LABOUR
BRIEFING
40p FORTNIGHTLY
NO.79 MAR 8~21 1989

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40p

TORIES IN TROUBLE IN THE POLLS

HOW LABOUR CAN WIN

Labour is ahead in the polls for the first time in years. This is welcome news.

By JEREMY CORBYN, MP

Less welcome are the facts behind this "lead":

•interest rates at their highest for 15 years;

•inflation rising;

•unemployment registered at over two million (in reality over three);

•and the devastating plans to privatise the Health Service only now being absorbed in the public mind.

The great achievement of Mrs Thatcher and her government has been to set the agenda and make the running in public debate.

This is partly done with the help of a sychophantic and pliant media, but also because of the way that the Labour leadership has campaigned on her values and in part accepted them.

Britain is becoming an awful place. Over three million without work, 750,000 with no jobs *and* no benefits. Thousands sleeping on the streets and beggers a constant feature of urban life.

The health service is straining to cope and the tax and trading system rewards the get-rich-quick and leaves the poor and vulnerable destitute.

Yet, in all this, the message of the media devotees at our Walworth Road Head Office is that if Labour is too associated with the "margins of society" we will never gain the support of the "middle ground" and therefore cannot win.

Apart from being arithmetical nonsense, it displays a lack of confidence in our ability to win an election and implies that we must join with other opposition forces such as David Owen's SDP or the barely competent SLD.

All this leaves Labour supporters, socialists who do not want a capitalist society, wondering exactly where they are.

They have seen the determination of the Tories to strip the public of its assets and liberties, the repression they have mounted, and their successful attempt to weaken the trade unions.

They have also seen the efforts of the miners to save jobs and communities obstructed by the police and frustrated by the refusal of the labour movement leadership to really support them.

We need an end to all this defeatist talk and a real effort to put the case for socialism NOW!

Any examination of our history will show us that it was popular movements that won the old age pension, free education, the National Health Service, leisure facilities for all. Nothing was won because we waited for somebody on high to give it to us.

Labour can win an election in 1991 or whenever, but only if we address the problems facing the poorest and worst off:

•housing for all, as a right, with control over rents and mortgage interest rates; an end to all repossessions;

•pensions linked to average earnings to eliminate poverty for the elderly;

•a health service totally free at the point of use with emphasis on preventative and environmental factors;

•minimum wage rates and the repeal of all anti-union laws;

•repossession of all privatised industries;

•serious environmental protection measures to halt the destruction of life;



Jeremy Corbyn on the General Election trail in 1987 — proving that socialist policies win elections.

•an international policy based on unilateral nuclear disarmament, cutting of all non-nuclear defence expenditure, closure of all US bases, and the freeing of resources for social programmes; a trade policy based on respect for poorer countries and their needs.

For Labour to win we need leadership. We need a serious assault on the values of the Tories and the system they represent.

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.

Second thoughts on *Satanic Verses*

Dear *Briefing*,

Since your editorial after the initial fuss regarding *Satanic Verses*, the situation has escalated.

In principle, I would agree there should be "no compromise" on the blasphemy laws, but in certain circumstances a reactionary government may find it necessary to extend the laws to cover other major religions.

The Ayatollah's death sentence and the "religious riots" in Teheran, Pakistan and India have led to a racist backlash in the media.

The writer Brian Aldiss is outraged at the "uncivilised" actions of fundamentalists rather than the supposed insult to Islam or the personal and literary threat to Rushdie.

He believes Iran should be isolated and the apparent wishes of the Muslim community here ignored.

Several British Muslims have publicly stated that they would kill Rushdie — although I understand that Islamic law states that they should abide by the laws of the land.

It is not our place to condemn religious fanaticism. I believe we have to try and understand it and come to terms with it.

Book-burning in any circumstances is wrong and the Ayatollah has certainly endangered Rushdie's life but we need to think out our responses.

Simply to state "abolish the blasphemy laws" and reiterate the demand for the complete separation of church and state is not enough.

Andy Gibbons,
Oxford



PHOTO: Martine Stead

Councillors Against the Cuts banner, fresh from recent demos. Should we start making "leftwingers for socialist ideas" banners?

Much too vague

Dear *Briefing*,

I share Reg Race's doubts about the value of continued preoccupation with local government by the left.

Certainly far too many erstwhile left wingers have been dragged rightwards by becoming Councillors and coming under pressure from Tory legislation.

And far too much Party time and energy has been devoted to the sunken ship of municipal socialism.

But Reg Race's alternatives for activity do not appeal. "Arguing for socialism and socialist ideas in the movement and the class..." is much too vague.

Surely that is what socialists try to do in a general sense. But advocating it in a general way does not get us further forward.

"Mounting a challenge to the domination of the PLP by the right..." may be worthwhile, but first smacks of fiddling in the bureaucracy, and secondly does not explain what a lowly branch activist like myself is supposed to do.

Of course there are plenty of important fronts on which the left is fighting at present, i.e. Poll Tax, Housing Bill, and trade union solidarity work.

Two other fronts should be opened. First, Ireland is still not on the agenda of the mainstream labour movement, not even among *left wingers*. The only reason is fear. This the left should face and overcome.

Secondly, the level of understanding or interest displayed in the workings of British or world capitalism by the movement in general and the left in particular is miserable.

Will Brown,
Windmill Hill LP,
Bristol South

These are the real Stalinists!

Dear *Briefing*,

B J Gibbons' complaint of a "negative and cynical report" by Mike Phipps on the Anti-Apartheid Movement AGM seems bizarre to one who has been a delegate for the last two years.

In reality it is the A-A leadership which is the vanguard of cynicism and sectarianism.

It is easy to say "solidarity with all genuine forces fighting apartheid is a principle". But if you act on it you soon find yourself in battle with the Stalinist/ANC alliance which leads the AA.

For years they have boycotted and slandered those forces with a different viewpoint to that of the ANC.

What about the cynicism of the A-A leaders in relation to Mayekiso? Would they have been so reticent if he had been an ANC supporter?

Under pressure from inside and outside the country they give mealy-mouthed support, doing only enough to deflect the demands for a genuine labour movement campaign.

The A-A leadership is a bureaucratic clique which brings together Stalinists (real ones, not "Stalinists" as Gibbons puts it) with liberals and ANC people.

Its bureaucratic methods are aimed at maintaining the domination by pro-ANC forces, subordinating activity in this country to the political line of the ANC in South Africa — a "democratic revolution" and a "negotiated settlement".

They act to prevent those in South Africa who disagree with this line from getting a hearing in the British labour movement. Does Gibbons propose we go along with this?

Of course, our primary responsibility is to build support for the South African revolution amongst British workers and oppressed, opposing the support of "our own" imperialism for the regime.

The problem is that the Stalinist/ANC alliance is an obstacle to that. They counterpose the consumer boycott to serious work in the trade unions.

Why? Because the union bureaucrats, whilst they are prepared to affiliate and express their "opposition" to apartheid, stand in the way of action by workers.

Serious activity on this level requires a struggle against the union apparatuses. The A-A leaders are not prepared to risk that.

It is the task of socialists in this country to give unconditional support to the struggle in South Africa, whatever our opinion of leading forces in it.

But there is a struggle going in the camp of the oppressed in South Africa. The black masses themselves will determine the course of their struggle and to which organisations they give their allegiance.

But we have to recognise that just as the Stalinists in Spain butchered their opponents in the name of defence of the "democratic revolution", so the nationalist/Stalinist alliance in South Africa will do the same if they need to and if they are strong enough.

It is crucial that we fight to ensure that those revolutionary forces who disagree with that line get a hearing.

Briefing should participate in the organisation of an "opposition" within the A-A, the purpose of which is not to denounce people but to organise the necessary struggle against the current leaders, not as an end in itself, but to more effectively build support for the South African revolution.

Martin Wicks
Reading A-A



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Anti-apartheid demo: does the mass movement adhere to the shackled line of the A-AM leadership? Should we help organise an opposition?

Are you unemployed?

Dear *Briefing*,

Efforts to reduce unemployment through various government schemes have had various degrees of success, also a fair share of criticism and failure.

The only thing for certain is that the unemployed themselves have very little input on which schemes are useful and which are not, what to do when you are disappointed with a course when the only route is to transfer to another.

There appears to be very little said throughout the media.

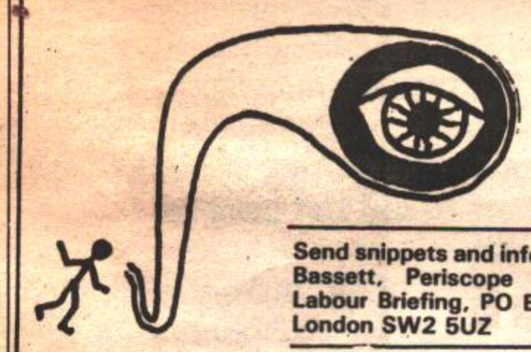
The biggest surprise, however, is the lack of any clear policy from the Labour Party or the trade unions (NALGO in this case) as to what you can do when on a scheme and it fails to provide adequate training.

This I experienced while working as a supervisor on a YTS involving computers, where in some cases the trainees knew more than the staff.

For these reasons, a group of us, all unemployed, have decided to try and rectify this by creating a newsletter for the unemployed. Any ideas or contributions from your readers would be appreciated.

Alan Roscoe
3 Plover Drive, Chesham Fold, Bury, Lancs BL9 6JH

Periscope



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

Haven in the Sun

Apparently they've pretty well eradicated mosquitos in the Cayman Islands, but the slugs and bloodsuckers are still there.

This favourite haunt for Euro-dollars and the like still maintains its comfortable tax-free climate.

Five hundred banks are registered there, including 20 of the world's largest 25 banking institutions.

Extreme confidentiality rules leave the amount consequently kept this way unknown, but estimates run to about £150 billions in 1986. There is no central bank.

These institutions employ no more than 700 Caymanians — just over one commissionaire per bank.

Eighteen thousand seven hundred other financial companies are also registered there, most of which don... have to file annual audited accounts.

The majority even have a guarantee that, should the tax regime change, they will be exempted from paying tax for at least 20 years.

Lastly, there are some 320 "insurance companies" registered there.

This British Crown Colony advertises itself as an "international aset protection" facility, which would give protection in the event of the reintroduction of exchange controls in the UK.

Surprisingly, therefore, it has been the US government that has tightened up rules governing the use of the Cayman Islands for tax purposes.

Initially this was a campaign to reduce the amounts of drug-traffic money being laundered through the colony, but subsequently there's been a general tightening up. Nothing similar has of course emerged from the British government.

There is scant concern that the 20,000 Cayman Islands' indigenous population might never get jobs other than as home helps, chauffeurs and the like, even though the cost of living is higher than that in the US.

Rather, like in the Channel Isles, government is by those with money, for those with money.

Could some constitutional expert in the Labour Party explain how we could regain financial control over these bits of old empire?

Frank Scott

Contact Briefing

This *Briefing* comes to you *almost* from our new office! Half of our belongings are installed: the other half await until we've sent this paper to you. Thanks to all those who helped with the move. The names of the three who didn't turn up as promised will be printed in the next paper — pending a suitable donation to the fund drive before then.

For the moment, please still send all your correspondence to 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB; we will print our new address and phone number as soon as we can. The move makes our £1,000 fund drive even more vital. We need this money to equip our new ofice with some basic tools of the trade, and make it easier to bring you your fortnightly paper.

John Wilton is organising a fabulous Summer Raffle for *Briefing*. The tickets are being printed as I write: for details contact John Wilton.

Published by Labour Briefing: PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ.
Printed by East West Graphic [TU], 01-354 3827

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Thatcher gets green — and rich!

Everyone's been talking about the "greening of Thatcher", of "Mrs Thatcher's conversion to green politics", as if she'd just woken up one morning and decided that capitalism could embrace the green approach.

But is it concern for lush Kent countryside which has made Thatcher rebuke British Rail's plans to drive the Chunnel train through it? No: it's self-interested concern for the Tory votes rural Kent can deliver.

The Tories show no interest in the workers' lives lost in the tunnelling of the prestige project. They are more interested in the moves afoot to deselect Junior Transport Minister Peter Bottomely from his Eltham seat.

Thatcher's interest in ozone-destructive CFC gases extends as far as summoning the world to the old imperialist capital for a Conference. It stops short of supporting a similar initiative in Norway, or of looking further than CFCs towards life and environment threatening chemicals like Lindane which workers handle every day.

Thatcher denounced the last Labour government on television — for sitting on an EC clean water directive for four years. Her government has spent ten years *identifying* the dirty beaches — not cleaning them up.

The strategy for cleaning them up is to privatise the water industry and make *us* pay for the work and creating profit for private companies into the bargain! Neat, eh?

The whole dynamic of green politics is *anti-capitalist* and *anti-imperialist*, as the Labour Party Black Sections have easily recognised (see page 7). The Tories may seek to co-opt concern over green issues — but only for their own, profit-seeking ends.

The true home of green politics is not in the Tory ranks, but in the labour movement. Yet the Labour front bench is silent in the face of House of Lords and All-Party Select Committee calls for a "food watchdog".

Labour's green policy exists largely at the level of what Local Authorities can do (some of which are long since abolished; the remaining of which are starved of resources). No wonder the Tories are in danger of getting away with one of their biggest ideological con-tricks yet.

Facts of Local Government life

"Socialist management" was the (tongue in cheek?) title of a recent LCC talkathon about local government. "Efficiency" and "improvements in service delivery" are also popular, provided they come cheap, and at the expense of jobs.

But all the self-serving platitudes dreamed up by the Labour Careerists Committee will not disguise the real nature and depth of the crisis Labour faces in local government.

The travails of Hammersmith and Fulham Council, broken on the money market rack, like the self-destruction of Brent Council before it, are merely the visible tip of the iceberg. Ten years of Tory attacks and umpteen Local Government Acts have placed Labour Councils in an iron legislative and financial vice.

Some seek escape through massive rent or rate rises; others through massive cuts in jobs and services; still others through a combination of the two.

In the process, they alienate their own electoral base, undermine grass roots struggles against the Housing Act, Poll Tax, and privatisation, and open the door to right wing backlash.

The nub of the issue, which the Labour right refuses to address, is *money*.

It is a fact of life that Labour cannot deliver to people the services they rightly demand without the resources to pay for them. And these resources are no longer available to us *within the law*.

As long as Labour dodges that reality, it cannot claim to have a serious programme for local government.

Although the political and financial situation varies from Council to Council, local government as a whole remains one of Labour's strongholds. No one should underestimate the damage done to our movement by the Party's failure to resist the Tory onslaught against that stronghold.

And no one should write off as irrelevant the struggle around local government — whatever particular tactics they would prefer to see the left adopt.

Others will try to slink away from local government, and go on to an "easier" question. *Briefing* believes socialists must continue to demand that Local Authorities provide the jobs and services that people need. To do so, it is now clearer than ever that they must confront the Tory laws that prevent them carrying out their electoral mandates.

Economic Notebook

Exposed...

The myth of low-tax Britain

With Lawson's Budget looming, much will be made over the next couple of weeks of the possibility and wisdom of further tax cuts.

This debate takes for granted one of the Tories' favourite economic myths.

By PETER THOMPSON

It is now widely and falsely accepted that Britain has become a low tax economy. In fact, only the very wealthiest have seen a reduction in their overall tax burden since 1979.

For the vast bulk of the population, the tax burden has either remained roughly the same or has grown. The myth of lower overall taxation is, as usual, built upon the selective use of statistics.

What has happened is that the Tories have, in effect, privatised taxation.

The shift from direct taxation (income tax) to indirect taxation (VAT) and an increase in National Insurance has meant an atomisation of tax collection and calculation and thus disguised the real tax burden.

There has been an increase in overall taxation for the lowest paid, who have seen more and more of their income transferred via the Exchequer to the rich, who have benefitted from tax cuts and increased subsidisation.

Let's back this up with some figures. Between 1976 and 1986 the proportion of original income going to the top 20% of the population rose from 44.4% to 50.7%. For the bottom 20% it fell from a miserable 0.8% to 0.3%.

The proportion of final income (original income plus state benefits) over the same period showed a similar trend: for the top 20% it rose form 37.1% to 41.7%, while for the bottom 20% it fell from 7.4% to 5.1%.

The number of people in households living on less than 50% of the national average wage grew from 4.4 million in 1981 to 4.9 million in 1985 (the last available figures).

Higher interest rates also mean that many of the low paid who have been encouraged to buy their own homes now find even more of their disposable income transferred into the hands of those with large deposit accounts.

All of this means that there has been a major transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich under Thatcher. This is no one by-product of Thatcherism. This is capitalism at work.

Take note, *Marxism Today*, Neil Kinnock, David Owen, *et al.* The class struggle has nothing to do with whether workers wear cloth caps and still go to Blackpool on holiday.

It has everything to do with the kind of taxation policies persued by the Thatcher government in the interests of the ruling class.

The question facing the labour movement is whether our response to it should be one of class-based defence of worker's rights or consensus-seeking amelioration.



"There has been a major transfer of wealth from the poor to the rich." Lawson's "booming economy" is not felt at the sharp end of making ends meet.

So what should *Briefing*be proposing in relation to taxation and the Budget?

The logical conclusion of the figures on disposable income and taxation shown above is that we should be demanding a Budget which

- establishes a sharply progressive tax regime which *reduces* the overall tax burden for the low paid in *real terms*;
- switches the tax burden on to those who can afford it best;
- starts the process of redistributing power, wealth, and control to the working class.

