valencia, Spain (where, it is said, three-shift working is to be imposed) and Halewood and Cologne (alternate Saturday working).

These extra hours may be paid at overtime rates but they are also likely to be compulsory. Restructuring on this scale could soak up all the work presently done at Dagenham — and lead to the closure of the entire plant.

The fightback at Ford should start with action to defend Mick Gosling.



PHOTO: Martine Stead/Jim Thain

Placards leaning on the fence during the last Ford strike

Socialist Conference
Solidarity Network
Hazards 88 Campaign

Health and Safety Conference

Saturday March 11th, 10.30-4.30

Key Books, Birmingham, 136 Digbeth

Recent "disasters" have demonstrated the drastic affect that the drive for profits has had on health and safety conditions. Numbers of deaths and injuries in industry and in the community are soaring.

This conference aims to bring together a cross section of industries, workplaces, trade union and community campaigns to discuss organising around these issues.

There will be speakers and workshops. Space is limited, so please book in advance if possible.

Creche available

No disabled access (future venues will be accessible)

Registration £3 (organisations); £1 (individuals)

Send cheques, payable to The Solidarity Network, to 74, Kingsland Road, Plaistow, London E13

AEU activists speak out

No merger with EETPU!

On Saturday January 14th, the Birmingham Engineering Gazette, Birmingham 4 Branch AEU, called a meeting of local supporters and national contacts to discuss building a national campaign to oppose merger with the EETPU.

The sad fact is that the Gazette Group national leadership have so far singularly failed to wage any anti-merger campaign.

By Norman Goodwin Secretary, Birmingham Engineers Gazette Supporters Group

They seem to cling to the rather touching belief that our National Committee will reject the finalised merger plans, worked out between Laird, Jordan, and Hammond.

We must anticipate that the right wing union leaders will find a way of going to the membership on a postal ballot (shades of the EETPU) with a form of words calculated to please the tabloid press and bamboozle the average member.

To date, information on how the talks are going is almost non-existent. The *Financial Times* seems to pick up what little information is available, and from that source we hear talk of having the merger now and sorting out little matters like structure, rule book, democracy, etc., *after* the marriage.



A much-remembered image from the Wapping dispute. Is this what lies in store for AEU members?

The Birmingham Gazette Group meeting laid stress on the fact that we are an integral part of the National Gazette Supporters Group, and that our demands on Gazette leadership are a single issue matter.

Passive

We believe the present position is passive beyond belief and we urge the Gazette leadership to lead a fighting anti-merger campaign now.

This position was agreed by members from as far afield as South Wales, London, Manchester, Hull, Blackpool, and Northampton.

The meeting accepted that such a campaign will be a hard task, given the power of the bosses, the press, etc. But failure could mean that by the end of the summer we will all be reluctant members of a yellow union.

Engineering union activists have a historic role to play in this matter. We are members of a union which has been abused by a scurrilous and openly boss-orientated leadership.

The great democratic union, the union of Wal Hannington, the union of the Saltley gates rank and file, is on the brink of becoming an American-style company union.

The meeting of January 14th passed the following motion:

•no talks with the EETPU while they are outside the Trades Union Congress;

•uphold the democratic structure of the AEU, defend National Committee, Final Appeals Court, District Committees, Branches, etc.;

•for the regular election of all officials;

•no to business-type unionism, reject single union/no strike deals;

•while recognising that a single union throughout engineering is a desirable long term objective, any talks with other unions must be on the above non-negotiable conditions;

•for a rank and file campaign against the merger, prepared to involve progressive EETPU members.

Practical proposals came forward for circulation of leaflets in the workplaces, model resolutions for District Committees, and local meetings open to all AEU members and other progressive trade unionists.

For further information, please contact Norman Goodwin, Secretary, Birmingham Engineering Gazette Group, 28 Bowling Green Close, Erdington, Birmingham B23 5QU, tel. 021-373 1463.

AUT boycotts exams

Tories tear into academia

The Association of University Teachers is currently engaged in the most radical action in its history.

Since January 9th, our members (who include administrators, librarians, and computer staff, as well as teachers) have been observing a total boycott of the examination process in universities.

By Steve Reicher Secretary, Exeter AUT and Steering Committee, AUT Broad Left (personal capacity)

Teaching goes on as normal, but we have been refusing to set exams, to supervise them, or to mark them. Should this action continue, no degrees will be awarded this summer.

It took a lot to push a traditionally passive union like the AUT into action — a 0% pay offer for 1988/89 (in real terms a 7% pay *cut*). We are the only group of workers in the universities, indeed the only group of workers in the entire public sector, to be offered nothing.

This was only the last straw in a process which has seen the value of our salaries cut by over 20% in the last decade. To quote a *Financial Times* editorial: "Lecturers are one of the few groups whose pay actually buys less in terms of goods and services than it did in 1979."

Our immediate target is our employers, represented by the Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals (CVCP). Vice Chancellors have sought to deal with the government's financial squeeze on universities by restricting staff pay.

While there was some money in the system — although clearly not enough to cover inflation — VCs chose to spend it elsewhere. Instead of fighting for more funds they decided to allocate academic and other staff a zero priority.

AUT tried to negotiate but the CVCP refused even to talk. We tried milder forms of industrial action, but they ignored us.

In the end, we were left with a dilemma: either do nothing and accept a catastrophic decline, or else take strong action which may disrupt the work of our students. Reluctantly, we chose action.

We were reluctant just as the nurses were reluctant, for we wish no inconvenience to our students. But we felt that the survival of the system and the long-term needs of future students had to be our first priority.

However, while the Vice Chancellors are our immediate target, the real problem lies with the government. Since it came to power it has systematically reduced university funding.

Over 20% of staff have been lost, many departments have closed, equipment budgets have been slashed, buildings are in disrepair, library spending has dropped by nearly a third.

In fact, our salary dispute is but a reflection of the general under-funding of universities: under-funding of staff, student support, general resources. That is why AUT supports the NUS campaign against loans, and the NUS supports the AUT in its dispute.

Cuts in universities are not the result of mere neglect; they are deliberate government policy. Ministers have stated their intention to reduce funding from year to year. They say this means "freedom" and "autonomy"; they say we can get funds from new sources.

What it really means is creeping privatisation, with universities becoming dependent on private finance. This means that if you are not doing work that is in the immediate interests of the privateers, you are out of a job (last year's Education Reform Act introduced the right to sack any academic deemed unnecessary).

Fundamental research will die (it is already gravely ill). And critical thought will be outlawed. In the words of *The Independent*, the Tories wish to make the academic world as docile as a Thatcher Cabinet.

The AUT action is a first step in fighting the crisis. It is already shifting the Vice Chancellors.

Ours is a fight that unites the entire university sector, the entire education sector, even the entire public sector. The political link must be translated into organisational links and into united action.

Juquin interview

Radical citizenship

In the last issue of *Briefing*, PETER TATCHELL reported on the realignment of the French left, following the foundation, last month in Paris, of the *Nouvelle Gauche pour Socialisme, Ecologie et Autogestion* (New Left for Socialism, Ecology, and Self-Management). Here, Peter interviews the leader of *Nouvelle Gauche* and former Presidential candidate PIERRE JUQUIN, on his radical socialist vision of "citizen empowerment".

Pierre Juquin believes the left must challenge the way the New Right has replaced the radical and popular concepts of citizenship — as embodied in the French and American revolutions — with a new philosophy which simultaneously extols individualism in the market place and suppresses it in the realm of personal civil liberties.

He advances a notion of "social individuality" which is "equally distinct from the politics of pure individualism and that of pure collectivism.

"This concept is against the tendency of the right to see society as merely a sum total of individuals and against the left tradition which submerges the individual within membership of a particular class.

"The individual exists as an expression of a whole set of complex and diverse social relations. Marxist reductionism, however, does not acknowledge the totality of these social relations and instead only sees the relationship between capital and labour.

"Furthermore, there is a tendency within Marxism, epitomised by Stalin, which demands full rights for the masses and none for the individual.

"We must revive the early Marx who wrote that collective action is a precondition and facilitator of individual freedom; and that through the freedom of all, there can be the free development of each."

Juquin eschews the conservative, liberal, and labourist "models of citizenship based on relations of subjection and dependency" in favour of a concept of "self-governing citizens acting together in association with others to achieve, through collective action, their individual emancipation.

"People are dispossessed of power by the state," he explains. "This cannot be resolved by professional politicians. Indeed, they are part of the problem.

"Instead, people's repossession of citizenship requires them to become active participants in creating the future."

He calls for "a transition from a system of formal and limited citizenship bestowed upon the individual by the state to a realisation of actual and complete citizenship, integral citizenship, in which the individual is an initiator and active participant in the organisation of society."

According to Juquin, "integral citizenship" involves five principles.