However we must be aware such modest measures would mobilise the opposition of the capitalist state and all the powers at its disposal.

That is why the Labour leadership fights shy of real policies for wealth redistribution and why we have the urgent task of building a socialist alternative within the Party.

Campaign!

Rushdie:

Labour twisting in the breeze

The latest twists in the Rushdie affair have been disturbing but predictable.

Douglas Hurd, having lectured Muslims in Manchester about the obligations incumbent on "law-abiding" Brits, then turned on Rushdie, snidely claiming the author didn't understand "British institutions". Howe and Thatcher have expresed their general disapproval of *The Satanic Verses*, and clearly a big push is on for some "diplomatic" (i.e. self-serving) solution to the British-Iranian conflict.

Meanwhile publishers Penguin (owned by multinational Pearson Group) are said to have pulped the first run of the paperback edition. The publishing industry and the bourgeois media in general are dithering and preparing the way for a climbdown.

This retreat from Rushdie's defence was inevitable. It's not just that someone in Thatcher's eyrie has finally read his book and discovered that it is far more offensive to the Tory regime than to the tenets of Islam.

It is that defence of the book and the principles of free expression are not in the interests of the class represented by the government. Labour's leaders, as usual, have not been so clear about the interests of the class *they* represent.

Paddy Ashdown took up the cudgels for Rushdie against the Tories, while Kinnock kept his lips buttoned.

The problem with leaving this battle to the likes of Ashdown and the bourgeois liberals pontificating in the "quality" press is twofold.

First, most of these people have a pitiful track record on free speech. Where were they when *Perdition* was effectively banned from the stage? When Sinn Fein was gagged? When Clause 28 was pushed through parliament? Some protested, but these cases never received the kind of outraged advocacy being shown in the Rushdie case.

Second, they refuse to place the current controversy in the context of the grossly racist society which is Thatcher's Britain, 1989. Not only such devotees of literary freedom as the *Sun* and the *Mail* but also Hugo Young in the *Guardian* and others have used the affair as an excuse for racist and inflammatory attacks on Muslims.

It is vital that the labour movement stake out a clear and principled position here — and argue for it forcefully not only in parliament and through the media, but in honest, direct dialogue with the Muslim communities in Britain.

We have to stand up against both racism and censorship, in whatever guises they appear.

Mike Marqusee

"Friends of Salman Rushdie"

"We the undersigned deplore the call to ban Salman Rushdie's novel, *The Satanic Verses*.

We are opposed to the blasphemy laws, which have used in the past to censor views considered offensive to Christians. As a result, we are also opposed to the extension of blasphemy laws to cover other religions, including Islam.

We deplore the recent statement by the Ayatollah Khomeini. We urge the widest possible condemnation of the threat to Rushdie's life. We believe that the energy deployed in organising against Rushdie would be better used to fight racism.

We believe that people should be free to practise the religion of their choice and equally that there should be complete freedom to discuss and criticise all religions and cultures.

***The Satanic Verses* should not be banned."**

Individuals and/or organisations wishing to sponsor the above statement, which will be printed in the national and Asian press, should send their name, address, and organisation (if applicable) to BM Box 1568, London WC1N 3XX. Please enclose a donation: cheques payable to Friends of Salman Rushdie. Suggested donations: £10 (organisations); £5 individuals.

(This initiative is supported by Salman Rushdie.)

For a Convention for Democratic Rights

Dora stays: the rest fight on

Dora Oppong is a Ghanaian women who came to Britain in 1973, returned to Ghana in 1983, and came back to Britain in 1984.

On both her previous and her present stays in this country she remained here without Home Office permission.

But during her 15 year residence in Britain she has made her home here, given birth to three children (all British citizens), has employment here, and owns her own house.



PHOTO: Finn Jensen

On vigil for Viraj: his deportation saddened all campaigners.

By LENNIE GLISK

The Home Office said she should be deported. She appealed, but lost. (The adjudicator said there were no compassionate circumstances and that there would be no hardship for her children in going to Ghana to continue their education.)

Dora's solicitor, realising that she could not win in the Courts, felt that her only chance was a public campaign.

Fortunately, Dora lived in Newham, and her solicitor was able to obtain the help of the Newham Monitoring Project, a Council-funded group set up to assist local residents threatened with racism, harrassment, police abuses, etc.

They were able to start a broad-based campaign, enlisting active support from local people, politicians, the church, teachers, etc.

A grass-roots campaign took shape with regular mailings, leafleting, petitioning, public meetings, and press releases. Newham Council passed motions of support and wrote to the Minister, as did various MPs.

It was because of this campaign that, while a further appeal was still waiting to be heard, the Minister of State, Timothy Renton, wrote on Feb 16th to MPs who had made representations and to Newham Council, assuring them that Dora was going to be allowed to remain in Britain.

Dora's predicament was by no means unique. Every week hundreds of people learn that they will not be allowed to stay here. Some receive notice in writing; some are arrested.

To most it is a great shock, and a severe wrench, to have to leave the country in which they have made their home.

Most have no effective legal rights to pursue (not least because the Tories have significantly reduced "right of appeal"). They are forced to leave the country quietly and with very few people knowing of their plight.

Dora's victory is a signal to all these people: a sign that they are not alone, and that where there is a political will, there is hope.

The circumstances of many of those threatened with deportation would make people in the street acutely embarrassed if they knew what the government was doing in their name.

But they don't know, and that's why the government continues to get away with it. And that's where the Socialist Conference's Call to Action comes in.

There are very few organisations like the Newham Monitoring Project.

There are very few people, among those directly threatened, their friends, fellow workers, or legal advisers, who have any idea how to start a campaign, obtain resources, gather support, etc.

If the Socialist Conference, through the Convention for Democratic Rights, can bring people together and help them organise local campaigning groups like the Newham Monitoring Project, it will have achieved a major step forward.

This would not just apply to immigration issues. Every day MPs are approached with cases of abuses of democratic rights which demand broad-based campaigning.

This type of activity will put democratic rights back on the national agenda, will help win back those rights in specific cases, and will help expose the government for what it is.

1989 may be a turning point. Viraj Mendis's campaign, although it did not succeed in keeping Viraj here, showed what could be done on a national scale.

Dora Oppong's campaign, although not as big as Viraj's, showed us that campaigns can win.

Let's make sure enough people take up the Call to Action and come to the organising meeting for the National Convention on 13th May.

For details of the National Convention for Democratic Rights, contact Democratic Rights, c/o Reading Matters, Box 35, High Road, London N22.

Socialist Conference

Benefit Cabaret:
Cabaret La Rouge
Sunday March 12th
The Red Rose Club
127 Seven Sisters Road, London N7
8pm-midnight
Artists: Guy Jackson; Albany Brothers; Bob Boyton; Scarlet Red; Eric & Derek
Compere: Ivor Dembino
£2.50 (£1 concessions)

Socialist Conference

RRegional Activities

Local Conferences on Socialist Alternatives to Labour's Policy Review

Bristol: Friday April 14th, 7.30pm, Shepherd's Hall, Old Market.
Glasgow: Saturday May 20th, 11am, City Hall.
Manchester: Friday March 31st, 7.30pm.
Newcastle: Saturday April 1st, 1pm, Civic Centre.
Preston: Saturday April 1st, 10.30am.
Sheffield: Saturday March 4th, 2pm, Library Theatre.
Gorbachev Conference: rescheduled to June 3rd/4th, Oxford University Conference Centre.

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.

Francis Okaniami (*LB* 77). Manchester NALGO member; Defence Campaign supported by them. Appeal on April 20th: watch out for details of accompanying support action. Contact Manchester NALGO (address below).

Labour Movement Conference on Immigration and Nationality: called by Manchester NALGO and Francis and Moji Defence Campaign. April 15th. 10am in Manchester Town Hall; continuing from 1.30pm in Mechanics Institute.£10 delegates; £2 individuals (£1 unwaged). Varied workshops and speakers on labour movement involvement.

Contact NALGO Manchester Branch Office, First Floor, Elliot House, Jacksons Row, Manchester, tel. 061-234 3226 for details and supplies of leaflets.

Saturday March 18th
Broadwater Farm Defence Campaign
Second anniversary of the Tottenham Three Convictions
Assemble 12 noon, Tottenham Green, Tottenham Town Hall (Seven Sisters tube).
March to rally with Irish in Britain Representation Group, 3pm, Duckett's Common (Turnpike Lane tube).
Speakers include: Bernie Grant, Unmesh Desai, relatives of the framed prisoners.
Quash the convictions!
March for Justice!

Campaign for Non-Alignment

Major anti-NATO conference in London



PHOTO: Martine Stead

Tony Benn

April 4th 1989 marks the 40th anniversary of the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty, through which NATO was formed.

The Campaign for Non-Alignment is marking the anniversary with a major international conference in London (March 31st-April 1st).

A young organisation, the CNA was formed in the aftermath of the US bombing of Libya by British-based F-16 bombers.

A host of international peace and development organisations are expected to attend the conference, which will be the main anti-birthday event in Western Europe.

Tony Benn will address the conference's opening rally on Friday, March 31, alongside CND Vice-Chair Marjorie Thompson and a number of European speakers.

Saturday April 1st will see a range of experts and campaigns revealing the truth behind the official NATO propaganda. There will be plenary sessions and workshops.

The Conference is at Hammersmith Town Hall, King Street, London W6.

The conference is open to all. Further details can be obtained from the Campaign for Non-Alignment, The Red Rose Centre, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QS. Telephone: 01 263 9450

Labour CND Day Conference

Unilateral Nuclear Disarmament: A Policy for the 1990s

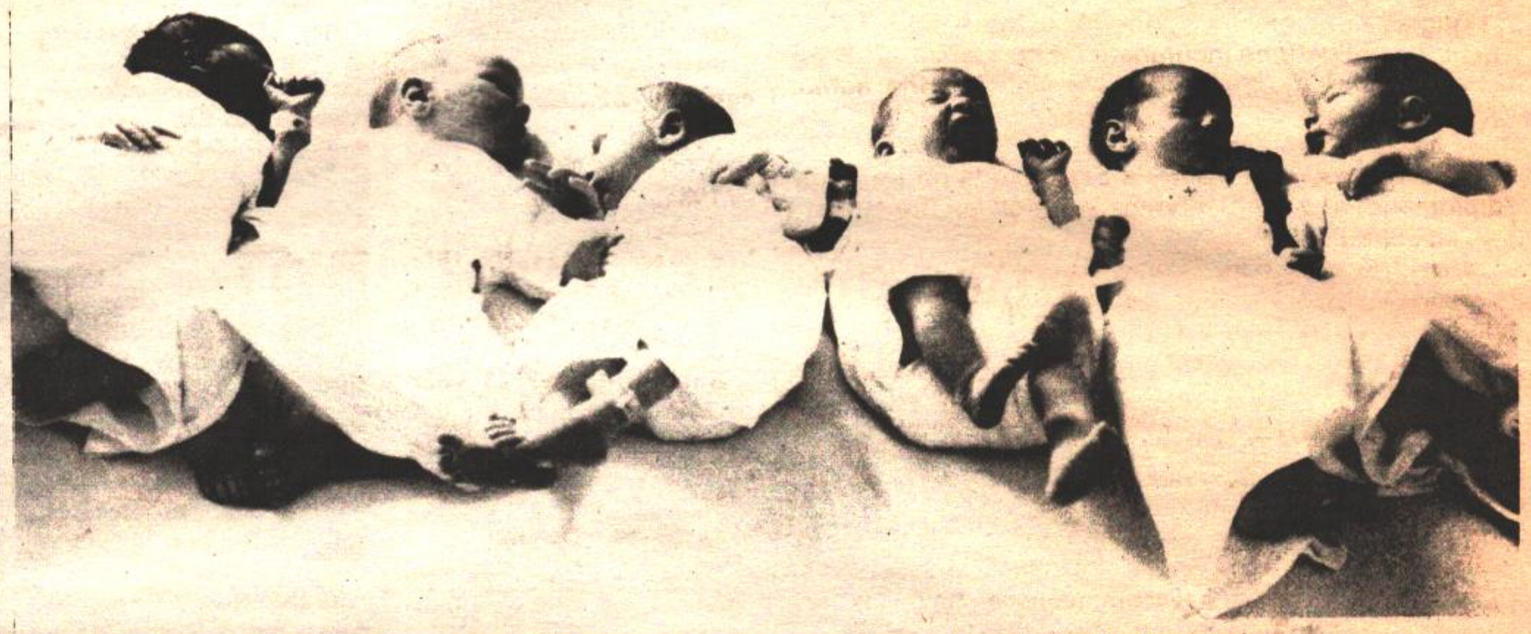
Saturday March 11th
Manchester Town Hall
Creche; disabled access; accommodation if required
Registration £3/£1

10.30-11.00: Registration
11.00-12.30: Defending Unilateralism
Morning Plenary with Bernadette Hillen, Ken Livingstone, Alan Quinn
12.30-1.00: Lunch
1.30-3.00: Workshops
Europe after the INF: with Jeremy Corbyn
Working in the Trade Unions: with John Gellet
The role of the Peace Movement: with CND speaker
3.00-3.30: Tea Break
3.00-5.00: Labour's Policy Review
Afternoon Plenary with Stuart Holland, Phil Kelly, Alice Mahon
5.00: Conference closes

Labour CND Day Conference, c/o 3 Birch Polygon, Rusholme, Manchester M14

Listeria hysteria?

Watch out, bacteria about!



Babies are among those especially at risk as scientists spend more time refining and complicating food processing.

Every year the British press rediscovers microbiology and a new scare story is trotted out.

One government minister has dismissed the latest outbreak as "Listeria Hysteria".

By Peter Chowney
Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP

But is it hysteria? Or is it a cover up for a much more worrying lapse in public health standards?

Bacteria and viruses inhabit every space and surface on this planet except the internal tissues of healthy animals and the mouths of active volcanoes.

The moment a vegetable or a piece of meat is cut open, it becomes infected. And the more it's processed, prepared, or handled, the greater the level of infection.

Right up to a century ago in Britain, the food people ate or the water they drank was the commonest cause of their deaths. In many parts of the world, this still holds true.

But here, we have come to expect that food and water are free from danger. Thus we entrust our lives, quite literally, to the food manufacturers and their watchdogs.

If you always buy fresh ingredients, cook them thoroughly, and eat them while still hot, the risks are small. But nowadays few people live that way. Many of us regularly eat canned foods, frozen foods, or, increasingly, cook chill foods.

But how many of us realise that canned foods are *not* guaranteed sterile and free from harmful bacteria?

Or that freezing food does *not* kill the micro-organisms it may contain?

Or that refrigeration does *not* prevent the growth of bacteria?

Or that the "sell by" date on cook chill foods only applies to food stored continuously at precisely the correct temperature (which it very rarely is) either in the supermarket or in domestic refrigerators?

The media is quick to latch onto "exotic" bacteria like salmonella enteritides or listeria, but it avoids more fundamental issues of food quality and spoilage.

The "salmonella in chickens" story recurs about once every fifteen years. Yes, one in three chicken is infected with salmonella. They always have been.

Anyone who studies the invitingly-named journal of the Public Health Laboratory Service, *Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report*, will discover that minor outbreaks of salmonellosis are common, and deaths not infrequent.

Unfortunately, the press's habit of picking up on the story in an irresponsible and eclectic way has done nothing to change this.

Bacteria like staphylococcus cause low-level food poisoning in all of us from time to time, but mild tummy upsets don't make the headlines, even if thousands of people suffer unnecessarily from them every week.

In truth, the food industry has a lot to answer for. Most food poisoning arising from convenience food could be avoided and standards could be much higher. But their watchdogs have few teeth.

The PHLS is underfunded, local Environmental Health Officers have been cut, and the handful of "independent" food research and monitoring establishments are largely funded by the food manufacturers themselves.

With the increasing use of convenience foods, especially cook-chill meals in schools, and on-going privatisation, the problems can only get worse.

Properly funded methods of enforcement and new standards for both food and domestic and commercial storage equipment are needed. If not, we can expect a gradual deterioration in our health.

Pathogenic and toxigenic bacteria have devoted the last thousand million years of evolutionary development to infecting and killing higher animals.

They'll ruthlessly exploit any chance we give them. And they're not about to give up to avoid embarrasing government ministers.

LCI AGM

Sowing the seeds for a mass movement for withdrawal

This year's LCI AGM, held in Birmingham on February 25/6th, attracted over 100 people, a slight increase on last year.

The key debate was on the Time To Go initiative.

By Bill Hamilton
Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP

After a long discussion a motion was agreed which accepted that Time To Go is "a qualitative broadening of the movement for British withdrawal and that winning support for the Charter will be at the centre of LCI activity."

Yet is was also agreed overwhelmingly that the success of Time To Go and the Charter was "in attempting to create an alliance."

With the conclusion of the Year of Action and Time To Go initiative, the LCI will help sow the seeds for a mass movement for withdrawal that can put genuine pressure on the British state to get out of Ireland and leave the Irish people free to run their own affairs.

The AGM agreed that this process will be started by "an approach to TOM, IBRG, Year of Action Committees, Time To Go, and other Irish, women's, youth, black, labour movement, political, and solidarity groups.