•**equal and universal citizenship** for everyone who lives and works in a society, rather than by ties of blood and soil which discriminate against immigrants or by archaic prejudices which deny the rights of women;

•**non-passive citizenship**, wherein people are full actors and creators of social development and are neither dependent on the state nor passive consumers of its services and regulations;

•**direct citizenship**, meaning that people do things for themselves and take self-responsibility, rather than delegating power to others to act on their behalf;

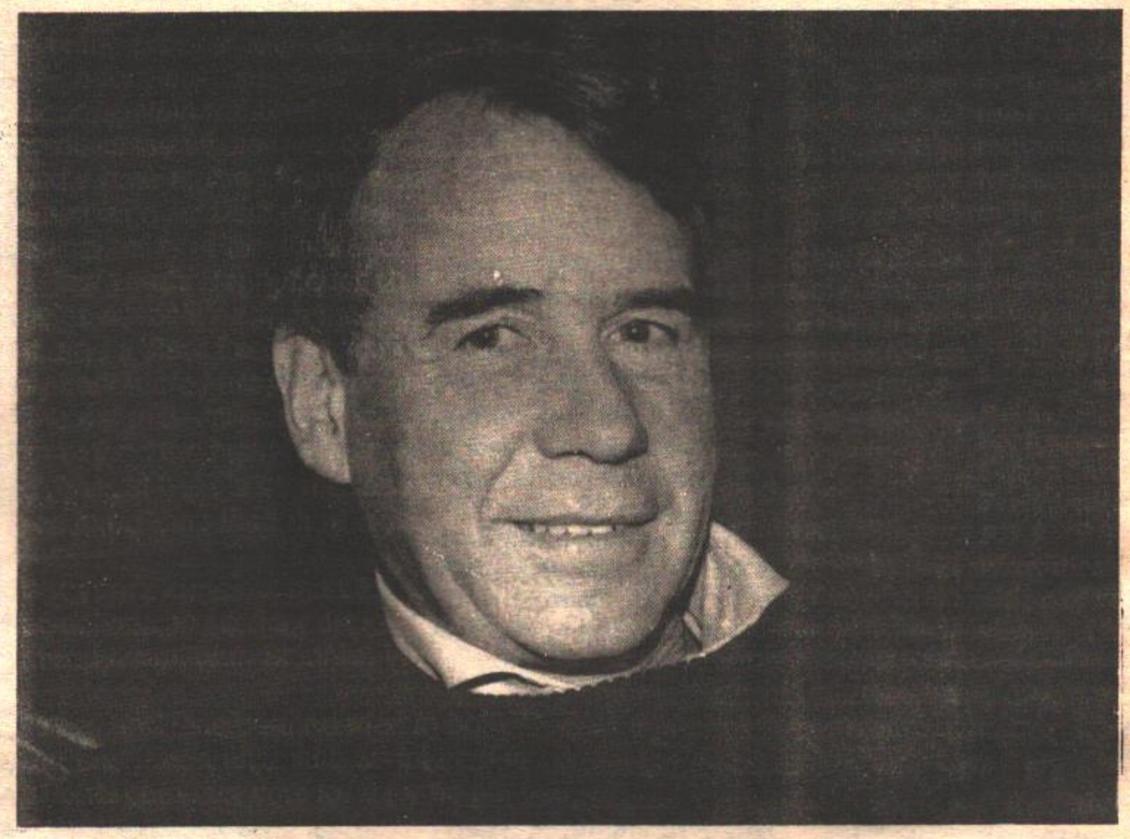


PHOTO: Peter Tatchell

Pierre Juquin

•**collective citizenship**, where, in contrast to decisions being taken solely by privileged groups or by those directly and immediately involved in an issue, everyone affected must participate in decision making;

(This is an implicit challenge to traditional trade unionism. In French factories, the most advanced workers demand "workers' control" of industry.

However, this demand overrides the rights of people not working in those factories who are nevertheless affected by the way they are run — local communities worried about pollution and consumers concerned about the price and quality of the products.)

•**general citizenship**, as opposed to a partial one, which allows people the right to determine their own existence with regard to everything that affects their lives. It means, for example, that citizenship is not just about political rights, but also about economic rights as well.

South-West African National Union

For non-sectarian solidarity

STEVE LLOYD, of Hammersmith Anti-Apartheid, interviewed VEKUII RUKORO and FREDERICK KOUJO, President and Secretary General of SWANU. SWANU is one of several anti-apartheid organisations in Southern Africa which is denied support by the British Anti-Apartheid Movement.

SL: Could you give a brief history of SWANU?

SWANU: SWANU was the first black nationalist organisation formed in Namibia. It was launched in 1959 as a national political organisation to unite what were then tribal institutions trying to fight Pretoria.

SL: What political principles does SWANU stand for?

SWANU: SWANU is a socialist movement. We passionately believe in a strategy of economic transformation after independence, based on the inherent communalism of African people.

We believe that there is a need to close the gap between rich and poor which has been caused by capitalism and colonialism. This means we must nationalise the major means of production under the direct control of the government.

We are also a democratic organisation. We believe in and practice democratic accountability. The SWANU congress meets every five years and is SWANU's supreme and sovereign body.

As a revolutionary organisation, we are determined to bring about fundamental social, political, and economic change, replacing the current system of capitalism and colonialism.

Liberation for Namibia will only come through the actions of the people. Support from the international community is therefore only complementary.

Although nationalist in form, SWANU is socialist in content. We are opposed to any forms of tribalism and racism of any kind. An overriding concept of a Namibian nation transcends whatever tribal pluralism may exist in Namibian society.

SL: What are SWANU's links with the wider mass movement?

SWANU: SWANU has worked hard under difficult circumstances to strengthen its links with the labour movement.

Currently, at least two trade union federations in Namibia, the Namibian Trade Unions (NTU), and the Namibian National Trade Unions, organising between them six to eight unions in various fields, are forging close links with SWANU.

Our negotiations are aimed at fusing the two federations as an affiliate of SWANU.

We have received great support from NACTU, the black consciousness federation in Azania.

A resolution was passed at NANSO (Namibian National Student Organisation) recognising SWAPO as the sole representative of the people. An attempt to drive out the SWANU youth league has failed, but if NANSO becomes a party political student movement, by definition, youth from other movements cannot join.

We hope that NANSO changes its position before it is too late. SWANU will not quit the united front of students.

SL: You are sometimes accused by opponents of taking part in the puppet interim government. How do you answer this accusation?

SWANU: This is a distortion. SWANU is not and has never been part of the interim government.

In the September 1984 Congress of SWANU, Herman Toivo Ja Toivo was the keynote speaker; this was his first public platform after 14 years of imprisonment.

Toivo Ja Toivo gave a solidarity statement thanking SWANU for its refusal to go into the interim government and for expelling the leadership elements who supported the puppet regime, namely Moses Katjiuongua.

It was important for the South Africans that a section of the interim government could be said to represent SWANU and SWAPO.

Should we say that because former leaders of SWAPO, like Andreas Shipanga and former vice president Mishake Muyongo, are members of the interim government, SWAPO are therefore in government? This would be as wrong as the allegations made against SWANU.

SL: What is SWANU's position on the talks between Angola, Cuba, and South Africa on the future of the South West Africa area?

SWANU: Our position is if the talks are aimed at speeding up the implementation of US Security Council resolution 435, we welcome them. However, we do not fail to notice the dominant role of the US in the talks, which should be a UN process, not an aspect of US foreign policy.

Resolution 435 can be an expression of the popular will of Namibian people and will put the Namibian people on the spot.

For the first time, they will be judges. Will its implementation represent the end of imperialist impositions by external agencies, or is 435 going to be used as a process to frustrate the Namibian revolution?

One problem is Walvis Bay; if it is decided in South Africa's favour, its use to a future Namibian government will be based on that government's "friendliness" to Pretoria.

Where the land question is addressed, it guarantees and entrenches rights to private property. SWANU defines the land as a means of production and as such it cannot be left in private hands.

We are also concerned that the responsibility for law and order during the election rests with the South Africans, who will keep up to 15,000 troops in Namibia until after the elections, while the UN forces will be unarmed.

SL: What is your view of the Anti-Apartheid Movement in Britain?

SWANU: We support those fighting to make the A-AM a non-sectarian movement. We are in favour of support being given to all those engaged in the struggle in both Azania and Namibia.

We also welcome direct links of solidarity between progressive organisations in Britain and Namibia.

SWANU may be contacted through: PO Box 75, Wolverhampton WV1 1SF.

Polish Socialist Party

The PSP was reactivated in Poland in November 1987. It is attempting to raise once again the standard of democratic socialism. In the course of the last year the PSP has become one of the most repressed organisations in Poland.

The PSP have just opened an International Office in London — a feat made possible by donations from the labour movement.

Now more donations are needed: to welcome the PSP to London and help maintain its activities.

Contact David Holland, Director of the PPS International Office, The Basement, 92 Ladbroke Grove, London W11 2HE, tel 01-229 6259.

Sinn Fein Ard Fheis

"Towards a mass movement"

When Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein President and MP for West Belfast, called on the IRA to avoid civilian casualties there was little reaction from the delegates assembled in Mansion House.

There were no heckles, no shaking of heads, no wild applause. And no surprise.

For those at the Ard Fheis, there was nothing remarkable or controversial in Adams's comments. They knew that Irish Republicanism has never shed blood lightly.

Only the British media, who have argued otherwise, thought Adams's restatement of a traditional policy newsworthy.

The real story of the Ard Fheis was the endorsement of the leadership proposals "to develop an all-Ireland mass movement which could appeal to all those capable of taking a stand for national self-determination".