"This will be with a view to developing structures and initiatives that will unify all those forces around the basic demand for British withdrawal."

This theme was echoed by Sinn Fein Councillor Frantie Molloi who, in his address to the AGM, said that "Such a movement should unite the activists for withdrawal and broaden that base."

Alliance

The clearest expression of how such an alliance can mobilise large numbers will be the demonstration on August 19th marking the 20th anniversary of the introduction of British troops.

The LCI's priority as agreed at the AGM is "to build the largest possible anti-imperialist contingent on the basis of Troops Out Now, Britain out of Ireland, and Self-determination for the Irish People."

Regardless of bureaucratic manoeuvres by sections of the LCI leadership, the AGM had agreed a positive programme of activity capable of "sowing the seeds of a mass movement for withdrawal."

A brief summary of the AGM could describe the LCI as facing two ways at the same time. The next 12 months will certainly resolve that one way or another.

A modern history of the Labour Party

The heyday of Bennism

The three years between Callaghan's 1979 General Election defeat and the 1982 Bishop Stortford declaration marked a high point in left influence in the Labour Party.

The fury at Callaghan's 5% wage limit had strengthened the left. In 1980, the Rank and File Mobilising Committee (RFMC) declared:

By Bryn Griffiths
Tottenham CLP

"The last Labour government defied the labour movement and made huge cuts... let capitalist chaos take its toll and unemployment rise to over a million...

"tried to impose a 5% pay rise on the trade unions and cut living standards... secretly spent £1,000 million on an updated version of Polaris... Never Again!"

Reform

The RFMC was a united front of left organisations that campaigned for the constitutional reform of the Labour Party.

Its support ranged from *Militant* and the LPYS to Clause IV and the LCC. By June 1981, it had even persuaded NUPE to sponsor its journal.

The RFMC's campaign for reform was based largely on model resolutions from the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy (CLPD). Its demand that a Labour government should carry out the policies of the labour movement struck at the heart of labourism.

The RFMC did this by fighting the economistic division of the movement between political (parliamentary) and industrial (trade union).

Enemies

Our enemies clearly understood the importance of those developments. In the *Times*, Peregrine Worsthorne attacked the reforms, claiming that they were not just an internal Party affair, but a matter of importance to the state.

For Worsthorne, the possibility that trade unions could choose a future Prime Minister through the block vote at Labour Conference was a challenge to the Constitution itself.

During 1981, it looked like Worsthorne's fears might actually be confirmed. A special conference at Wembley in January created an electoral college of Constituency Labour Parties, trade unions, and Labour MPs to elect future leaders.

That summer, Livingstone siezed control of the GLC, Benn waged his Deputy Leadership Campaign, and towards Christmas Scargill was elected NUM President.

My favourite memory of the period was an incident at the demonstration against unemployment (organised by the Labour Party). Both Benn and the despicable Denis Healey were due to speak: unfortunately, Benn could not attend due to illness.

When the Chair read out a message of support from Benn, the crowd rose to its feet for a five minute ovation. An outraged Healey later accused Jon Lansman of somehow organising the entire demonstration to barrack him!

Benn lost his campaign for Deputy by a margin of 0.8%. This marginal defeat turned out to be a watershed.

In January 1982, Trades Unions for a Labour Victory (TULV) held a special conference in Bishop Stortford. The conference had no constitutional status but at its end, it was announced that peace and unity had broken out in the Labour Party.

Under pressure from the trade union leaders, Benn agreed to a formula of "unity around existing policies, membership, and leaders." From then on, Benn was hamstrung — but the old Tribunites and right wingers were not.

Shortly after Bishops Stortford, the witch-hunt commenced.

Party Leader Michael Foot opposed Peter Tatchell's endorsement as the Bermondsey by-election candidate.

By the time Tatchell (whose crime was calling for extra-parliamentary action in the pages of *Labour Briefing*) was endorsed, the damage was done. Labour was heavily defeated in the February 1983 by-election.

An official register of acceptable groups was agreed at the 1982 Conference. The expulsion of the *Militant* Editorial Board followed in 1983.

When the trade union leaders who had brought Benn within a whisker of victory withdrew their support, the movement around him began to fragment and collapse.

Limehouse

A key factor behind this withdrawal of trade union support was the 1981 "Limehouse Declaration" by the Gang of Four (Roy Jenkins, David Owen, Shirley Williams, Bill Rogers).

In March (following Labour's Wembley Conference) they formed the SDP. After the split, Labour's opinion poll rating fell from 47.5% (December, 1980) to a low of 23.5% (December 1981).

Leaders

It was against this threat of electoral disaster that the Bishop Stortford declaration was imposed on Tony Benn by the trade union leaders.

Benn's particular weakness was his failure to organise a rank and file base in the trade unions.

In December 1981 (not long before Bishop Stortford) a poll indicated that 40% of Labour voters in the trade unions wanted Benn to carry on his campaign.

Strikes

If these workers had been organised, the defeat of Bennism at Bishop Stortford could have been resisted. The major strikes in the steel industry in 1980 and the railways in 1982 should have been linked to the Bennite constitutional movement.

The lesson of the Bennite years is that we must entrench ourselves in the trade unions and the Labour Party so that we can take advantage of the upheavals that will undoubtedly occur in the future.

It is for these reasons that building *Briefing*, along with the broader forces in the Socialist Conference movement, is so important.

The Thatcher years seem endless. But we must keep the left intact and prepare for future opportunities.

To do otherwise would be to condemn the next wave of radicalisation to another ignominious defeat — and to forget the lessons of history.

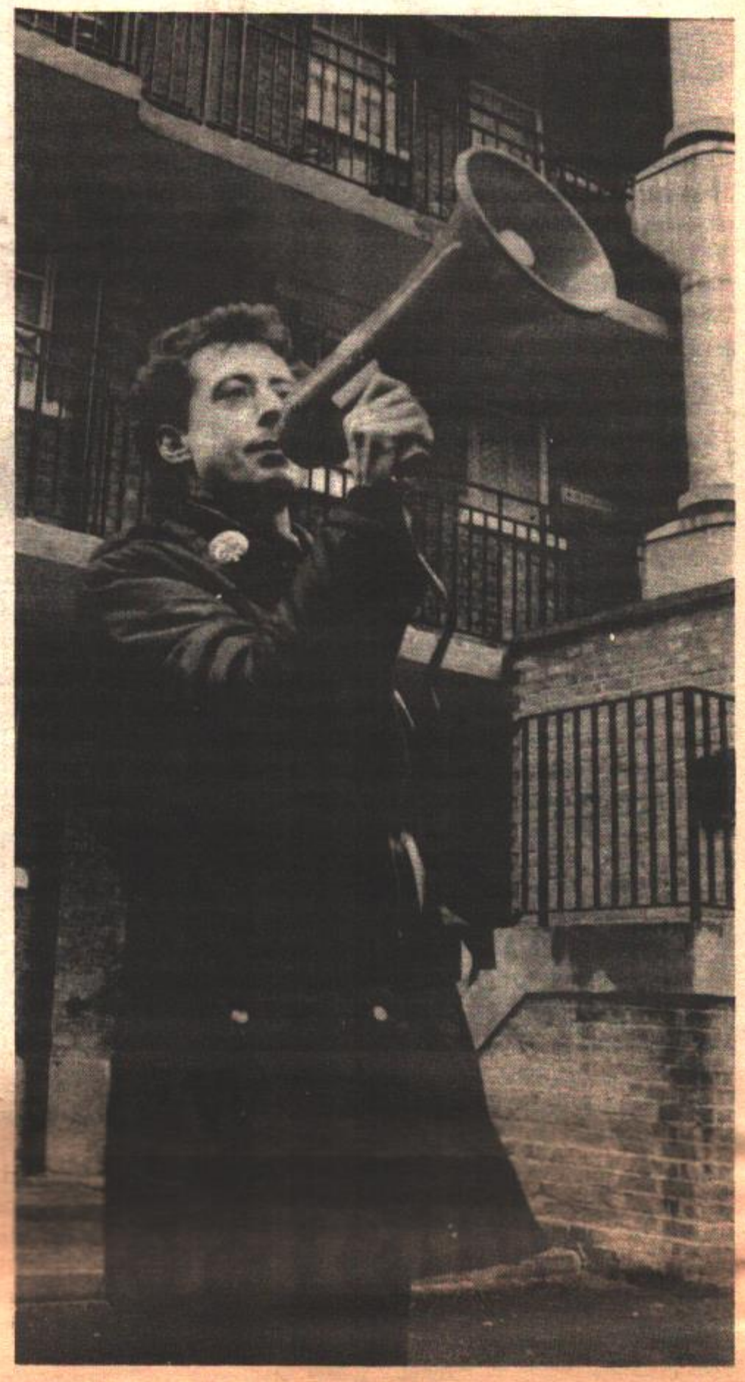


PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Peter Tatchell during the Bermondsey by-election, February 1983.

Parliamentary Selection and the left

Getting our act together

If the left is to make its influence felt in the new procedures, it must start now on some basic tasks.

First, it is vital to obtain good representation on the Constituency EC. Many of the new procedures are under the supervision of the EC rather than the GC, e.g.:

By REG RACE

•precise arrangements for distributing election addresses and their format;

•validating postal vote applications;

•precise arrangements for candidates' speeches and question sessions at branch meetings, etc.

In the absence of strong and fair guidance from the EC, either too much power will lie with the designated representative of the NEC or confusion will prevail.

Second, though there is nothing in the new rules to prevent Party branches from holding proper nomination meetings, many branches will be under pressure to cut down the number of meetings.

In the interests of democracy, the left should argue for:

•proper nomination meetings at which a range of candidates can be put through their paces;

•a variety of formats for nomination meetings, including panel discussions, which will expose many of the real strengths and weaknesses of individual candidates;

•commitments from all candidates on a range of issues of concern to local Party members.

Third, all Party members must receive information on how the new system works.

Left

Fourth, the left must ensure that the task of editing and producing the short-listed candidates' election addresses is in competent hands.

Fifth, the left in each CLP should delegate an individual to deal with the press. The right will certainly use the media and enterprising local journalists will try to find stories.

A policy of not speaking at all to the press will not work and will act against left candidates.

Sixth, basic information is needed:

•Copies of the full GC delegations, including their rights to vote. (NB: Under rule 7.4 a full list of accredited delegates and their addresses must be read out "at the commencement of the General Committee convened to consider the shortlist.")

Challenges can be made to the eligibility of delegates. For example, it might be known that an individual does not live in the constituency; or that s/he has not attended a GC meeting in the relevant 12 months, etc.

It is best to try and obtain this list *in writing, in advance.*

Seventh, collect branch membership lists. A direct approach can then be made to individuals.

Eighth, it is vital that in each constituency an organisation is developed to mobilise the vote at member level, and to watch and control the bureaucratic selection process.

Ninth, the left needs to argue for arrangements whereby candidates are given, say, 20 minutes to speak, with 20 minutes questions at branch balloting meetings.

A shorter time is inadequate and enables candidates who can't string an argument together to conceal their inadequacies.

Tenth, pressure should be placed on local affiliated organisations to hold proper ballots and not leave decisions to local officials. Each union needs to be handled in the light of the union's rule book and local traditions.

Eleventh, the left needs to ensure that it has a competent presence amongst the tellers elected by the Party branches and affiliated organisations.

Since the branch ballots will be conducted on the basis of Single Transferable Vote, the left in each CLP will have to make a tactical decision on whether or not to "plump" for the left candidates, and *not* spread their second, third, fourth place preference votes to centre and right candidates.

Unless this is done, centre candidates may be able to pick up second and third preference votes from both left and right and win "coming through the middle".

Before the freeze date, left trade union delegates must be encouraged to attend the GC. If they do not clock up at least one "appearance", they will disenfranchise their organisations from the electoral college.

These organisational suggestions will be no substitute for a political campaign amongst the members for the selection of a left candidate who will be prepared to change the character and role of the PLP.

There is now a very definite premium on establishing left unity around a single candidate as early as possible. This means, in the first place, that the left must be clear about the qualities it expects from a candidate.

A great deal of attention has rightly been paid to the need to increase the representation in Parliament of women and black people; but other factors also need to be considered.

Candidates need to be committed to local action and representation, e.g. by running effective local advice bureaux and by linking Parliamentary action with campaigns in the constituency.

They should also be clearly committed to strengthening the Campaign Group and to the development of an alternative set of socialist policies.

They should have a track record of practical solidarity with people in struggle and a willingness to build the left at all levels.

Many more qualifications could be added — but the key task now is to *start organising.*

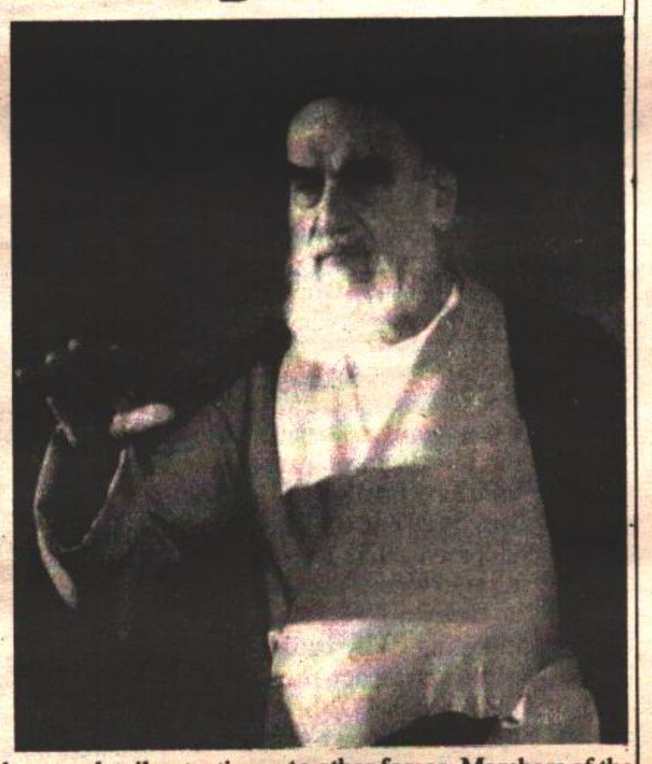
Satanic Verses in Bradford

Leaving the field to the Monday Club

Two images sum up the international campaign against Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*.

One is of Khomeini pronouncing the sentence of death. The other is of Muslim leaders burning the book outside Bradford City Hall.

By Paul Hubert
Shipley CLP



Khomeini's threat puts the labour movement on the line: will it stick to an anti-racist response?

Media coverage of the controversy has brought Muslims in Bradford to prominence. In the local press this story has constantly occupied the front page, selling papers almost as effectively as the Council cuts.

Two leaders of the Bradford Council of Mosques apparently supported the call for Rushdie's death. Subsequently they claimed to have been misquoted.

The Council of Mosques excused itself, saying "We are not politicians." The officials concerned were only speaking in religious terms, it appears. They say they only support legal, peaceful action.

Such confusion has been typical of the whole affair, not helped by a local newspaper which seems to have deliberately avoided clarifying the issues.

Its columnists' evening ramblings have provided the lengthiest public discussion and have, for example, sought to link the current conflict with the campaign against Ray Honeyford.

Some leading Labour Party figures have identified themselves with the Muslim campaign, if not with every detail or tactic.

The local MEP, Barry Seal, who is Leader of the Labour Group in Strasbourg, spoke at the rally where the book was burnt.

Max Madden MP signed a motion in parliament supporting the extension of the blasphemy laws and, more recently, has called for a Muslim "right of reply" to be inserted in the book.

Madden claims he has been misrepresented in the media, and both he and Seal have told me that they oppose the banning of the book. However, they have failed to make clear public statements of this principled position, presumably on the basis of electoral calculation.

The Council Labour Group, some of whose Asian members have called for the book to be banned, has decided not to take *any* position.

Such caution has left the field to other forces. Members of the Monday Club have been running around posing as defenders of "free speech".

Needless to say, this is not because they support the vigorous anti-racism which runs through Rushdie's book.

Their claim that they are trying to "relax racial tensions" is belied by their leaflets and letters to the press.

These include such traditional ingredients as an end to immigration from "the hinterland of the Indian sub-continent" and a claim that those who have capitulated to the censors are guilty of "sapping the roots of national morale."

Tory Council Leader Eric Pickles has donned the mantle of literary critic to say that "nobody deserves to die for writing bad fiction."

Despite his protestations of support for freedom of expression, the Council has decided that a warning statement will be inserted into copies of the book stocked in public libraries.

It will also no longer be displayed on the public shelves, a concession which costs nothing — since copies are in such demand that they have only been available through advance reservation anyway.

What is needed in Bradford is a labour movement response to the crisis which concedes nothing to clerical reaction and censorship, but which also deals with the Muslim campaign in the wider context of a racist society and of traditional Labour Party attitudes towards black people.

The element of patronage in Labour practice has meant that the Council of Mosques has been treated as *the* representative of a body of people who are not, in fact, exclusively Muslim.

It appears that the District Labour Party wants to avoid the risks associated with taking a clear stand and with honest public discussion.

Party members on the left, particularly in the Campaign Group, will be fighting to change this attitude.

Witch-hunt

Coalition in Reading?

By a Reading *Labour Briefing* supporter

As the Labour left increases its profile, most recently with the launch of a Campaign Group and a successful Socialist Conference, the right wing Council leadership are getting increasingly rattled.

After arguments between Councillors and *Militant* sellers at the Party tightly controlled Housing Bill meetings, the GC put an outright ban on the sales of the *Militant* paper.

The male Chair of the Party then took over the Chair of a Women's Section meeting on the Housing Bill!

Militant was sold at the end of the meeting by a comrade who has now been charged with a "sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the Party". (It wasn't *that long* a paper sale!)

The charge will be heard by a special investigating committee.

The witch-hunt in Reading follows that in Bracknell where five people face expulsion (including two who are not even Party members).

The Party Agent and others have talked about winning seats in Bracknell and getting a "progressive" County Council after the May elections.

If pacts with the Democrats are to be negotiated, the Labour right will need to get the left well out of the way.

Black Sections

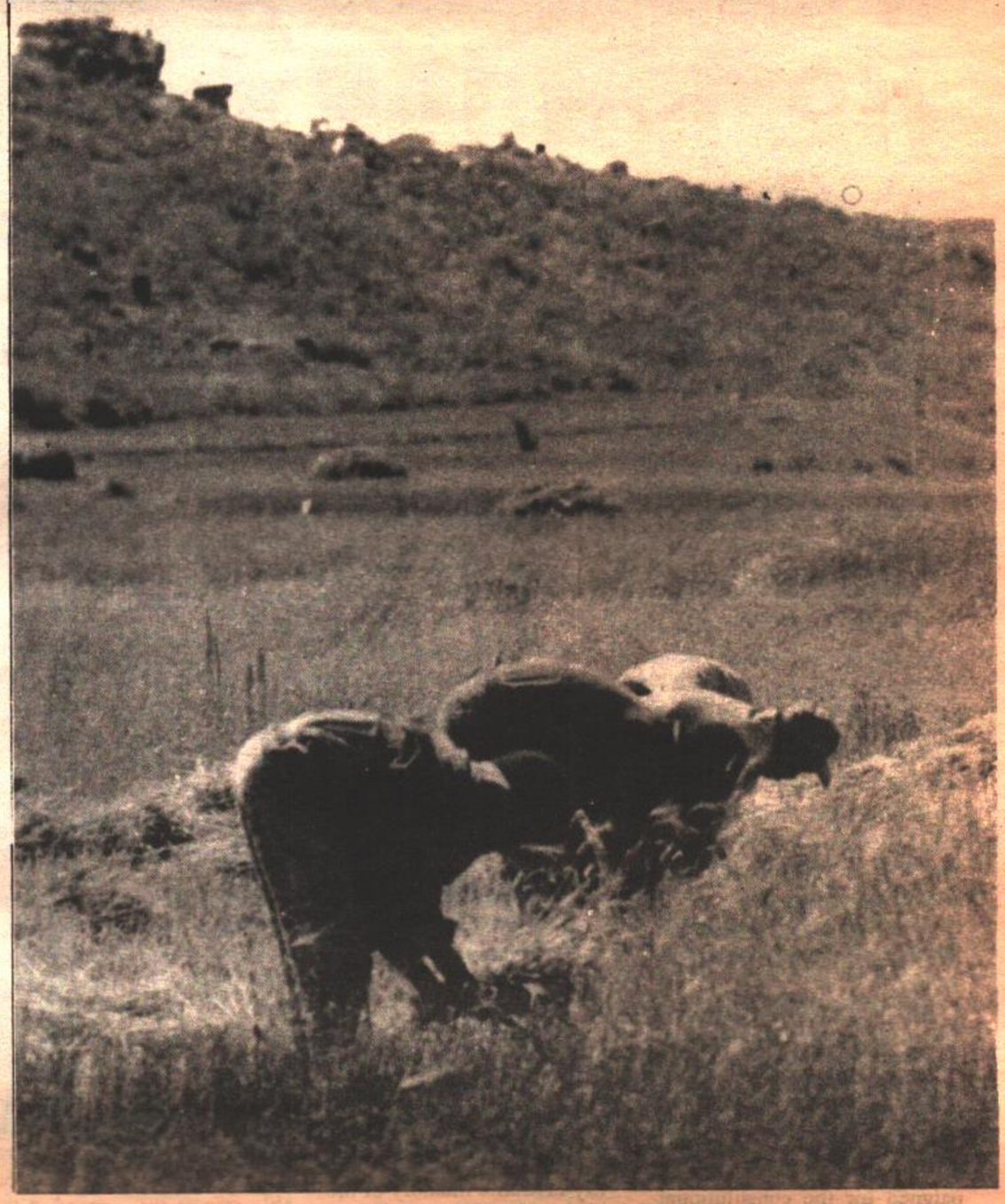


PHOTO courtesy Third World First.

Black countries fight to keep their environment free from imperialist domination, and under their own control, to avoid harmful exploitation by multinational companies.

Still black; still red; going green!

Black Sections won a great victory at the Greater London Labour Party AGM.

This has given a tremendous boost to our campaign, coming just a week before our own National Conference in Leicester on March 18-9th.

By JULIAN LEWIS

The GLLP passed Composite Four, calling for Black Sections to be formally represented at the Annual Meeting with representation on the Executive.

This is a major success for Black Section activists and our supporters on the left in constituencies like Vauxhall and Haringey.

The campaign for a self-organised voice for black people in the Party must be stepped up and efforts redoubled nationally to ensure the London victory is carried forward to the Annual Conference this autumn.

Following the publication of the *Black Agenda* last year, the Black Section Conference will be considering two further position papers on the media and on the environment, to incorporate into an updated edition of the *Agenda*.

The draft environment paper — *Red, Green and Black* — looks at an area of increasing importance that stretches far beyond single issues of polluted rivers or a dissipating ozone layer.

Green politics represents a social concern of black people totally opposed to the destructive politics of the developed world with its emphasis on imperialism, exploitation and domination.

Bhopal was a prime example of how western business interests maximise profits by cuts in safety standards, low pay, and poor controls in black countries; and run huge risks which would never be tolerated in Europe or the US.

Toxic

African countries are also used as dumping grounds for toxic waste which blights vast areas of land, yet illicits little outcry from liberal sections of the green movement more concerned with fields in their own back yards threatened by developers.

The Black Section conference will be considering a Media Paper which will put us alongside others in the front line fighting for essential reforms in press and broadcasting. Among its wide-ranging recommendations are calls for:

- a Freedom of Information Bill;
- a Right of Reply Bill;
- more black community publications and greater input into radio and TV;
- greater representation for black people at all levels of media companies, trade unions and regulatory bodies;
- the break-up of newspaper and broadcasting monopolies.

Reforms

These and other reforms are a pre-requisite to exposing the racism and oppression meted out to the black community on a daily basis by poisonous press conglomerates which stereotype black people and perpetrate racist ideas with impunity.

In addition to these papers the Black Section Conference will discuss resolutions from Black Sections across the country from Bristol to Birmingham, London to Leicester, ranging from education to Azania, Poll Tax to legal aid, housing to Sri Lanka.

Labour and Scotland

Defend Unilateralism!

Review the presentation not the policy!

By Tony Southall
Glasgow Pollock CLP
Secretary, Scottish Labour CND

Disarmament is joint equal with the Scottish Assembly for top place in the league table of numbers of resolutions (17) submitted to this year's Scottish Labour Party Conference.

All 17 support a policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament.

Many are clearly based on our model resolution which called for the re-affirmation of Labour's non-nuclear defence commitment and for the forthcoming Defence Policy Review to be centrally concerned with how to campaign effectively for unilateralism in the run up to the next General Election.

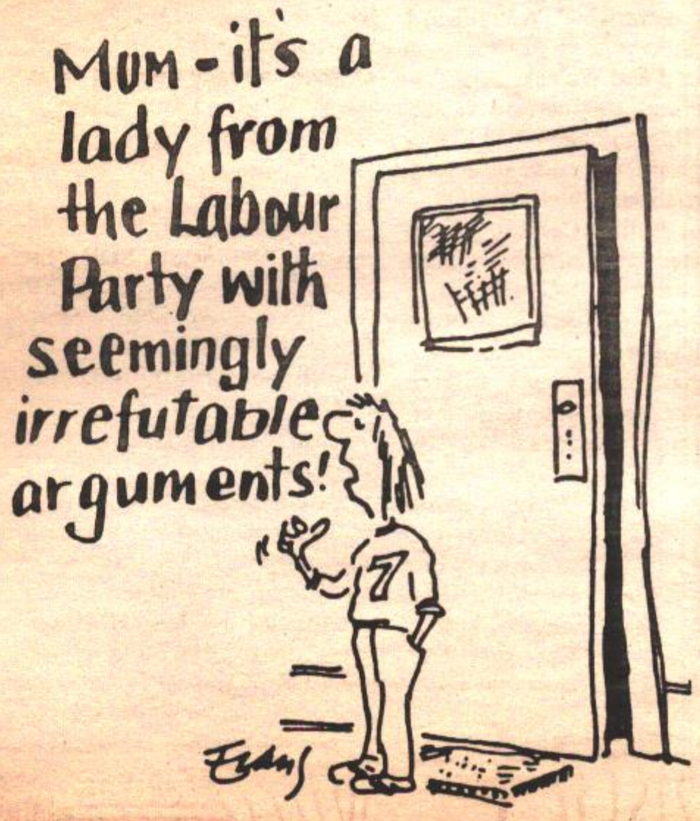
Motions

Two other key elements, which we also stressed, are repeated in many of the motions:

•The need to start to work *now* on real plans for alternative employment of the resources and labour force currently committed to the nuclear programme.

Such work is particular important for the Party in Scotland where places like Rosyth, Dunoon, and the Conport/Faslane area are economically enmeshed in defence spending.

•The need for the Scottish Party to take the lead in this campaign because we are the area in Europe most heavily involved in the nuclear arms race and because all opinion polls indicate that an end to nuclear weapons is more popular here than in any other part of Britain.



Clearly, some positive conclusions have been drawn from the fact the Jim Sillars won Govan while making it clear that an independent Scotland would not only be non-nuclear but outside NATO!

Just one out of the 17 resolutions (from Clydebank and Milgavrie CLP) revives the spectre of the 1987 election tragedy by insisting that strong conventional defence is essential to "convince the electorate of the viability of a non-nuclear defence policy..."

Hopefully this nonsense will not feature in the final composite that will surely be passed overwhelmingly.

Determination

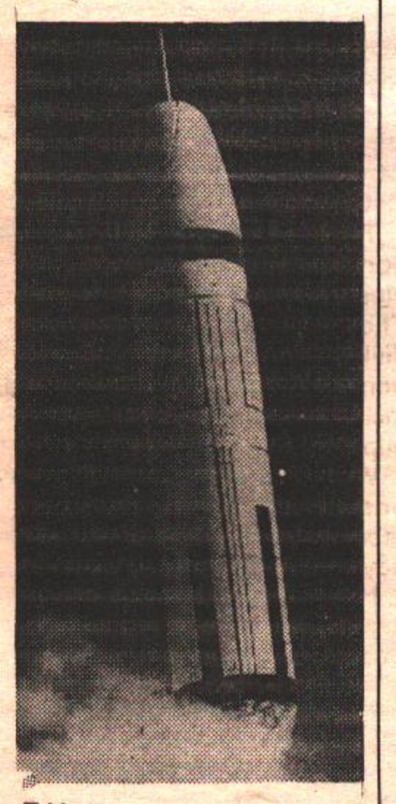
In making clear our determination to defend Labour's unilateralist policy, the Scottish Party can give an important pointer to the whole movement and encourage a similar groundswell in the lead-up to the October Conference.

Such Kinnock-supporters as Norman Buchan or Joan Ruddock have spoken out for unilateralism in *Tribune*. In contrast, the two-faced contribution of Brian Wilson to this paper is contemptible.

Campaign

Wilson implies that the Deputy Leadership challenge "distraction" was all that prevented us from mounting a successful unilateralist campaign in 1983. For him, unilateralism has now been rendered irrelevant by Gorbachev's moves.

On the contrary, as Joan Ruddock insists, these moves have opened the way to demolish the myth of the Russian threat and to make unilateralism an election winner and a major stage towards global disarmament.



Trident: soaring on its way to bring in all those Labour votes from the "middle ground".

Review the Presentation, not the Policy!

Friday March 10th, 7.30pm
Rose Street Hall, Inverness

Speakers:
Bruce Kent
Norman Buchan MP
Louise Robertson, Dumbarton CLP
Graham Buchanan, NUR

Come and discuss how we defend unilateralism in the Party and campaign for it outside.

Organised by Scottish Labour CND

The constitut convention a the challeng facing Labou

Long before last November's Govan by-election, the Campaign for a Scottish Assembly (a cross-party pressure group) had been pressing political parties, the STUC, church leaders, etc., to set up a Constitutional Convention for Scotland.

The function of the Convention would be to bring together the parties that favoured some degree of Home Rule to discuss how to achieve a Scottish Assembly or Parliament.



"Watering down the policies", ph available from PO Box 647, Lon

By JIM NIBLOCK and ALLAN GREEN

The Scottish National Party gave a positive commitment to the CSA initiative. Labour's Donald Dewar, on the other hand, threw a spanner in the works by responding in an aloof and equivocal manner.

After Govan, the Labour leadership in Scotland changed tack. Dewar agreed to participate in the Constitutional Convention.

But at the first meeting to set up the Convention (held in January), it became clear that the SNP's position had also changed dramatically. It was now their turn to adopt a negative stance.

The SNP representatives walked out, complaining that the forum lacked democratic legitimacy and was stacked in Labour's favour.

What is this game of musical chairs all about?

Party of the answer is that the Govan by-election radically altered the political balance of the SNP. Since the 1987 General Election, support for the SNP has doubled.

They therefore have a legitimate complaint about their representation at the Convention being linked to the 1987 result. However, this is mainly for public consumption.

Privately, they view Dewar's support for the Convention as little more than a time-buying exercise, designed to check the SNP's revival.

The Strategy of the SNP

The SNP got their fingers burned over Devolution in the 1970s. When they walked out of the Convention, this was obviously still on their minds.

Sillars pointed out, "The main problem was what would the Convention do when Thatcher said 'no'? Or, put another way, where does the Convention's sovereignty rest — with Westminster or the Scottish people?"

The SNP have, since their Conference last September, developed a new self-confidence, based on a coherent strategy for the period leading towards the next General Election.

This is based on the assumption that Kinnock has no chance of leading Labour to victory.

As the next election approaches, the SNP expects to polarise the debate on its own terms: Scotland once more governed from Westminster by a totally unrepresentative Tory administration versus Scottish independence within the European Community.

This strategy was largely theoretical before Govan. Now their bandwagon has begun to roll.

They have plenty of opportunities to build on their support: the Poll Tax (which begins to bite in Scotland from April), the Euro elections in June, and next year's regional elections.

When the SNP left the Convention, they were confident that Labour's prospects would continue to slump. It has to be said clearly that the SNP are wrong to engage in such opportunist manoeuvres in preference to a serious effort to make the Convention work.

But the Labour leadership's performance is encouraging the SNP. Kinnock's chameleon-like adaptation to Thatcherite policies is forcing Labour in England towards a rotten compromise with the centre parties.

This attempt to defeat the Tories through compromise and stealth keeps Thatcher dominant and demoralises Labour's base. In Scotland, the whole charade is seen as completely irrelevant to our needs.

Dewar now appears to be gambling that the SNP's decision to leave the Convention will backfire. But it would be a mistake for Labour to do nothing now. We should respond positively to the problems facing the Convention.

We should actively seek to prepare conditions which would make it impossible for the SNP to refuse to participate in the Convention.

The SNP should be offered more "top up" positions in the Convention. They have a real case for more than 8% of the places.

Direct Elections and PR

Devolution, without a complete break from the rest of Britain, is the preferred option of the vast majority in Scotland.

Yet there is now a real prospect that Devolution (or any form of Scottish Parliament within Britain) will be removed from the political agenda by the actions of the Tories and the SNP.

If this dynamic were to continue, it could spell disaster for the Labour Party in Scotland.

Labour should take up the SNP challenge over Direct Elections. In addition to immediately offering the SNP more places, we should make it clear that we want the Convention to prepare for direct elections to an Assembly as soon as possible.

Either the political pressure of the initiative would force the Tory government to hold such elections or they could be organised from Scotland "unofficially", but with real democratic credibility.

Providing there was a political will, organising elections should not be a major stumbling block. Dennis Canavan has pointed out that the labour movement would be able to fund such elections if necessary.

Prominent Labour Councillors have suggested that the Labour-dominated COSLA could run them. There is no shortage of possibilities.

There is no good reason for Labour, or any other party, to insist on there being only one option to present to the people of Scotland.

We should agree to the SNP demand of presenting *a variety of options for Scottish Home Rule*, including independence

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tomontage by Cath Tate, on SW2 4JX.

vithin Europe.

Scotland has the right to na-ional self-determination — vhich it can exercise in opting or the *status quo*, or an As-embly, or independence.

We would, of course, cam-aign vigorously for an As-embly with full tax raising owers. It is very likely that our osition would win.

There is also a strong argu-ent for elections to an As-embly to be held on the basis f proportional representation. his would ensure that the arious parties are fairly repre-ented.

With Labour's current ominant position in Scottish olitics, we should not be afraid f PR. We certainly should not llow the question of PR to scut-le the Convention or any future ssembly.