The demands around which such a mass movement could be built "might include calling a halt to pollution; the selling off of our natural resources; discrimination against the poorer people in education, health and housing.

They would be against extradition, the maltreatment of prisoners, against the decimation of our economy and the denial of sovereignty by the EEC, against poverty and forced emigration."

And, finally, they would be against "British occupation and the 26 Counties' collaboration with the British government in denying self-determination to the Irish people."

Context

In the context of Sinn Fein's history and development, the significance of these proposals can hardly be over-estimated. After all, the literal translation of *Sinn Fein* is *Ourselves Alone*; in the past Sinn Fein members have often taken this to mean

GEOFF BELL (Hackney North CLP) reports from the Sinn Fein Ard Fheis (annual conference) held in Dublin at the end of January.

that Irish freedom, unity, and peace will *only* be delivered by Sinn Fein.

One speaker called the new line "a clear cut rejection of the old Republican elitist position." In Adams's words, it was a recognition that "we cannot free the people; only the people can free the people."

The only public objection at the Ard Fheis to the "broad front" proposal came from Johnny White of Donegal Sinn Fein, a leading socialist, who warned that the policies could lead to a watering down of Sinn Fein's socialism.

He was answered by Sinn Fein's General Secretary, Tom Hartley, who said that Sinn Fein participation in broad fronts was "born of a confidence in our positions, but a confidence too that allows us to say, we don't hold the holy grail."

Others laid the "broad front" emphasis on "anti-imperialist unity". According to Martin McGuiness, "we are not the only anti-imperialists in Ireland. Sometimes we think we are, but we are not."

For any British observer to the Conference, especially anyone used to British left politics, such political modesty is refreshing. But it is a modesty born of a real sense of achievement.

In recent years Sinn Fein has developed a membership more and more capable of leading mass struggles. The level of serious political debate is more impressive than ever, just as the overwhelming working class background of those at the Conference remains as obvious as ever.

Environment

This year there were discussions on a detailed policy on rights for people with disabilities, on the environment, housing, women, culture, local government, health and social welfare, education, and many other issues.

A key session on the economy adopted policies on the EC, emigration, taxation, and privatisation.

The Ard Fheis reaffirmed that "the problems of unemployment and discrimination can only be dealt with by radical socialist policies and that these can only be achieved within a free and independent Ireland."

In short, in policy, principles, tactics, and personnel, Sinn Fein is a growing threat to the British in Ireland and their collaborators in Ireland's establishment. It is not surprising that laws are passed to muzzle its voice.



PHOTO: Martine Stead

Gerry Adams, Pat Doherty, Tom Hartley, Sean McManus, and Caoimhine O'Caolaoin at the 1989 Ard Fheis.

British Violence and the IRA response —

what Gerry Adams said at the Ard Fheis:

The history of Ireland and of British colonial involvement throughout the world tells us that the British government rarely listens to the force of argument.

It understands only the argument of force.

This is one of the reasons why armed struggle is a fact of life, and death, in the Six Counties.

Republicans do not turn to this method of political struggle lightly or easily. It arises from the presence of a foreign government which maintains its rule by violence, institutionalised sectarianism, widespread repression and military occupation.

Deprived of any alternative, armed struggle is the response of the oppressed, in any situation, to their oppression.

Armed struggle, however, is not merely a defensive reaction by an oppressed people. It sets the political agenda. Thus armed struggle can advance the overall struggle to the advantage of those in whose interest it is waged.

But the politics which shapes the objectives of the liberation struggle and the idealism which motivates the freedom fighters must guide and control the actions of that struggle.

IRA mistakes are welcomed by the British establishment. It cares little about the tragedy involved and is interested only in exploiting such tragedies, even temporarily, to the advantage of those interests against which armed struggle is waged.

It seeks to demoralise and confuse the wider nationalist support base which does not have the same insight and understanding as the Republican base which remains solid after 20 years of struggle.

That base and the wider base have the right to question and do question those operations in which civilians are killed or injured.

I want to speak directly to active service volunteers of Óglaigh na hÉireann. You have a massive responsibility. At times the fate of this struggle is in your hands. You have to be careful and careful again.

These are the feelings of the broad mass of the Republican people, feelings which are shared by Republican activists and which now call for more circumspection than ever before.

The morale of your comrades in jail, your own morale and of your comrades in the field can be raised or dashed by your actions. You can advance or retard this struggle.

I say these words not in the hypocritical, condemnatory fashion of selective moralists in the churches or in the political establishment. I say them in solidarity and in comradeship.

I am mindful that the media will misrepresent my remarks. I am aware that the hardy annuals of unfounded speculation about hawks and doves, splits and disagreements will be given yet another airing.