A Strategy for Labour

Labour needs to adopt a oherent strategy to challenge he SNP's polarised scenario of hatcherism or independence.

We must remember that, longside the SNP, the Tories re also trying to squeeze abour, by presenting the op-ions as the unionist *status quo* r complete independence.

Over the past year, Scottish abour Action have put forward credible answer to the key uestion facing the party in cotland: how to meet the dual hallenge of the SNP and the ories?

The SLA have consistently pointed out that Labour must act on the mandate that the people of Scotland gave the Party at the last election.

Flowing from their recognition of Scotland's right to self-determination and from their call for an early establishment of an alternative democratic forum in Scotland, the SLA has presented a series of policies for Labour at an electoral and extra-parliamentary level.

This includes calls on Labour to:

- act to make the Constitutional Convention a success;
- seek a specifically Scottish mandate for the immediate establishment of an Assembly;
- support mass civil disobedience as a legitimate means of protest;
- and, crucially, campaign for obstruction of and civil disobedience to the implementation of the Poll Tax, leading to a mass campaign of non-payment.

The SLA also, correctly, demands internal Labour Party Home Rule — for Labour in Scotland to have control over its own affairs.

Many on the left will argue that there are important questions which the SLA have no position on. True.

But on the main issues facing the Labour Party in Scotland in the immediate future — the Poll Tax and Home Rule — as broad a unity as possible should be built around the basic positions of Scottish Labour Action.

Along with defence of unilateral nuclear disarmament, the Constitutional Convention and the Assembly have attracted most support in motions to the Scottish Labour Party Conference in Inverness.

Six of these 17 motions (from Paisley North, Maryhill, Monklands West, Linlithgow, Stirling, and North East Fife) specifically take up the SLA call for Labour to seek a "Dual Mandate" from the Scottish people.

This means that while campaigning *now* for a Scottish Assembly, we also seek a specific mandate at the next General Election to set up an Assembly in Scotland, no matter what the Westminster result.

It is important to work to commit the Party to these positions. The alternative is to allow Thatcher and the SNP to set the agenda, to risk further demoralisation at Labour's base, and to weaken Labour's position in Scotland and the rest of Britain.

By adopting the policies of the SLA, Labour could go onto the offensive for a Scottish Assembly. A genuine mass campaign along these lines would enable Labour to demonstrate that Thatcher can be beaten.

Poll Tax

Regional Councils take sides

This coming April will see Poll Tax bills dropping through letterboxes throughout Scotland.

A taste of what's to come was on view in Aberdeen on February 23rd.

By Graham Sullivan Aberdeen Against the Poll Tax

On that day Sherriff's Officers entered at least 40 houses in Aberdeen and started procedures to recoup the first £50 fines for non-registration.

Four hundred and eighty-nine people have now been fined in Grampian Region, some as much as £650.

Regional Councils, having agreed to collect the Poll Tax, are now trying to collect the fines. This can be done in three ways:

- arrestment of wages or benefit;
- arrestment of bank accounts;
- warrant sales (the sale of "non-essential" household goods, known as "distraint" in England and Wales).

Central Region and Grampian Region have taken a very aggressive stance against non-registration.

But unlike Central, whose first step has been to freeze bank accounts, Grampian's Sherriff's Officers have gone straight for warrant sales, entering people's homes without warning and "poinding" (earmarking goods for sale 14 days later).

What makes these poindings worse than usual is that they were carried out on the very same day as Grampian Regional Council was discussing motions on the banning of warrant sales. Only Labour and the SNP voted for these motions.

It was eventually decided that any possible warrant sale would first be referred to the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

What this will mean in terms of goods already poinded is, at the time of writing, unclear. What is clear is that any attempted warrant sale will be fiercely resisted.

The Council is run by a hotchpotch of Democrats, SDP, "Independents" and two expelled members of the SNP Group. These two remained in the administration when the rest of the SNP Group withdrew in January over the issue of warrant sales.

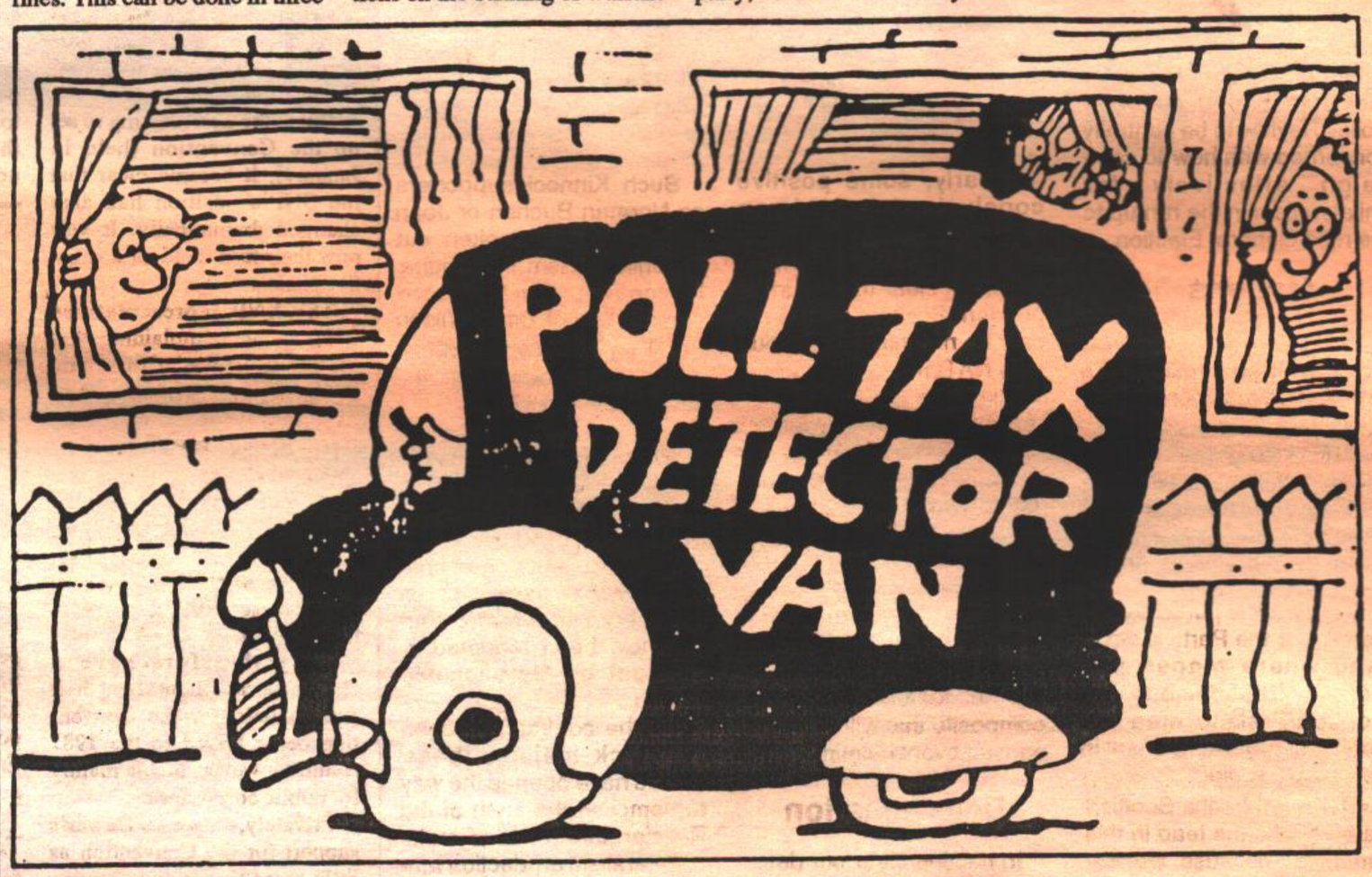
Following the SNP withdrawal, the Labour Group attempted to become involved in running the Council not by trying, as the largest single party, to form a minority administration, but by offering to do a deal with the Democrats.

The Democrats' major claim to fame is closing two schools in working class areas while sparing no expense on rebuilding the fire-damaged "prestige" Aberdeen Grammar School.

This unprincipled manoeuvre fell apart when the SNP split saved the existing administration; political suicide by the Labour Group was thus avoid by accident rather than design.

Meanwhile, the fight for a mass non-payment campaign continues.

Such a campaign will begin to raise again the question of whether Regional Councils are simply puppets of the Tory government, or whether they will make a real stand against the Poll Tax, which they denounce as evil, iniquitous, and so on — while doing their best to force the rest of us to pay it.



Don't Attack Non-Payers!

In October the Labour Party opposed non-payment... and promptly lost the Govan by-election.

Gordan Morgan Glasgow Central CLP

Since then, we have had the disgraceful spectacle of Central Region arresting child benefit for supposed non-registration.

If there is to be seizure of thousands of workers' wages and widespread warrant sales, Labour will come out of the next election with far fewer than 49 MPs.

For this reason the Scottish Labour Party Conference must affirm it will not use warrant sales against people who can't or won't pay the Poll Tax.

However, Conference must also recognise the harm it did by its actions in October.

The momentum of opposition to the Poll Tax was stopped dead in its tracks. The Party was shown as divided. Those supporting non-payment were vilified, including Committee of 100 supporters.

We must reaffirm our opposition to the Poll Tax, recognise that people *will* not pay and *can* not pay.

Non-payment is one tactic amongst many, but the time has come for Labour to embrace *all* tactics.

The non-payers deserve our support as one component of a legitimate campaign. The STUC demonstration on April 1st should also be supported, as should the demonstration for non-payment on 18th March.

In particular, the FBU resolution should be supported as it allows the decision of October to be reversed when a mass non-payment campaign emerges.

Aberdeen Against the Poll Tax

Demonstration

Assemble Saturday March 11th, 10.45am

Rubislaw Terrace Gardens
March to Rally at St. Katherine's

Main Speaker: Tony Benn

The Women's Page

Images of Women

Briefing Women want to be part of a process of developing socialist feminist analysis and activity on all aspects of our oppression as women.

Over the next couple of issues we will be looking at different aspects of "images of women" — pornography, representation and looks. In this issue, to coincide with the first national Fat Women's Conference, we are taking up the debate on fat oppression.

In the West, most women face a daily struggle around body size. The media is full of miracle diets and images of the size and look we should all strive for.

Being socialists and feminists doesn't make us immune from this "thin propaganda". It's the fashion and diet industries, not women, who benefit from this obsession with size.

But many on the left, men and women, don't see the issue of fat oppression as a legitimate issue for debate and action, dismissing it as a luxury, or simply a joke (echoes of old attitudes to lesbian and gay oppression).

In the articles below, individualistic and negative responses to fat oppression are challenged and a start is made in putting forward some concrete ideas for action.

Briefing Women welcome your ideas and articles, not just about size and looks, but also on pornography (a workshop on which attracted the largest participation at the Women for Socialism conference), advertising and other aspects of images of women.

Jane Connor

What is fat oppression?

On March 11th the first national Fat Women's Conference takes place in London.

It will provide a much needed opportunity for fat women to get together and share experiences. But it must also begin to develop a coherent theory of fat oppression and strategies to challenge it.

By Mandy Mudd

One of the first steps towards this is through fat women supporting each other and beginning to feel comfortable and proud of our body size.

But in order to make a longer term impact we need to go beyond individual solutions and use our collective strength to demand real changes.

Challenging fat oppression is about challenging the negative attitudes most people in the West have towards fat people and challenging a norm of body size and looks that is determined culturally and socially.

Individual challenges are both time-consuming and non-productive. We have to make structural changes and create a framework which makes it more difficult for people to hold negative attitudes.

First we must convince people, including socialists, that fat women are oppressed *as fat women.*

Control

"Common sense" arguments say that we have some control over our body size (i.e. you are fat because you eat too much), and therefore fat people are somehow to blame for their own plight.

It's our own fault so we should be prepared to suffer the consequences.

This view doesn't challenge where these "common sense" ideas, that fat is unhealthy and undesirable, come from and whose interests are served in maintaining this view.

Raising this debate and winning the argument is the first stage in putting fat oppression on the political agenda since it makes it everyone's concern not just a "fat people's problem".

Alongside the political debate must go concrete campaigning. Many fat people are turned down for jobs because they assumed to be unhealthy or even lazy, greedy and dishonest.

Many employers don't want their corporate image tarnished by employing fat people in visible positions (although for male company directors size may be seen as an indicator of success).

We could campaign around equal opportunities statements and argue for the inclusion of "regardless of weight and body size" into such statements.

Fat people could then directly challenge discrimination on the basis of their size, and interviewers would have to become aware of their own attitudes.

Lousy

Most fat people receive lousy health care. They are harassed to diet, denied necessary medical treatment because of "medical complications" and often don't seek treatment because of the pain and humiliation they are made to suffer.

If your are middle class, white, articulate you can probably find a sympathetic doctor or try and take on the NHS bureaucracy.

But most black and working class people get lousy health care generally, and on an individual basis don't have the time, energy or knowledge to get better treatment.

A collective response would be to link up with existing health campaigns and Community Health Councils to work for a patients' charter that includes the needs of fat people.

We could also campaign about the size and comfort of seats and other facilities in public places and on public transport, joining with disability and transport campaigns to raise issues of accessibility and safety — demanding that public safety is put before private profit.

A successful campaign would benefit not only fat people, but the community as a whole.

This approach place fat people in the centre of struggle and provides the opportunity to link up with other oppressed groups. Whilst improving self-image can be a starting point, it's society that needs changing, not fat people.

Challenging attitudes to fat is difficult in the abstract. Without a coherent theory that locates fat oppression within an overall analysis of women's and class oppression the problem will be seen as one of individual likeness and individual behaviour.

Working to achieve structural changes will ultimately benefit all oppressed people and will create a climate in which the attitudes and behaviour of individuals will change.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Mandy Mudd: subjected to harassment and persecution by the media because they didn't like her size; still standing strongly for all women's liberation.

REVIEW

Fat people go on demos too

Shadow On A Tightrope, USA (1983); *Fat is a Feminist Issue*, USA (1978)

When I first read *Fat is a Feminist Issue* by Susie Orbach ten years ago, it made a big impact on me.

The book provided what seemed at the time a rational explanation for the adolescent traumas I had gone through — alternate phases of compulsive eating followed by bulimia (making yourself vomit after eating) — all in an attempt to make myself thin.

The central thesis of the book is that women choose to be fat because we are frightened of being sexually objectified and trivialised if we are thin.

But women also have a love/hate relationship with food. We love it because it is pleasurable and nurturing; we hate it because we believe it makes us fat — which generally makes us either fat or anorexic.

Orbach puts forward a self-help programme aimed at breaking down our fear of food and learning to love ourselves as we are: in doing which we will... wait for it — lose weight!

The danger of *Fat is a Feminist Issue* is that it makes fat an individual, not a social, problem and provides individual solutions.

By Jane Connor

Shadow On A Tightrope starts from a different premise: that capitalist society is a patriarchal, fat-hating culture which seeks to keep women down by keeping them thin.

In the process, the diet industry makes billions of pounds profit — our lost pounds are their gained pounds. Women expend an enormous amount of energy trying to stay thin, instead of fighting their oppression.

Shadow On A Tightrope is a collection of writings which challenges a series of myths about being fat and argues the case for fat liberation. The central myth smashed in this book is that your size is linked to the amount you eat.

The collection also contains a critique of Orbach, challenging both her assumption that it is better to be thin than fat, and that being fat represents a fear of sexuality.

Orbach assumes that to be fat is to be unattractive and will some how protect you from sexual harassment. Yet all women are sexually harassed, however they look!

Ten years on, I realised that Orbach's writings didn't square with my reality.

Yes, I started to like myself and enjoy eating, but not because of Susie Orbach. I became active as a socialist feminist and started to believe that society, not me as an individual, could be changed through collective action.

I'm not frightened of sex and being attractive. I'm angry about sexual violence. My size makes me feel strong. I'm noticed when I walk into a room — I cannot be ignored.

Reviewing books that are hardly recent says something about the state of the debate on fat liberation. Whilst *Shadow On A Tightrope* is a powerful book, it comes from a radical feminist perspective. On the other hand, Orbach's individualist response must be rejected.

There is virtually nothing written by socialist feminists on this issue (other than in *Briefing*). Perhaps we are frightened of challenging socially dominant ideas about attractiveness.

Or perhaps it's because most socialists dismiss the issue as either another trendy "ism" or a luxury in the face of the hard fight against Thatcherism.

As socialists we have to understand and fight all forms of oppression: giving up on the fight to end any specific oppression is a luxury — and a concession to capitalist rule — we cannot afford.

BOOK REVIEW

Meet CLR James...

CLR James — The Artist as Revolutionary, by Paul Buhle, *Verso*.

Few who know his work would deny the extent of CLR James's influence or the range of his writing.

Born 88 years ago in Trinidad, James has been a powerful advocate of Pan-Africanism and West Indian independence, a leading member of the American Workers Party, cricket writer, political theorist, historian, novelist, and literary critic.

James's books include:

•*The Black Jacobins* (a study of Toussaint L'Ouverture and the Haitian revolt, which Buhle puts on a par with Trotsky's *Russian Revolution*);

•*Beyond the Boundary* (a semi-autobiographical account of his life in cricket, whose subtext is the relationship between sport and colonialism);

•*Mariners, Renegades and Castaways* (a study of Herman Melville).