For this reason some of you may feel that some of those things should be left unsaid. I understand such sentiment but it is a responsibility of leadership to lead from the front on this crucial issue as much as any other.

Nothing I say should be interpreted as a condemnation of the IRA. The men and women Volunteers of Óglaigh na hÉireann have my continued loyalty. As I remind them of their responsibilities, I salute them as freedom fighters.

Faced with numerically superior forces and beset by many difficulties the ability of the IRA to survive and to remain intact in defiance of all that the British government has done this last 20 years is a tribute to the courage, tenacity and resourcefulness of its Volunteers.

Czechoslovakia

Police go berserk in Prague

On Sunday January 14th police, aided by water cannon, armoured cars, and dogs, waded into a peaceful gathering in Wenceslas Square in the centre of Prague.

The crowd of several thousand had assembled to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the suicide of Jan Palach, who burnt himself to death in 1969 to "awake the people from their apathy", as they adapted to the restoration of bureaucratic tyranny.

The police then rounded up the usual suspects, among them playwright Vaclav Havel. With the meeting dispersed and the ringleaders arrested, that should have been it.

However, it turned out to be only the beginning of a week of defiant protest by thousands of people, most of them too young to remember the events of 1968-69.

"Write the truth," they demanded, "Long live Vaclav Havel," "Long live the Charter," "Human rights," "Give us a new government," "Give us back Dubcek."

Gorbachev and the first President of the independent Czechoslovak state, Tomas Masaryk, were also mentioned.

Three days after the initial demonstration, the authorities seemed to back off. The crowd was allowed to assemble and hold a meeting without interruption.

But the following day the police went berserk. Witnesses say many officers were drunk. Exits from Wenceslas Square were blocked and casual passers-by were beaten up.

In response to taunts from the crowd of "gestapo", the police shouted, "we'll give you gestapo!" and kicked a 16 year old as he lay on the ground. This boy's parents are so intimidated that, although he is seriously injured, they have not dared to seek medical help for him.

Over 800 people were arrested during the week and accused of "hooliganism".

There was a further demonstration on the Friday. On the Saturday some hundreds of people tried to make the way to the small town of Vsetaty, where Palach's body is buried (it was removed from Prague when it seemed that the grave might become a political focus).

By Colin Meade
Surbiton CLP

Police surrounded Vsetaty and deported outsiders as they arrived.

Meanwhile, the mass media were pouring out the lies. These people are in the pay of "foreign centres". The dissident leaders are trying to incite young people to commit suicide. People are threatening to put bombs in cinemas and stores.

This torrent of drivel was too much for 694 TV personalities and other artists, who wrote to the Prime Minister calling for the release of Havel and all those arrested, an end to the slanders, and for the state to launch a dialogue with society.

This apparently small move is of momentous importance in Czechoslovakia, where the state has gone to great lengths to ensure that every position of power and influence is held by obedient people.

Now celebrities seen every day by millions have broken the spell of conformity.

This crack in the monolith is the first victory for thousands who did not wait for "revolution from above", but decided to defy the full force of the state and claim their right to meet in Wenceslas Square.

Lennon

Will the state seek revenge? Most of those arrested were released shortly afterwards. Three have been held for a longer period: Havel, who has been jailed twice before and is thus a dangerous recidivist; Jana Petrova of the Independent Peace Association; and Otakar Veverka, a supporter of the so-called "John Lennon Peace Club".

Any attempt to put these or any other independent activists on trial will ignite further protests.

LABOUR BRIEFING

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Poll Tax Notes

Poll Tax and Women

The Poll Tax is an attack on the living standards and the civil liberties of us all. But it will affect different people in different ways. Over the next weeks we will be looking at how the Poll Tax affects different sections of the working class. This week, GREG TUCKER, a Lambeth Councillor, starts with the way Poll Tax attacks women.

Tory propaganda for the Poll Tax often centres on the poor, elderly widow paying the same rates as the family of five all with jobs.

It's a measure to *help* women they say. But do women gain from the Poll Tax? No. Even the Tories' widow is more likely to be worse off.

While many single people will be better off, in inner city areas most people living alone will be worse off. Only those in large properties will benefit financially.

For other women the Tax will have a direct and severe effect.

Everyone will be liable for Poll Tax, irrespective of ability to pay. As a flat rate tax this particularly hits women whose earnings are, on average, only 75% of male earnings.

Despite the increasing numbers of women at work, many still have to spend significant periods of their life outside work caring for others. In and out of work, or forced into part-time employment, women's wage earning is restricted.

As a percentage of their income, women will be paying more Poll Tax than men. For black women, often forced into the lowest paid jobs, the situation will be even worse.