James has also been a major influence on such people as Eric Williams, Kwame Nkrumah, Walter Rodney, Manning Marable, and, in Britain, the editors of *Race Today*.

It's therefore extraordinary that this book, written by the author of the commendable *Marxism in the USA*, should be the first major study of James's life and work.

By Woody Haut
Hampstead & Highgate CLP

Buhle gives three reasons why James has been neglected by the left:

•James is outside the tradition of Western Marxism;

•Since breaking with Trotskyism in 1950, James has insisted on both the continuing revolutionary potential of the working class *and* the historic obsolesence of the vanguard party as defined by Lenin;

•James has regarded politics not merely as a form of intervention but as the content of history and world culture, never underestimating the talent and energy that ordinary people bring to revolutionary struggle.

James, believing that the oppressed are "prepared socially for [their] tasks by the very mechanisms of capitalist production", sought to go beyond Trotskyism.

In contemporary terms, this means not only a reassessment of the evolving modes of capitalist production, but also new methods of organisation to resist it.

Consequently, though James was convinced that "organisation, as we have known it, is at an end," he was, at the same time, one of the few people of his generation to recognise the political potential in an alliance between racial, ethnic, social and cultural forces.

"Workers," James said, "should always act over the heads of their organisations."

Elsewhere he says, "All development takes place as a result of self-movement, not organisation or direction by external forces." He stressed the distinction between a self-organised group and a party.

(James, of course, viewed the Labour Party as *a* party and not *the* party, saying there's nothing wrong in joining where there's nothing else, so long as one is clear about its past, present and likely future).

Being contained within British society, and yet an alien in it, James has, to a large extent, been able to subvert his colonisers. In his education, especially his knowledge of cricket and literature, James has always been more British than the British.

Yet, James was always able to go beyond his own cultural background, to investigate areas that the left had yet to discover.

As Buhle points out, in turning his attention to the deconstruction of popular culture, such as film and sport, long before the days when such activity was considered intellectually legitimate, James was ahead of his time.

There's a problem with the book that's apparent from its very first sentence. The statement, "This is an *intellectual* biography, strictly speaking, but also by necessity a political and cultural portrait," is never fully explored.



PHOTO: Andrea Campbell

"Workers should (...) act over the heads of their organisations." Hangers strikers are among those who would agree with James!

Nor is the difference between and *intellectual* and a *political* biography explained, leaving the reader with a text in which intelligence is separated, no matter how slightly, from politics and culture.

Despite Buhle's successful reaffirmation of the breathtaking range of James's work, the book has the effect of only partially propelling the reader into the world of James the activist.

The fact is, CLR didn't get deported from the US just because he liked to think. But the important point here is that a biographer has a political responsibility to be as precise as possible, because s/he, by definition, controls her/his subject.

Therefore it isn't surprising that Buhle should end the book rather weakly, implying that although James did not accomplish what he set out to, at least his texts are back in circulation.

With a simplicity that's almost ingenuous for a Marxist who monitors popular/mass culture, Buhle never considers how even James's work might be obscured by consumer fetishism or mis-readings, or that James's ideas may yet have the influence they deserve.

Nor is it surprising that his writing tends, at times, to be so syntactically contorted that some of the ideas become more complicated than they need be. This is in glaring contrast to James, who has always been able to make complex ideas accessible.

Nonetheless, this book will help many readers return to or discover for the first time one of this century's more remarkable Marxist writers.

FILM REVIEW

The Politics of Roger Rabbit

The technical achievements of *Who Framed Roger Rabbit?* are so overwhelming that is is easy to overlook the story itself.

In post-war Hollywood, cartoon characters — "Toons" — have come alive. Their lives, however, are totally subservient to the demands of their human masters.

Roger's wife, Jessica, for example, is the ultimate vamp stereotype, an objectification of male desire. Resourceful as any vamp created by Chandler or Hammett, she is not wicked: "I'm not bad," she says, "I'm just drawn that way."

"Toons" are an oppressed minority. They are segregated, living in a reservation called "Toon Town", and exploited as slave labour.

Employment for "Toons" is restricted to the entertainment and service industries.

Even the privileged caste who work in films are quite alienated from the means of production; and Daffy and Donald are reduced to working in a "humans-only" version of the Cotton Club.

By Jim Thain
Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP

Naturally, there are liberals prepared to explore other relationships, like soft-boiled 'tec Eddie Valiant (Bob Hoskins).

Down on his luck and mourning his dead brother, Eddie finds some consolation in the notion that "Los Angeles has the finest public transport system in the world."

This is ironic, as the system is bought up by Cloverleaf industries, who implement cutbacks and lay-offs with the long term aims of shutting down the service.

The apparently peripheral information turns out to be crucial to the plot. For the villain of the drama is the evil owner of Cloverleaf Industries, Judge Doom.

Doom, we discover, is a renegade "Toon" in disguise, who has successfully exploited the corruption of the human political and economic systems.

Aided and abetted by collaborationist weasel gangsters, his plan is to demolish "Toon Town" so the state can build a freeway.

Cloverleaf would then own the sole franchise on gas stations, motels, fast food restaurants, car dealerships, tyre salons, and advertising for the freeway. Hence the dismantling of public transport to make way for private enterprise.

In demolishing "Toon Town", Doom will liquidate its inhabitants, not simply because he despises his fellow "Toons", but also because "Toons" are not consumers.

Doom's vision follows the inexorable logic of monopoly capitalism.

He alone fully understands the nature of the society he is living in: a fact glossed over by the police lieutenant who characterises Doom as "one seriously disturbed Toon."

Thus the contradictions of capitalism are reduced to the personal problems of the individual.

Against the power of Doom's vision, and his will to realise it, Valiant's liberalism and Roger's anarchism pale into insignificance. Herein lies the film's major weakness.

"Toon Town" life is too chaotic to permit any organised fightback and there is certainly no solidarity movement amongst the humans. So political fable degenerates into fairytale.

In the end, Doom's project is thwarted by Valiant's ability to regain his sense of humour. As Roger says, "Sometimes laughter is the only weapon we have." Roger is one seriously apolitical "Toon".

But maybe this was the only way monopoly capitalism could be exposed to such a wide audience. The film is a classic, and shouldn't be missed.

MUSIC REVIEW

Refreshment from Hue & Cry

Seduced and Abandoned, 1987, *Remote*, 1988, both from *Circa Records*

With soap stars and oldies topping the charts, there seems little exciting on offer in the current music scene.

By DAVE WARREN

My own disillusionment dates from about the beginning of the decade, but the recent appearance of Scottish group *Hue and Cry* has been refreshing.

The group's songs are penned by brothers Gregory and Patrick Kane (also lead vocalists) and they have produced some great numbers.

Their first album, *Seduced and Abandoned* (1987), included *Strength to Strength Along With Truth*, which I take to be about Colonel North and Irangate.

The album's highlight is *Alligator Man*, dedicated to the Caterpillar work-in: "He's gonna destroy you for burgers and milkshakes," sings Kane with suitable emotion.

The more recent second album, *Remote*, is an excellent follow-up. *Ordinary Angel* is about credit card debt, and *The Only Thing More Powerful Than The Boss* deals with new technology.

The album has a catchy single, *Looking for Lynda*, which may yet produce the big hit which the group surely deserves.

MAGAZINE REVIEW

Not-so-new times

Interlink, February/March 1989, £1.10

In this special issue of the Socialist Society journal *Interlink*, guest-edited by Sheila Rowbotham, *Marxism Today*'s epochal discovery of "post-Fordism" and "New Times" is subjected to withering critique.

"It was not only rum politics," she writes, "it was theoretically misleading.

By Mike Marqusee
Haringey Labour Briefing

"It led to the vital debate about how capitalist production is actually changing and what socialist strategies could counter these up a dead end.

"Speculative assertions were presented as facts and internal arguments within the Communist Party have been projected on to the rest of the socialist movement...

"There is a perplexing silence, not only in *Marxism Today* but around the Labour Party's Policy Review about the human cost of restructuring.

"Why is there an apparent embarassment instead of anger against a government responsible for material misery and spiritual distress?

"The conditions and relations being forced on people mean redefining not discarding concepts of class and exploitation..."

Articles examine the politics and economics of post-Fordism in detail, with glances at industrial accidents, computer technology, low-paid women workers, and what's happening at the Ford plant in Halewood — all shedding considerable doubt on the platitudes emanating from *Marxism Today*.

Remembering the miners' struggle

The view from the rank and file

Five years on and it is as though it happened yesterday.

This is how those on the front line of the 1984-5 Miners' Strike feel today. No one involved was left untouched by the longest strike in British mining history.

By Sheila Webb Hackney Labour Briefing

In Kent, where two out of the three pits have shut, the workforce of over 2,000 has dwindled to 650, producing the high quality "sweetening" coal from Betteshangar.

That means 1,300 workers have either been made redundant, taken early retirement, or never been reinstated since they were sacked during the Strike.

Disillusionment is so great that, says Kent President John Moyle, "the men feel that if management continue to renege on agreements and tear up customs and practices, then they will be told to stuff their job."

Roy Acott, rank and file NUM member, took redundancy from Snowdown one year after the return to work in March 1985. "I stuck it for a year, then I began to get ill," he said.

He was over 50, and 30 years as a miner seemed long enough, especially as things were so different after the Strike. "We'd lost. Management felt they could do what they liked, and it rubbed off on the Deputies."

During his night shift Roy found work unbearable. Management were moving men to other local pits, despite having invested £23 million in a new seam since the NUM saved the pit from closure in 1981.

A skeleton workforce was left. Roy found himself wandering about looking for others to talk to. "All the pleasure of going to work, the camaraderie, the discussions, was gone."

The Deputies began treating the men with little or no respect. Before the Strike there had been a reasonable working relationship.

During the Strike year Roy travelled over 45,000 miles, mainly to Kingsnorth Power Station in North Kent. He worked longer hours as a picket than he did in the pit.

After the police prevented Kent miners driving through the Dartford Tunnel, a group of miners marched from the pit village of Ayelsham to Nottingham, and were put up by students and lecturers from Kent University and then the GLC in London.

"I learned how other people lived, and that we could get support from all sorts of people," says Roy.

For Roy and his wife Daphne it was a year of comradeship, laughter, learning, and despair. "I wouldn't have missed it for the world," said Daphne, who joined the picket lines when she wasn't at her part-time job.

Clubs

Yet along with the comradeship they found at the Welfare Clubs in Ayelsham and Mill Hill and in the homes of supporters in London, Nottingham, and Barnsley, they also battled with hostility.

Living on a large housing estate in Dover, where only a few neighbours were miners, they were cut off from the support offered by homogenous mining communities.

Generally, their neighbours were against the Strike and Daphne had to endure many overheard or direct attacks.They also watched, as Roy put it, the scum float to the surface as some of the miners began to scab.

Kent miners, said Roy, got fantastic support from the printers, NUJ, teachers, lecturers, and unions in Holland and Belgium, the CTG in France, miners in South Africa, and seamen in New Zealand.

Yet the local NUS, later to wage their own fight against P&O for jobs and safety, refused to pay a 50p levy. Nonetheless, miners and Women Against Pit Closures have supported the sacked P&O workers.

The year exposed Daphne and Roy to new experiences: they enjoyed being guests at a Sikh wedding. They also saw the grinding poverty of young miners in Barnsley, where picketing money was low.

Starving

"They were almost starving," said Daphne, "making sure there was enough food for the children and going without themselves."

The Acotts learned the meaning of solidarity and scabbing through direct experience. Some neighbours gave up the Strike. Some kept going but did nothing to help the Strike.

The Acotts also learned about Spencer unions, other people's struggles, and how the press and television distort, manipulate, and lie.

Like most people from the mining communities, they had little direct experience of the media until the Strike. They watched how interviews with Roy were cut and chopped, and how they were never really allowed to state their case.

Daphne had taught her children to think of the police as people to be trusted and respected. Along with the 300,000 others who were arrested during the Strike, their view of "law and order" is now radically different.

Liz French has never been allowed to forget the Strike.

Her husband Terry was imprisoned and served over two years of a sentence for grievous bodily harm.

While the Strike continued, Liz battled on with her sisters in the Women's Group. She became a regular speaker for the Group, travelling about the country and abroad raising money for the struggle.



Strikers' children eating in the soup kitchen at Whinney Road, Ollerton

As others settled back to some kind of normality after the return to work, Liz was fighting to make sure Terry and the other imprisoned and victimised miners were not forgotten.

And the fight didn't stop on Terry's release: neither of them could get work because of their political "records". They were also, like thousands of others, deeply in debt.

Liz is bitter about the leadership of other unions and the Labour Party. "That's where we should have got support, and we didn't."

It was the rank and file members who kept the miners going, she said, and the poorest were the most generous.

Liz's view of left groups is not flattering: "They appear to be more concerned with fighting each other than fighting Thatcher."

According to Liz, most women went back to how they were before the Strike. The old pattern of domestic work re-established itself.

Although during the Strike there were claims that women would never go back to the old ways, life quickly returned to normal, with men wanting their dinner on the table when they returned from a shift.

Margaret Holmes has a different interpretation. An active member of the TGWU, Margaret was involved in Women Against Pit Closures in Kent and nationally, and still is.

Her husband was active in the Strike. "All the women involved in the Strike were touched by it," she said. They were educated, became more aware and questioning.

This has changed how they view things, relate to their families, teach their children.

Some joined the Labour Party and unions, but most did not want to get involved in outside activities. Margaret is not disappointed.

Perhaps, she suggested it is wrong to expect women to prove they have changed yet not look for the same signs in men.

"Everyone seems to assume men are already aware," she said, "but men don't rush off and join political parties either."

Women got to know each other better through organising together, and learn from new experiences: Margaret's first experience of public speaking was to an RCP group in Brixton.

Meeting

"I hadn't even heard of an A to Z," she laughed, and admitted finding the place was more nerve-racking than addressing the meeting.

As with most of the women and men involved in the Strike, there were times when Margaret didn't know how she got through.

"I don't feel defeated, though. We were beaten, but our spirit wasn't broken. We may have been tired, desperate even, but the men could still march back to the pits."

In the past the people in the Mill Hill area of Deal have shared a common purpose, and even at times a common enemy, not only bosses but other working class people, who treated the miners with hostility when they first came to Kent.

But over the years miners have become scattered throughout East Kent, originally, observed John Moyle, as part of a deliberate policy to weaken communities.

During the Strike, said Terry Harrison, ex-Secretary of Betteshangar NUM, people made the best of things but he believes any community feeling there was has now gone. Thatcher's ideology of individualism is all-pervasive.

"There is a great disparity of income," said Terry, "Some have large incomes, potential capital in their homes, while others can't find a job, or buy a house because of the prices, or are eking out an existence on a pension."

Then there are those like himself who were sacked and never reinstated. (Terry does not think of himself as victimised: "We're all victimised, the unemployed, the poor buggars who have to put up with the management in that pit every day.")

This caused a division between those who felt forgotten and those who went on to fight new battles in the workplace.

Then there are the scabs. In Kent they either moved away or were among the first to take redundancy. Kent doesn't have the division caused by the UDM but some scabs still live in the neighbourhood, and some families are still not on speaking terms.

Fragmented communities, a declining industry, and workers' defeat appear to be the picture in the mining areas today. Yet this is not the *whole* picture. Bonds exist, links have been made which cannot be broken.

Although there was no victory to celebrate, no one who witnessed the 84/5 Strike will forget the courage of those who stuck it out, day after day.

They were an example to us all and what we learned from the struggle will take us forward in the next battle.

Ford victimisation

"More knives in my back than in a kitchen drawer"

On Tuesaday, February 21st, a ballot of the entire TGWU membership on the B shift at the Ford Assembly Plant at Dagenham produced a result of 880 to 493 against strike action in support of sacked union activist Mick Gosling.

By MARK SEATON

The vote followed a series of manoeuvres by both management and TGWU officer Steve Hart.

Management, realising that Mick enjoyed overwhelming support in his own work area, threatened to use Tory anti-union laws against the TGWU, which backed down and agreed to organise a shift-wide ballot.

The TGWU officer also allowed a long delay in the holding of the ballot, thus taking the heat out of the situation. Amazingly, he also allowed the ballot to be held without a mass meeting preceding it, which has never happened before.

One third of the membership was thus denied any chance of hearing Mick's case before voting.

The company also wrote to every worker on the B shift slandering Mick and accusing him of being anti-union! In the circumstances the 35% vote in favour of action was, in Mick's words, "a miracle."

"I had already beem out of the workforce for three months, and in the context of the looming loss of Sierra production at Dagenham, and the manoeuvering of the TGWU officer, the vote does give a basis for a fight back against Ford in the future," Mick commented.

"There were more knives in my back than in a kitchen drawer.

"The workforce must now regroup and reorganise, and not give way to a gloom and doom mentality. There is a willingness to continue the fight."



Liz French, speaking at the launch meeting of the South East Region Justice for Mineworkers Campaign

PHOTO: Pete Cooper

The Great Miners' Strike

Five years on

March 1989 marks the fifth anniversary of the beginning of the Miners' Strike — the most sustained and courageous episode in the British class struggle since the General Strike of 1926.

By Ed Fredenburgh
Secretary, South East Region National Justice For Minworkers Campaign

The Strike's tragic defeat has allowed the employers, now dubbed British Coal, to cut the mining workforce from 181,400 at the start of the strike to its present 68,000.

BC has now closed half of the pits operating in 1984.

1989 is also the centenary of the founding of the Minimg Ferderation of Great Britain, forerunner of the NUM.

It may also be the last year of an independent union of mineworkers, as discussions proceed on amalgamation of the NUM with the TGWU.

"People understand that Mrs Thatcher and her monetarist policies are an *international* phenomenon," wrote a German reporter visiting Durham in 1984. They affect all the industrial states in the West.

"Mrs Thatcher is seen as a leading advocate of those policies and to many people in Germany and Scandinavia the miners are involved in a struggle that will affect everyone by its outcome. That's why everyone watches it so closely."

It was clear from the beginning that the Strike would mark a watershed in British politics.

It would make the difference between the Tories winning a third term and a major breakthrough for the British labour movement, against the tightening grip of New Realism.

In the end, the miners were defeated and (as night follows day) the Tories were re-elected.

The New Realists, always adept at self-fulfilling prophecies, have used both events to support their case for a further rightward shift.

Many of the Tories' anti-union laws, particularly the provision for sequestration of union assets, were used for the first time against the miners.

Subsequently, they have been used against printers and seafarers, making it virtually impossible to mount an effective strike without breaking the law.

We are still living with the consequences of the NUM defeat. But neither the NUM nor the class struggle stops here.

Strike

The true significance of the miners' strike will be found in the lessons it offers. Could we have changed the outcome? How should the left itself change?

In retrospect, it's clearer than ever that that the most important single issue is *class unity in action*›

The strike produced an explosion of grass-roots support activity across the country, taking in Trades Councils, CLPs, Miners' Support Groups, and the inspiring movement of Women Against Pit Closures.

The miners themselves broke out of their political isolation and linked up with campaigns on Nicaragua, local government, women's and lesbian and gay rights.

The NUM was already clearly associated with the environmental and anti-nuclear lobbies and respected for its militant support for healthworkers and others in industrial struggle.

Yet the call of miners and their supporters for industrial action in solidarity was never answered on a national scale.

Whether to call for a general strike, and how and when to do so, was the crucial issue and the acid test of the left's understanding of the united front.

It was clear some months into the strike that the NUM was facing a government and state of unparalleled brutality and determination.

The strikers, however committed, would be in difficulty unless the labour movement gave more than moral and financial support.

For the Communist Party, a general strike posed a threat to their carefully cultivated links to the right-wing union bureaucracy. They played a conservative role throughout the strike.

Mick McGahey, as NUM representative on the TUC Genral Council, consistently opposed demands for a recall TUC.

In South Wales, the CP were central in manoeuvering for the final decison to return to work, against official Area policy (shared with Durham) for a recall TUC.

For the "rank-and-filist" tendencies on the far left, a general strike was the necessary weapon, but it had to come from the rank-and-file.



"Neither the NUM nor the class struggle stops here..."

This meant they opposed calls from the support movment for a recall TUC to fight for official action, in favour of appealing to individual and therefore isolated workplaces to come out in unofficial support.

The problem here was *not* that workers were unwilling to take solidarity action, but that five years of vicious Toryism and mass unemployment, coupled with the treacherous record of the labour movement leadership, had taught workers the dangers of acting without maximum unity.

The only way to generalise industrial action (and ultimately win the strike) was to build on the demand from South Wales and Durham NUM Areas for a recall TUC.

At a conference of this kind, called under such urgent and demanding circumstances, the trade union left, spearheaded by the miners, could have fought the General Council's opposition and won support for a general strike.

Benn

This argument was rejected by the Labour Party (with the notable exceptions of Benn, Skinner, Livingstone), by the Communist Party, and by the rank-and-filist currents on the far left.

All those who believe the Miners' Strike has a lasting political significance must engage in a reassessment of all these issues and help build a current in the labour movement better equipped to take advantage of the struggles ahead.

A number of major event are being organised for this anniversary year. Book these dates in your diary now:

June 17: First national miners' gala, Barnsley.

June 24 or July 2: South East Justice for Minworkers Campaign rally and concert, Town and Country Club, Camden, London.

Briefing Trade Union School

Beating back New Realism

The Tory third term offensive against the working class and the oppressed is comprehensive in its sweep.

It aims to reverse most of our social gains of this century. Nothing is sacrosanct.

The employers have taken full advantage of trade union defeats and the ever tightening anti-union laws by stepping up productivity, cutting wages, and sacking trade unionists at GCHQ, Fords and elsewhere.

The removal of European Community trade barriers in 19992 is already bringing a massive restructuring of industry and the threat of a renewed wave of sackings.

Women are having to bear the brunt of the cuts in the "social wage" while many are being forced into low paid, part-time jobs.

Black people are additionally being threatened by moves towards *gastarbeiter* status for immigrant workers, the introduction of internal "pass law" controls and the stepping up of deportations.

The "new realists" of the trade union and Labour Party leaderships have long since given up any pretence of leading a fightback.

Struggles such as the nurses, textile workers, postal workers and Ford workers have all forced concessions from the employers.

But much greater concessions, or even outright victories could have been won if the trade union leaders had not sought to derail and isolate these struggles. Others, like the P&O seafarers have simply been left to their fate.

The Communist Party, traditionally the most powerful force on the trade union left has led the retreat.

The new defeatists' response to Tory measures such as poll tax, restructuring and privatising the NHS, housing, education and social benefits, and draconian restrictions on civil liberties, has been predictably and pathetically inadequate.

Similarly the trade union Broad Lefts have remained trapped in electoralism and have so far been unable to offer a clear fighting alternative, consequently drifting rightward themselves.

At a national organised level only overtly socialist currents such as the Socialist Teachers Alliance in the NUT and the socialist caucus in the CPSA broad left have resisted this pressure.

Briefing fully supports the only non-sectarian moves towards a class-wide response to this crisis of orientation and leadership which are emerging from the Chesterfield Socialist Conference.

Briefing is organising this dayschool in order to discuss perspectives and strategies for socialists in the trade unions, and in particular building the proposed Chesterfield Trade Union Conference later this year.

The Conference will be in London on Saturday 22nd April 1989. The agenda will include a plenary on perspectives and strategy and workshops on:

- the defence of the NHS;
- local government, poll tax, housing and education;
- organising the left in the unions;
- organising women in the unions;
- black people and the introduction of internal controls;
- solidarity work.

Sponsors so far include: (all in personal capacities) Ken Jones (NUT Exec), Cllr Greg Tucker (Sec NUR Southern District Council), Tony Richardson (T&G steward Cowley and Treasurer Solidarity Network), John Parkinson (President Lancs Association of Trades Councils), Carolyn Sikorski (Chair Newham NALGO), Liam McQuade (Sec LOMO UCW C&CS Branch), Ian Driver (NUPE NEC), Alan Wassell (Vice-President W.Yorks County Association of Trades Councils), Cllr Pat Waylett (GMBATU, Sec Works Ctte No.8 LEB and ex-EEPTU Industrial Ctte)

Bradford Council Unions

Succumbing to salami tactics

By DAVE MILES

The Tory administration in Bradford has just announced another £4 million cuts, balanced by £1.2 million of new spending.

This will apparently mean no rate rise this year. The long-term aim is to get spending down by another £13 million, keeping Bradford's Poll Tax level within government limits.

Bradford NUT had decided to ballot for a half day strike on the day of the Council Budget meeting, March 7th. Both NALGO and NATFHE were to ballot in support.

However, the National Executive of the NUT received "assurances" from the Council leadership and vetoed the local ballot.

NATFHE

NATFHE action was then called off, reinstated, and called off again. It appears likely that there will now be no action from NALGO either.

NUT militants have sought to draw comfort from the leaked budget plans. £1.9 million is to be cut from the education budget, but they claim that schools have been treated better because of the threat of action.

Jobs lost due to falling rolls were already known, and there will be no compulsory redundancies. Job losses will be largest in the two smaller local colleges.

Clearly the danger is that the unions are succumbing to salami tactics. Much larger cuts in overall Council spending are yet to come.

International Briefing

USSR Economy

The legacy of Stalinist planning



People in the West are familiar with economic problems facing Gorbachev.

There are declining growth rates, poor labour productivity, an inability to keep up with the west in fields like high technology — all the phenomena summed up in the word "stagnation".

Are these the inevitable results of any planned economy? Or are they specific to the Soviet method of planning?

In this article, the second in our series on Eastern bloc economies, RICK SIMON looks at how the Soviet plan is devised and implemented.

The whole notion of planning derives, of course, from the desire of socialists to be rid of the anarchy of the capitalist market and to replace it with the rational allocation of resources according to human need.

The first country to effect a victorious socialist revolution and take the major means of production into popular hands was, however, Russia, a comparatively backward country with an overwhelming preponderence of peasants.

Its economy was then devastated by years of Civil War and isolated by the failure of revolutions in the West.

The question of planning, industrialisation, and relations between town and country were at the heart of debates in the Soviet Union in the 1920s, but it was not until 1929 that the First Five-Year Plan was implemented by Stalin, who had previously been lukewarm on the question of planning.

Stalin's plan was bound up with forced collectivisation of the peasantry, from which he expected to extract the resources to finance industrialisation.

The breakneck speed of industrialisation and collectivisation was opposed by both Trotsky (then in exile) and Bukharin.

Trotsky pointed out that the Soviet economy could not be sealed off from the capitalist world economy and that administrative categories could not fully replace the roles of money and the market in what was still a terribly backward country.

Nor could bureaucratic fiat effectively replace democratic participation. His warnings were ignored and the Soviet planning structure established in the 30s is still, in the main, operative to this day.

The Soviet economic system is first and foremost a hierarchy. At its apex is the state planning body, Gosplan USSR. Beneath Gosplan are the various Ministries and beneath them are the enterprises under their control.

More recently another tier, that of Associations, was introduced between Ministries and enterprises. This structure is then repeated in each of the USSR's 15 republics, which are thus made subordinate to Moscow.

Gosplan draws up the Five-Year Plan. This is called a "perspective plan" because it is pitched at such a general level that it has no direct meaning for specific enterprises.

To enable enterprises to be given concrete targets, the plan has to be disaggregated into annual and quarterly plans. The targets handed down from Gosplan to the Ministries, and thence to associations and enterprises, have the force of law.

Prices and wages are also centrally determined and the banking system ensures that an enterprise spends its money on authorised expenditures.

Investment, for which there is always excess demand, is the subject of considerable bargaining between Ministries and enterprises.

The basic heavy industries which were the first recipients of massive investments have also received the bulk of subsequent investments — to the detriment of agriculture and consumer goods industries.

Fulfilment of the plan is the number one aim of every enterprise manager and Minister and (as we shall see in a future article) this leads to a variety of illegal acts.

Operational plans are drawn up through what is known as the "materials balance" approach. Gosplan draws up a draft plan, based on the previous year's results with additions for growth.

Enterprises respond by telling Gosplan their projected needs for the coming year. There a tendency here for the enterprise to exaggerate its supply requirements so that it can fulfil its target as easily as possible.

Gosplan then assesses what is needed to meet all enterprises' supply requirements and thus the projected level of supply and demand in the economy as a whole.

Gosplan, of course, attempts to produce as taut a plan as possible. This means there is little leeway if something disastrous happens like Chernobyl or the Armenian earthquake.

Because operational plans are for very short periods the individual enterprise engages in little forward planning.

Its prime concern is to fulfil the plan or slightly overfulfill it (bringing bonuses for the workforce), but not overfulfill it too much, as this would have consequences for future plan targets, i.e. they might be too high.

What an enterprise achieves this year has a strong effect on next year's target. This is termed planning "from the achieved level".



Above: Gorbachev face to face with the workers. Top: queuing for vodka.

The plan targets or indicators are themselves the subject of much controversy and there have been many attempts to make them more effective.

The prime historical indicator has been that of "gross output". It basically did not matter what the quality was like as long as the total number of planned units or the volume in tons was produced.

This, coupled with the practice of "storming" (in which the bulk of the plan was fulfilled in the last few weeks of the plan period, generally because essential supplies were previously unavailable).

"Storming" led to the production of (s)crap — TVs with screws hammered in, ultra-thick or ultra-thin glass (depending on whether the indicator was in tons or square metres), etc.

It didn't matter that the TVs were returned a few days after being sold or blew up in living rooms (a major source of domestic accidents) as long as they were produced on time.

The Soviet economy was therefore planned in a strictly bureaucratic fashion.

It met its targets through a combination of mobilising external resources (turning peasants into workers, harnessing energy resources) and building up basic industries (steel, coal, etc.) at the expense of light and consumer goods industries.

The gross output indicator was more useful politically than economically. It could advertise to the world the great strides being made by Soviet industry.

But the real basis of these achievements was the vast potential created by the revolutionary nationalisation of the means of production and the screwing-down workers and peasants' living standards, particularly during the 30s.

Agriculture was so damaged by this experience that it has never fully recovered. The limits of this type of planning began to be reached in the 1950s. Despite repeated "reforms" since then, the economy has gradually petered to a halt.

Czechoslovakia: 50 years on

Still waiting for the day of reckoning

By Colin Meade
Surbiton CLP

"I felt as if I were sitting on burning coals," remarked Adolf Hitler of his decision to occupy what remained of the Czechoslovak state on March 15th 1939.

By this move he tore up the Munich Agreement signed the previous September with France and Britain; from now on world war was inevitable.

In five hours the German troops were in control of the whole of the Czech lands. The Czechoslovak President, Emil Hacha, knew what was coming and ordered the Czechoslovak troops not to resist.

For the 20 years of its existence the Czechoslovak state had relied on France to guarantee its borders. But the French rulers were trapped between a remilitarised Germany and fear of their own people.

The general strike of 1936 had awakened a mood which saw capitulation to German imperialism as the lesser evil to encouraging any mobilisation of the French working class.

The Czech leadership was completely isolated. Once the French and British had backed out of their obligations, there could be no talk of help from the Soviet Union.

Stalin's undertakings with regard to Czechoslovakia were dependent on joint action with France.

When France accepted the remilitarisation of the Rheinland by Hitler in March 1936 without resistance, Stalin lost faith in his "democratic" allies.

He began to move his forces — including the Communist Parties of Europe — into a more independent position, which turned out to be no more than a halfway house to the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 1939.

In Czechoslovakia itself, the Communist Party suddenly rediscovered the class struggle in 1936, giving notice to the Czechoslovak capitalist parties that the Soviet Union was indifferent to their fate.

But it was not only Czechoslovakia's diplomatic policy which had collapsed; the state was rotten within. The large German minority was absorbed by the Reich, while Slovakia and Carpatho-Ukraine moved towards independence, encouraged by the Germans.

In the Czech Lands themselves many leaders hoped that totalitarian methods would restore order, while unity with Germany would resolve the state's chronic economic problems.

The Nazis established a so-called Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, whereby the drudgery of administration was done by the Czech state apparatus, while the Nazis retained overall control.

Even before the occupation, the Czech government had introduced pre-publication censorship and suppressed the Communist Party. The trade unions were centralised under the leadership of right wing social democracy.

Immediately after the invasion, some 2,000 Communists were rounded up by Czech police on German orders.

In the "New Europe" Czechs were to be allowed to assimilate to the master race, after going through a humiliating screening process. Despite obvious material advantages only some 70,000 people applied.

Serious efforts at resistance were met with ferocious repression, the most notorious example of which was the massacre of all the inhabitants of the village of Lidice in revenge for the killing of the Protector Heydrich.

The working class waited for the tide of war to turn, and for the time of accounting — not only with the Nazis, but with the bankrupt policies which had led the Czech nation to this desperate situation.

Socialist Travelogue

Cuba and Nicaragua: contrast and comparisons

"Psst. Change money?" is the first thing you're likely to hear when you arrive in Cuba.

Since the country was opened up to tourism a few years ago, the population has not been slow to recognise the attractions of the US dollar, and the doors it can open.

You get five times the official exchange rate on the street for your dollars — an offer that's hard to refuse.

The tourist who succumbs to the temptation hands over dollars for pesos, which the Cuban then hands back if the tourist is willing to buy goods on his or her behalf from the tourist shops, which the ordinary Cuban is forbidden to enter.

Cubans do have money to spend, but no goods to spend them on — at least not in their own shops.

This is not because Fidel (and whatever you do, don't call him Castro) has a downer on his own people,

By Alison Clarke
Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP

but because the country is desperate to curb consumer spending and to accumulate hard currency, which it needs to sustain its welfare and military budgets.

It is because of these policies that Cuba can boast the highest standard of living in any Latin American country today.

Education

Its health care system is technologically advanced and free (even to foreigners like us). There is no hunger, poverty or unemployment. Education is free, and racial (although not sexual) discrimination has become a thing of the past.

But there has been a price to pay. There is no freedom of expression, no political opposition, and no free press.

Cubans, unless they are privileged bureaucrats, are not allowed to leave the country. The only way out is to marry a foreigner, and that is precisely what many of them would like to do.