DHSS "cohabitation" rules have long been fought against. Now the Poll Tax makes every women liable to sex snoopers.

Partner

"Joint and several liablity" means that couples, married or not, are liable for each other. Unwaged women will be even more financially dependent on their partner.

Councils will have a duty to know whether people are "cohabiting" in order to charge one if the other does not pay.

In the event of a partnership breaking up, women may find themselves liable for unpaid Poll Tax for their missing partner. Reluctance to report the change in circumstances will just add to the bill.

Nearly one in three married women experience violence. Their extra economic dependence will leave them more powerless. Leaving home may be harder if an already violent man is then going to be told by the Council that he still has to pay both Poll Taxes.

Women leaving home because of violence could find their Poll Tax details open to the public, and their partner, unless they can prove to the Poll Tax registration officer that they may be at risk.

Five million women act as carers for elderly or disabled relatives. A quarter of the elderly live with their children or other relatives. For them the Poll Tax may be an added burden. For if the cared for lived in hospitals or residential homes they would be exempt.

Instead of paying Poll Tax for the carer, denied a decent income, and the cared for, the pressure will be on many families, however reluctantly, to put their elderly or disabled members in hospital or a home.

The pressure will be to make arrangements permanent. If an elderly relative becomes infirm and leaves their home to move in with relatives the carers could even find themselves liable for three sets of tax – for themselves, their elderly relative, and for the empty property.

Single parents (90% women) are mostly reliant on benefits. For them the government has introduced a new swindle. 80% of their Poll Tax will be paid direct; but the other 20% must come out of their benefits.

The government says it will include an amount for this based on a notional national average Poll Tax. No one knows how this figure will be determined. What is clear is that benefit claimants in the inner cities, with high Poll Taxes, will lose out.

Women lose out financially. They lose out in direct attacks on their civil rights. They will also lose out as Councils cut services.

The Tory rationale for the Poll Tax is to make local government "more accountable". Decoded, this means cuts. Pressure will be applied on all Councils to lower the Poll Tax levels.

Inevitably the services that suffer will increase the burden on women. Non-statutory provision of nurseries, under-5s provision, support for carers such as day centres and home helps, subsidised and public transport are likely to be the first targets.

Next issue: Black people and the Poll Tax

Ealing

Campaign launched

By Eve Turner, Ealing Fightback

The fight against the Poll Tax in Ealing, West London, got underway at a meeting in Southall on January 28th, called jointly by Ealing Southall CLP, Ealing Trades Council, and Ealing Fightback.

Although the attendance, at 75 people, was not as large as had been hoped for, many were representing trade unions, wards, local community and political organisations, showing how widespread interest in campaigning against the Poll Tax is.

Representatives of the ruling Labour Group were rather thin on the ground. This is hardly surprising, given that they are complying with the legislation with barely a murmur of opposition.

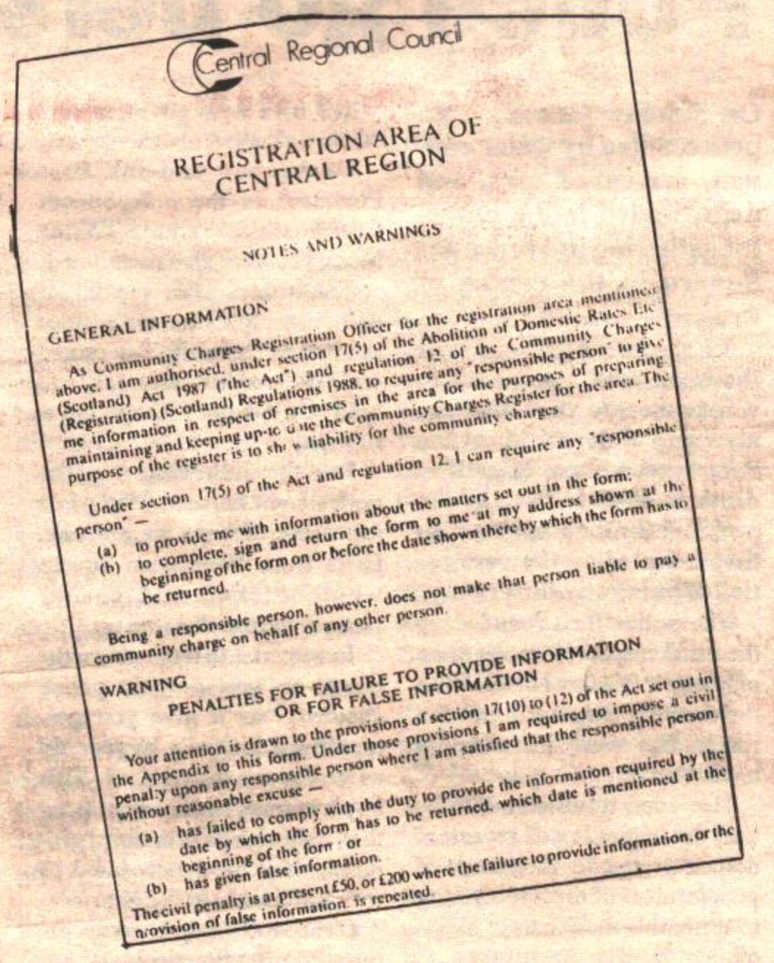
After a very lucid introduction to the legislation by Leander Neckles of the Local Government Information Unit (LGIU), Gary Kent of London Against the Poll Tax and Lambeth Councillor Greg Tucker both spoke on the need to build a broad-based campaign.