Achievements

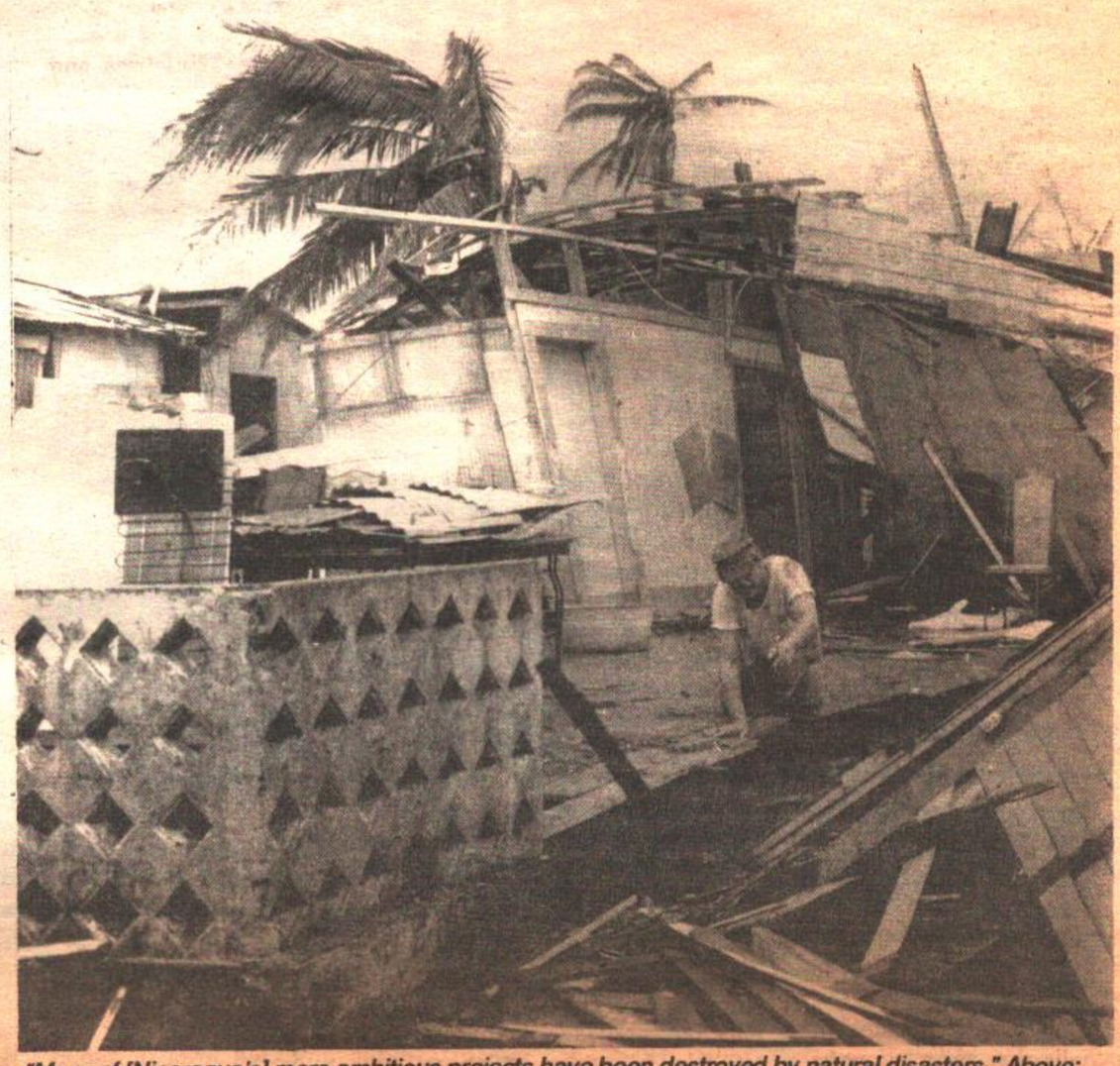
So what's the alternative? Political plurality and a mixed economy?

That's the road which Nicaragua has chosen, and its achievements to date do not augur will for the future of the country or its people.

I say this knowing that Nicaragua spends 60% of its net income on the war with the *Contras*, that many of its more ambitious projects have been destroyed by natural disasters, and that the Nicaraguans chose this option because they did not want to go down the same road as the Cubans.

But it's hard to applaud the choice when you still see kids begging on the street because they're hungry or when you find out that the Sandinistas have reduced the scope of the health service and introduced payments or when you see the shacks in which people are forced to live.

All this exists cheek-by-jowl with people driving brand new Toyota 4-wheel drive cars, living in expensive houses, and using a private medical care system.



"Many of [Nicaragua's] more ambitious projects have been destroyed by natural disasters." Above: hurricane-devastated Bluefields. For details of the latest aid schemes, contact NSC, 23 Bevenden St, London N1.

To add insult to injury, the private sector receives state aid!

On the other hand, there is freedom of expression. There are political parties. There is complete freedom of the press and freedom of movement for all citizens.

All of this has helped to make the Nicaraguans the relaxed people they are today. Unlike the Cubans, they no longer have to look over their shoulder in case an armed police officer is watching.

And the Sandinistas can boast the support of the majority of the population in their battle against the Contras.

Going to Cuba and Nicaragua has left this socialist with more questions than answers.

Stop the US intervention in Central America
US hands off El Salvador and Nicaragua
Picket:
US Embassy
Grosvenor Square, London W1
March 18th, 1-4pm
No to fraudulent elections!
Bring your banners/placards along
El Salvador needs your support!

Organised by: El Salvador Solidarity Campaign, 20-21 Compton Terrace, London N1 (01)-704 9849

Major public meeting organised by the

El Salvador Solidarity Campaign

Speakers:

Jose Masariego
(leading member of ASTTEL, the telecommunications union and Deputy International Officer of the UNTS of El Salvador)

George Faulkes
(Labour Party spokesperson on Central America)

Tony Young
(Newly elected General Secretary of the NCU)

Caroline Baker
(one of the NALGO delegation to El Salvador in 1988)

Friends Meeting House, Euston Road, London
(Euston tube)

Monday March 20th, 7.30pm

This coincides with the planned Presidential elections in El Salvador

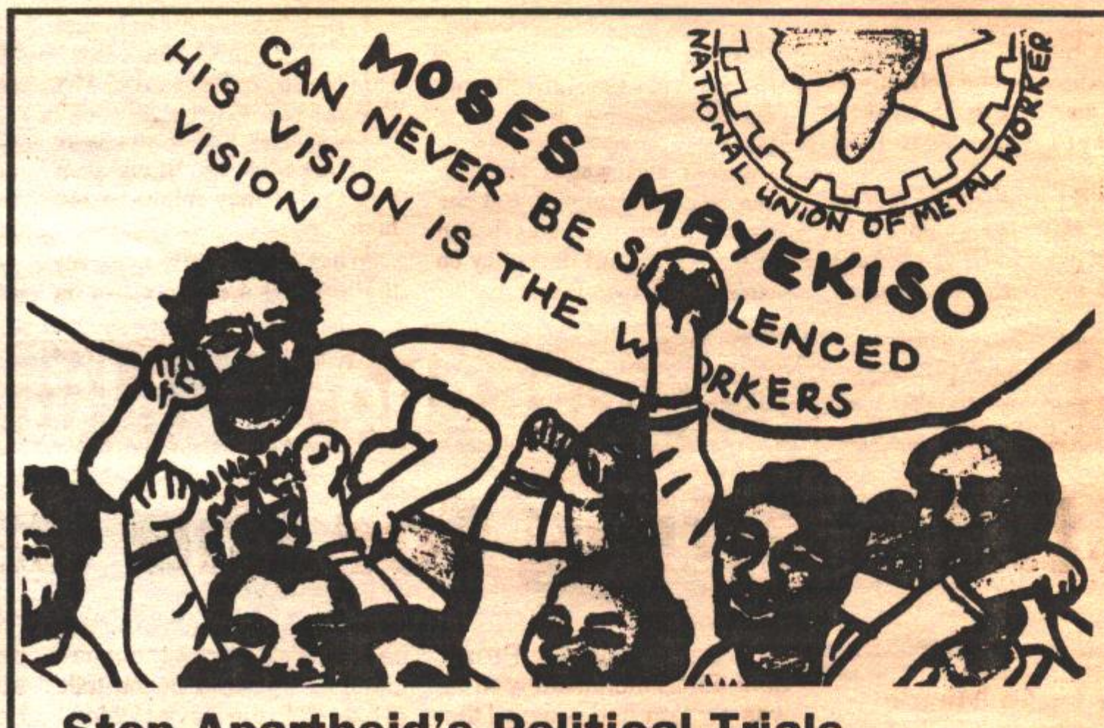
Irie! Dance Company and Rock to Rock Radio Tony P, Mistri, Sister B, J.B. & Daddy Frenchie proudly present

A Benefit Concert for

"The Cape Town Sixteen Campaign"

(16 young, black activists in South Africa who have been tortured and jailed by the racist regime for fighting against apartheid)

Monday March 20th, 7pm (show starts 8pm)
The Albany Empire, Douglas Way, London SE8
Tickets: £2.50 (unaged); £5 (waged)
Reggae Ballet; Rock Rock DJs; and Guest appearance by Linton Kwesi Johnson



Stop Apartheid's Political Trials

Apartheid South Africa holds without trial thousands of opponents to its regime. It detains tens of thousands more on trumped up charges, executing many and imprisoning the rest.

Moses Mayekiso and his four comrades were detained on such charges in June 1986, accused of "treason against the South African State" — in reality it was because they are "worker leaders" in trade union and community struggles.

Moses Mayekiso is General Secretary of the mighty South Africa Metalworkers' Union, NUMSA, and his wife Kola is touring Britain to draw attention to this and the other political trials and detentions in South Africa.

Meetings:

Thursday March 16th: 7.30pm, Leeds Trades Club.

Friday March 17th: Hull.

Friday March 17th: 7.30pm, Sheffield Town Hall. Speakers: Kola Mayekiso (from South Africa). Chair: Blanche Flannery (President, Trades Council). With: Paul Jagger (Secretary, Regional TUC); Richard Carborn MP (Sheffield Central). Organised by Barnsley Anti-Apartheid and Yorkshire & Humberside Regional TUC.

Saturday March 18th: TUC Women's Council.

Saturday March 18th: 6.30pm, Barnsley Miners' Offices.

For further details: tel. 0226-730023.

LABOUR BRIEFING

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Poll Tax Notes

How the Tax hits young and old

With this article, we conclude our short series looking at the special effects of the Poll Tax.

Young or old, the Poll Tax will hit hard.

A survey in London has shown that nearly 90% of London pensioner households will lose out by an average of £500 a year before benefit.

Even after rebates, this still means paying an extra £2 a week.

So much for the government's concern to protect the widow living alone!

At the same time is is already becoming clear that the pressure will be on to institutionalise the elderly and infirm.

For if you are temporarily in hospital or a residential home, the Poll Tax is paid. If the arragements are permanent, it isn't.

If our mythical widow has an accident at home, and goes to stay with her relatives, then not only does she still pay Poll Tax herself but her empty house also attracts a charge which could be twice the Poll Tax level.

How much easier it would be to be packed off permanently into hospital and sell the house — saving three Poll Tax charges!

With the change in benefit rules, every household now



has to make some payment towards the rates. Under Poll Tax, everyone must pay something.

A full rebate will still leave 20% to pay. But of course this will be allowed for when the government sets the benefit levels! Except of course... that the government will assume an average Poll Tax level.

A government-assumed average of some £250 will mean £1 a week benefit to go towards Poll Tax. But in many areas, particularly those with high levels of claimants, the Poll Tax will be far higher.

The 20% may be more like £3 per week — an immediate £2 per week cut in benefit.

For young people this might be only half the story. With the forced imposition of YTS schemes, already many are left with no income whatsoever.

Pressure is great to move out and cease being a burden on parents. Begging in the streets of most big cities, especially London, has already increased dramatically as the effect of government attacks on youth is felt.

Now the burden of Poll Tax will be added.

When registration started in Scotland, London saw an influx of young Scots being uprooted to escape the Tax. When England and Wales implement the Tax, the pressure will be for young people to try to disappear before they reach 18.

After all, if you are being denied any benefits at 17, why pay tax at 18?

Young people who can't move will be pressured into taking any job available: a gift to employers seeking workers for very, very low wages.

How many young people will end up, unable to claim benefit, unable to reregister because of backdated Tax that will be due, effectively stateless in their own country?

What if you're unlucky enough to stay on in education? Full time students will only pay 20% of the Tax; but again, any addition to student grants will suffer from the same inconsistencies as the benefit additions.

There will be problems defining full-time students; and problems for the students themselves in working out where to register for the Tax.

If grants are abolished, how an extra "Poll Tax" element will be added to the loans scheme is a mystery.

How will Councils know who to rebate? Already there is talk of a special Poll Tax ID Card for students. How long will it be before all young people will need to carry ID cards permanently?

Strathclyde

Poll Tax expulsions

By Gordon Morgan Central CLP

The Poll Tax has created disarray within Glasgow's Labour Group.

Six Councillors were suspended from the Group for refusing to vote to set the Poll Tax figure.

Days later the Group Leader and two other Executive members temporarily resigned over whether there should be a free vote on refusal to supply Council rent and tenancy information to the Registration Officer.

The Council has a policy of non-co-operation with the Poll Tax. This non-co-operation does not appear to cover administration of rebates or setting Poll Tax levels. Whether it covers supply of information remains to be seen.

Meanwhile, Labour's constitutional committee has expelled at least three *Militant* supporters in Cumbernauld Constituency with a probable ten in Cathcart and 25 in Pollok to follow.

The major spur which led to bringing charges in so many Glasgow constituencies is *Militant* activity over the Poll Tax, particularly through the Strathclyde anti-Poll Tax federation (SAPTF).

The SAPTF encompasses many of the community based Anti-Poll Tax Groups. Its major campaigns are for mass non-payment and amongst workers for non-collection.

In a major development, a Scottish wide Federation was set up on March 4th to build for non-payment. A demonstration for non-payment has been called for Saturday March 18th, in Glasgow.

This should help relaunch the campaign and should be supported by all Scots supporting non-payment — at least 3,000 from England and Wales are expected.

On April 1st, to mark the official start of Poll Tax Bills, the STUC has called a mass demonstration in Edinburgh.

Poll Tax Truths

Did you know?



There are at least 50 highly personal questions Poll Tax officers can legally ask in order to compile their registers.

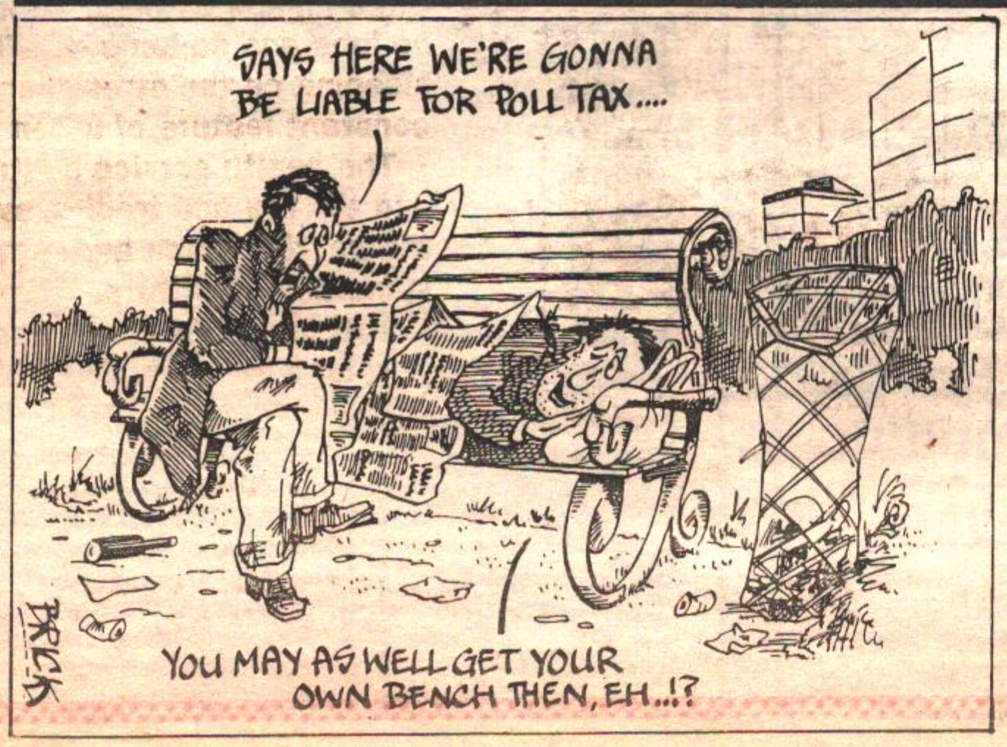
Samples include:

- What is your relationship to any person who provides you with money to live on?
- Are you of a different sex and married or living together as husband and wife?
- If your spouse or partner has left you, does he or she have a job?
- Are you of arrested or incomplete development of mind?
- Have you had an injury to your brain causing permanent severe impairment of intelligence and social functioning?
- Are you a member of a religious community involved in prayer, contemplation, relief of suffering or education?
- Are you under threat of violence?
- If so, from whom?

The Association of Metropolitan Authorities has compiled these and other permissable questions in the light of the Local Government Finance Act 1988, draft regulations, and the Poll Tax Practice Notes being issued by the Department of the Environment.

Taken from Poll Tax Focus, published by the LGIU.

Poll Tax Guide



The Local Government Information Unit has produced a useful *Guide to the Poll Tax*. It examines in detail how the new system will work and its effects on local Councils, businesses, women, youth, disabled people, and other sections of the community.

Price £5 (including P&P) from LGIU, 1-5 Bath Street, London EC1V 9QQ.