They described the different tactics campaigns will have to consider over the next 18 months.

Whilst the majority of speakers from the floor spoke broadly in support of a campaign of non-payment and non-collection, it was generally agreed that the Ealing campaign should be open to anyone who wants to take action against the Poll Tax, even if it stops short of breaking the law.

A follow-up meeting is to be organised in the next few weeks and one of its first tasks will be to start building support in Southall's black community, who stand to lose an average of £10 per week.

If you live locally and want to get involved in the campaign, contact Oliver New, 01-571 5019.



Central Regional Council

REGISTRATION AREA OF CENTRAL REGION

NOTES AND WARNINGS

GENERAL INFORMATION

As Community Charges Registration Officer for the registration area mentioned above, I am authorised, under section 17(5) of the Abolition of Domestic Rates Etc (Scotland) Act 1987 ("the Act") and regulation 12 of the Community Charges (Registration) (Scotland) Regulations 1988, to require any "responsible person" to give me information in respect of premises in the area for the purposes of preparing maintaining and keeping up-to-date the Community Charges Register for the area. The purpose of the register is to show liability for the community charges

Under section 17(5) of the Act and regulation 12, I can require any "responsible person" —

(a) to provide me with information about the matters set out in the form;
(b) to complete, sign and return the form to me at my address shown at the beginning of the form on or before the date shown there by which the form has to be returned.

Being a responsible person, however, does not make that person liable to pay a community charge on behalf of any other person.

WARNING

PENALTIES FOR FAILURE TO PROVIDE INFORMATION OR FOR FALSE INFORMATION

Your attention is drawn to the provisions of section 17(10) to (12) of the Act set out in the Appendix to this form. Under those provisions I am required to impose a civil penalty upon any responsible person where I am satisfied that the responsible person without reasonable excuse —

(a) has failed to comply with the duty to provide the information required by the date by which the form has to be returned, which date is mentioned at the beginning of the form; or
(b) has given false information.

The civil penalty is at present £50, or £200 where the failure to provide information, or the provision of false information, is repeated.

Just the beginning of one of the complicated forms which did the rounds in Scotland, demanding people register to pay the Poll Tax. It has to be filled in by a "responsible person" — again, men will be "responsible" for their wives, partners, and daughters.

NALGO Conference

Frontline workers organise

By Nick Hazlewood
Shop Steward, Lambeth NALGO

Lambeth NALGO have called a National Conference to discuss the Poll Tax. It will be on Saturday April 15th at Lambeth Town Hall.

The Conference, initiated by white collar workers in Lambeth, will discuss strategies for fighting the new tax in the months leading up to its implementation and in the coming years.

NALGO is the union in the front line when it comes to the implementation of the Poll Tax. Union members will be responsible for its collection and recovery and in the long run for the success or failure of the Tax.

Under legislation accompanying the introduction of the Poll Tax, town hall finance workers will be given unprecedented powers to impose fines, attachments of earnings and ultimately more severe penalties on members of the public refusing or unable to pay.

Yet despite the importance of their membership in the Poll Tax process NALGO's national leadership has failed to provide a clear line or policy on the issue.

The Lambeth Conference will aim to redress this. It will consist of workshops and speakers from the Union's National Executive Committee, Black Workers' Group, the Newcastle Organising Committee, from Scotland and Council representatives.

Its importance to union members has already been demonstrated by the number of branches that have shown an interest in attending and sponsoring the event.

For further details contact: Sian Moore, Vice Chair Lambeth NALGO, Brixton Town Hall, London SW2.

Local Reports

Send us your local reports! We need to share campaigning ideas around the many anti-Poll Tax groups. With much of the anti-Poll Tax campaigning going on locally, we need to publish local reports to give us all a feeling of the strength of the campaign. We're starting off with a short report from the West London Borough of Ealing. Send your contributions to 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB.