LABOUR
BRIEFING
40p FORTNIGHTLY
NO. 92 NOV 8~14 1989

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40p

Tories in crisis:

LABOUR: WAKE UP!



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

The government is in its worst crisis for ten years.

Lawson's resignation has stripped the Tories of confidence and exposed the reality of Thatcher's regime — a weak government presiding over a chronic economic crisis.

Despite ten years of bitter attacks on the working class, the Tories remain unable to solve the profound dilemmas of British capitalism.

These dilemmas are much deeper than the political problem of Thatcher's authoritarian "style".

The ongoing destruction of manufacturing industry under Thatcher has led to a drastic trade deficit. The only Tory response is austerity policies — in this case, high interest rates — to defend the level of the pound.

That means an economic attack not only on the working class but also on crucial sections of Thatcher's own political base — resulting in looming electoral disaster for the Tories.

The only immediate way out would be to join the Exchange Rate Mechanism of the European Monetary System. This would in effect tie Britain's exchange rate to the Deutschmark — and allow the Tories to lower interest rates.

But Thatcher refuses to make any real moves towards this alternative.

To her it would mean an end to Britain's great power pretensions, a loss of political and diplomatic influence, and a weakening of the role of sterling as a major trading currency.

Thatcher prefers to maintain an "Atlantacist" posture, with Britain as a half-way station between Europe and the USA.

By the *Labour Briefing* Editorial Board

But Thatcher is now isolated on the question of Europe, especially at Cabinet level. This is re-enforced by her growing unpopularity — due to her close personal association with the Poll Tax, NHS cuts, and attacks on democratic rights.

The Tories know they may well lose the next General Election with Thatcher as leader. But they also know that any upheaval which would force her out would have highly unpredictable political consequences.

So, despite Lawson, Howe, Heseltine, and even Tebbit putting in the knife, the Tories seem stuck with Thatcher — and Labour has a real chance to form the next government.

But there lies the rub. While delighting at the Tories' disarray, the Labour leadership proposes virtually no alternative policies.

A Labour government under Kinnock, guided by the sub-Thatcherism of the Policy Review, would attempt to manage the economic crisis on a capitalist basis — and that could only mean more austerity and more attacks on the working class.

A Kinnock government would not simply be a re-run of the Callaghan and Wilson governments — it would be even worse.

Many in the labour movement have given reluctant support to Kinnock and the New Realist union leaders in the belief that only they offer a realistic hope of getting rid of Thatcher.

They also believe that a Labour government will bring in policies radically different from Thatcher's. They are bound to be bitterly disappointed.

The left needs to prepare now for the political upheavals which will certainly follow. That means the long slog to rebuild the left in the Labour Party and the unions.

The tragedy of the present situation is that at the very moment of Thatcherism's open bankruptcy, our leaders offer only a pale imitation of Thatcherism as an alternative.

A real socialist alternative must be built from the ground up if the post-Thatcher period is not to witness yet more setbacks for the working class.

TONY BENN SAYS:

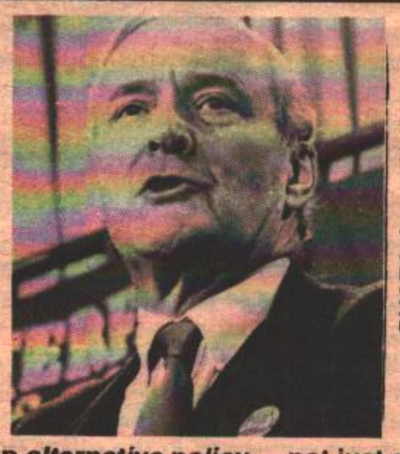


PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

The government's economic policy has failed and the Chancellor has quit.

The EMS is the latest attempt by the British establishment to shoehorn us into total subordination to the EC — before any possible change of government. The EMS would block any action taken by a Labour government to remedy our deep economic crisis.

The Tory establishment has turned against Thatcher not because she is authoritarian but because she is anti-Europe — for nationalistic reasons which no socialist can share. They now fear that Thatcher could lose them the next general election and they want a post-Thatcher Tory to save them.

In response, the labour movement must explain that the Thatcher myth — as promoted in *The Guardian* and *Marxism Today* — is an illusion, that it is not the personality but the policies that have failed.

Those who live by market forces shall die by market forces. What is important now is an *alternative policy* — not just an alternative Prime Minister. Those people who expect Labour to defend their interests want us to pursue a different policy — not just manage the old one better.

There is a great audience waiting to hear our socialist alternatives to the Thatcher debacle. We have to address them seriously if we are to win a genuine mandate for what needs to be done.

Editorial: *See Page 3*

Behind the Thatcher-Lawson Split: THE EMS BUST-UP

See Page 5

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, PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY.
Please send letters for the next issue to arrive by Wednesday, Nov. 15th if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

Briefing unites with *The Guardian*?

Dear *Briefing*,

At this year's Conference, through the GMB resolution and the "consultation" document, the ground was prepared for an attack on conference sovereignty.

Alongside this an attempt is being made to undermine the block vote. John Edmonds described the block vote system as "corrupt" and "outdated".

Over the next year all the forces on the left need to give top priority to defending both Conference sovereignty and the block vote. The Tories and those hostile to the labour movement have always decried the influence the trade unions have within the Party.

This is because this has been its historic strength. The Labour Party is the political arm of the mass organisations that were developed to defend working class interests.

It is also important to understand that the bedrock of the movement is collectivism. Making decisions collectively, coming to a decision by a majority vote and then all standing behind it. Strikes are just one obvious example of this.

But apparently some sections of *Briefing* believe that they can somehow defend the block vote by breaking it up and allowing, say, the TGWU to deliver a percentage of their votes for unilateralism and a percentage of their votes for multilateralism.

Not only is this very bizarre proposal one that has been floated many times by *Guardian* leader writers, and other spokespeople for the liberal bourgeoisie, but it would be impractical and above all it would destroy collective decision-making, the historic strength of the movement within a hostile capitalist environment.

This very dangerous idea will make little headway in the unions, but it will mean that our campaign against the right will be weakened because some of those on our side will have gone off at a tangent, as they did over PR.

Of course we must democratise the decision-making processes withing each union, but to undermine the collectivist tradition can only help the enemy.

Pete Willsman,
CLPD

THE SOCIALIST MOVEMENT

Tortoise creeps out of bag

Dear *Briefing*,

John Wilton (letters, *Brieifng* No. 91) has turned magician and conjured — rather than "let" — the cat out of the bag. And like all magicians, he used a somewhat tawdry technique and quotes only part of our argument.

Yes, we do see the Socialist Movement as preparing the way for a socialist party. "But," we add, "it will be doing so in circumstances not of its own choosing.

"Consequently, it is impossible to predict the mechanism by which such a party will come into being — in what relation to internal developments in, or transformations of, the Labour Party, the Greens, and other left organisations; nor is it wise to make political judgements on the basis of such predictions."

A tortoise perhaps, but certainly not a "cat".

As to encouraging comrades to leave the Labour Party: I and other Socialist Society activists in the Socialist Movement spend much time arguing at public meetings with Labour Party members on the verge of leaving the Party that they should stay in and join the Socialist Movement.

As for proportional representation, one of the Socialist Movement's strengths is that it includes members of the Green Party as well as members of the Labour Party.

Surely it is not unprincipled to question an electoral system which prevents such an electorally significant minority from having Parliamentary representation.

Briefing readers should study our pamphlet, *Negotiating the Rapids*, for themselves.

Yours,
Hilary Wainwright,
Socialist Society

Hint, hint

Dear *Briefing*,

Congratulations on your dynamic Conference efforts against the stream, especially with your printing difficulties — truly published in the traditions of the original *ISKRA*!

Enclosed is a donation — my winnings on the *Briefing* 500 Club a few weeks back, plus a donation.

Keep fighting and printing.

***Phil Chambers*,**
Surrey

Vaz passes the baton

Whoever said that politics and sport don't mix must have been thinking of Keith Vaz's Early Day Motion pressing for Baton Twirling to be included in the Olympic games.

Being lobbied by battalions of mincing majorettes marching in formation must be quite a frightening experience.

At least, compared to his antics over the Rushdie affair, this latest intervention by Vaz in the business of the House is relatively harmless. Unless we're all forced to watch the result on telly in 1992.

Rats

The rat population in the UK has increased by 20% in 1989 alone, according to the Institute of Environmental Health Officers. Rentokil puts the increase even higher — at 50%.

And they haven't even been to the Parliamentary Labour Party yet!

Twenty-forty vision?

Ealing Council switchboard has been out of action for over a week, due to "unpleasant odours" in the switchboard room which has provoked a walk-out by telephonists.

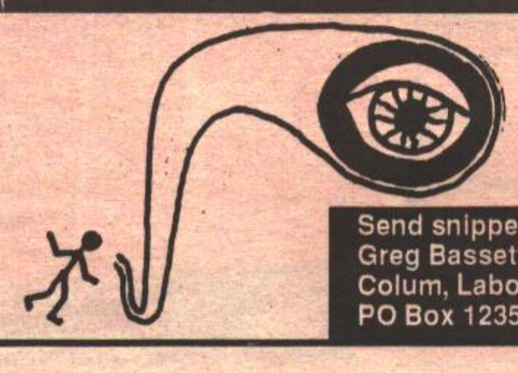
Public outrage, however, has been surprisingly muted.

This could be related to a recent survey in the Local Authority "trade" paper "Governing London" which put Ealing bottom of its league table of London Councils for answering the telephone — up to twenty minutes (largely as a result of under-staffing).

But the Ealing punters will be comforted to know that a "partial service" is to be re-established very soon.

Now we can expect Ealing to take forty minutes not to answer the phone, rather than twenty...

PERISCOPE



Send snippets and info to:
Greg Bassett, Periscope Colum, Labour Briefing,
PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY.

Macnamara Misdemeanour

Hot on the heels of his poorly-received performance in Brighton, Kevin Macnamara, Labour spokesperson on Ireland, has denounced Tory minister Peter Brooke for being "soft" on the IRA.

Brooke suggested that a British government might consider talking with the IRA if the IRA "renounced violence".

Macanamara must've missed it, but Brooke's attempted propganda ploy was clearly inspired by PW Botha's guff about the ANC having to "renounce violence" before he would talk to it.

Thus a golden opportunity to highlight the similarities between British and South African state repression — and resistance to it — was squandered by our "more British than thou" front bench.

It must leave punters wondering just what Labour's policy *is* on Ireland. Perpetual warfare and state terror in pursuit of "unity by consent"?

Right in the Chair

Hackney South GCs are getting to be lively affairs these days, as the controlling right-wing grouping desperately try to arrest the gradual shift back to the left.

Last month's meeting spent over an hour debating the delegature of ex-Councillor and *Militant* supporter John Bloom — a debate which almost exclusively involved John Bloom and the GC chair, David Manion, trying to shout each other down.

Indeed, the debate got so lively that the RCP, meeting in the next room, had to complain about the noise.

Needless to say, the GC eventually voted to accept John Bloom's delegature. It seems if the right want to retain control of the GC, they'll have to get a louder chair.

Going to the (Revolutionary Communist) Party

Interesting facts in the October 20th issue of the *Newsagent* (trade mag for the people who sell everything but *Labour Briefing*).

An article on political magazines includes the following:

"Technically *Marxism Today* is the



Sucking up to Rajiv

A resolution condemning human rights abuses in India and calling on Labour to help "mediate" in the dispute between the Indian government and the Sikh population was kept off the Labour Conference final agenda.

This came after pressure from Indian government emmissaries, according to *India Abroad*, published weekly for the Indian overseas community.

Representatives of Rajiv Gandhi's administration took umbrage at the mildly worded resolution (submitted by Reading East CLP).

They reminded Labour of its long history of friendly relations with India and with various Congress regimes — and its own 'theoretical and discussion journal of the Communist Party', but Mark Perriman, *MT's* circulation manager, told *Newsagent* 'the only Marxist aspect of the magazine is its title'."

At least Mark is honest and when he reports *MT's* circulation as 15,000 he can be believed.

Not so one Suke Carey, marketing manager for the RCP's *Living Marxism*, who claims a circulation of 20,000 — one third of it on subscription.

Newsagent, clearly unaware of the nature and track record of the RCP, prints this wildly improbable boast with the typograpical equivalent of a straight face.

Of course if you believe that *LM* sales are well over half as large as *New Statesman and Society* sales or equal to the combined sales of *New Socialist*, *Tribune* and *Labour Briefing*, then you should also belive Ms Carey when she says *Living Marxism* "isn't exclusively a Party magazine".

Of course, you've got to give them credit for trying. With their "It's Offensive" posters all over London the Revolutionary Communist Party-goers are certainly pulling out all the stops in their one-sided circulation war.

However this is clearly at the cost of abandoning anything remotely resembling political activity.

RCPists were last seen flogging *Living Marxism* outside the late night show at London's Screen on the Hill cinema in Belsize Park, a hitherto unkown class struggle hotspot.

policy of pursuing the "fight against terrorism" as vigorously as possible.

The NEC will now consider the resolution at its leisure — no doubt with the fraternal assistance of the Indian High Commission in London.

Whatever people make of the ideology and methods of Kalisthani separatists, there can be no doubt that the Indian state is guilty of numerous violations of civil rights in the Punjab and elsewhere.

Let's not forget Labour's abysmal record during Indira Gandhi's brutal "Emergency" of the mid-70s, when "civil libertarian" Michael Foot went around the country defending the Nehru dynasty as it gaoled tens of thousands of trade unionists and other political opponents.

Contact Briefing

Articles and correspondence should be sent to Labour Briefing, PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY; as should payment for invoices (including subscriptions) and money for paper sales in the "London" area.

Payment for paper sales outside the "London" area (i.e. papers sent on the train and national-only papers sent by post) should be sent to 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB.

You can telephone Briefing on 01-809 3927.

That was the good news. The mildly bad news is that we apologise for there being no London supplement this issue. This was due to our changeover in staff in the office. Thanks to the extra volunteers who have helped this issue, particularly those who were learning new skills ready to take on more work in the future!

If you missed our AGM, you may not have heard that some of our office staff are moving on. If you have any skills we could use in the office (touch typing, numeracy, manual dexterity, an ability to be polite to Graham Bash on the telephone) please call us — we could use you!

Next issues:
No. 93: Deadline for articles 14/11; distribution 22/11.
No. 94: Deadline for articles 28/11; distribution 6/12.
No. 94 will be the last issue before the Xmas break.

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

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Tory adversity — our opportunity

"The adversity of the capitalist class," wrote Clydeside revolutionary John McLean, "is the opportunity of the working class."

His words have special resonance now, as Lawson's resignation marks the biggest turning-point in British politics since the defeat of the miners in 1985.

It brings into the open a simmering crisis in the leading circles of the Tory Party.

As the "Thatcher factor" goes from being an asset to a liability, attempts to rein in the Prime Minister's worst excesses are being made from the very heart of her government.

But in the long term the economic problems underlying this crisis will cause most trouble for the Tories.

The profound weakness of British capital — and of British manufacturing in particular — will mean a continuing trade deficit and a weak pound for the foreseeable future.

While an emerging majority in the ruling class see the only answer as further British committment to Europe (and the EMS in particular), Thatcher prefers to raise interest rates.

Her problem is that escalating mortgages are already alienating voters from the "party of home ownership". As the polls go from bad to worse, backbench (and cabinet) pressure on Thatcher will increase — they will tell her to change course, or even to go.

The Tories have been through mid-term slumps before — notably in 1985, in the midst of the Westland affair, which was also, at root, about a split in Tory ranks over Europe.

That was compounded by the aftermath of the miners' strike, when Thatcher's ruthless attacks on democratic rights had alienated many former Tory voters.

This time around, things are likely to get worse instead of better for the Tories. Their own "Third Term" policy offensive — Poll Tax, NHS, education — coupled with continuing economic failure, means they are in for a long, rough ride.

Oppositions don't win elections, we're told, governments lose them. If that's really true, it's just as well, because Labour's response to the crisis has been feeble.

Attacking Thatcher's "style of government", backing Lawson against her, and championing the EMS and other EC institutions as sterling's salvation will only help pave the way for a post-Thatcher Tory PM — and in the meantime exposes the emptiness of Labour's own economic strategy.

Now is the time for a major offensive against the Tories on all fronts: on Poll Tax, the NHS, water privatisation, etc. The unions must move decisively against the employers for better wages and conditions. The fight for the 35-hour week must be spread.

Above all, the Tory crisis and the real prospect of a Labour government make the need for an alternative socialist economic policy more urgent than ever.

Without that, we will end up as an adjunct to one side or other of the Tory split — and will squander this moment of opportunity.

Labour Briefing: rebuilding the left

The following is an edited version of the main political resolution passed at this year's ***Labour Briefing*** AGM.

The closing months of 1989 find the ruling class in the throes of its worst political crisis for many years.

Meanwhile, outraged by Tory attacks on living standards and democratic rights, alarmed by the deteriorating economic situation, and buoyed by the prospect of a Labour victory in the next general election, the working class is rediscovering, albeit slowly and unevenly, its self-confidence and capacity to fight back.

However, the labour movement, hamstrung by New Realism in both the unions and the Labour Party, has been unable to exploit the crisis and go on the offensive.

In the Labour Party, the crisis of the left is severe.

It is seen in the adoption of the Policy Review, the strengthening of the Kinnock regime, the threat of the Edmonds' proposals, and the decline of activism at the base of the Party. The reactionary and anti-trade union character of the next Labour government is becoming more and more clear.

In this contradictory situation, it is more vital than ever to retain and rebuild a socialist presence at all levels of the Labour Party and the trade unions.

Difficult as the short-term prospects may be, the escalating crisis of the Tories, the inability of the New Realist leadership to provide an answer to it, and the approach and likely consequences of the general election will offer new opportunities and challenges for the left.

If the left is to take advantage of these it must recommit itself to working for a Labour victory and to long-term activity at the base of the Labour Party, the unions, and campaigns.

The Labour left must be re-built from bottom up, on a grass-roots, democratic basis.

It must develop a broader socialist political agenda, strongly emphasising internationalism and anti-imperialism and the struggles waged by trade unions, women, black people, lesbians and gay men, people with disabilities and others against specific forms of oppression.

It must set out new and far-reaching proposals on Labour Party and trade union democracy. It must maintain a visible and public opposition to the Party's current policies and leadership.

It must actively forge links with a wide range of struggles outside the Party, notably the campaign against the Poll Tax. It must bring forward socialist strategies for dealing with the crisis of the environment.

Above all, it must undertake the serious work of building unity with socialists in the trade unions and bringing their struggles into the Labour Party.

Towards this end, we believe the Socialist Movement offers an excellent vehicle for the renewal and reorganisation of the Labour and trade union left.

In particular, we strongly support the forthcoming Socialist Movement Trade Union Conference and the formation of Labour Party Socialists as an organising focus for Party members who support the Socialist Movement.

Behind the headlines

Westminster fortnight...

Roll on TV!

It was an amazing fortnight at Westminster.

The Guildford Four were imprisoned by anti-Irish bigotry, press hysteria, and the PTA.

Their case has been greeted with embarrased silence by the meritocrats of Kinnock's front bench and guffaws and abuse from the Tories; even getting signatures for undebatable motions has been hard.

After scenes of total joy outside the Old Bailey, I rushed back to Parliament and desperately phoned the High Court in Belfast to ensure they were ready to receive an application for a further appeal from Paul Hill. That done, we awaited victory.

Douglas Hurd at the dispatch box mumbled his way through a statement informing the House of what it already knew (that the four were innocent), evaded the crucial technicalities of the terms of reference of the May Inquiry, and sat down.

No word of apology, concern, or compassion for an aggregate sixty years of imprisonment and near silence from the stockbrokers, barristers, and used car salesmen behind him. Those who did give tongue could only lamely claim that the whole process was a victory for British justice. The hangers remained hangers.

The scene downstairs in the Jubilee Room where we were holding a press conference for the families was a little different: over 100 journalists vying with cameras and supporters for space in a room for 50. The combination of press questions and continuous cheering gave the families the boost they deserved.

By JEREMY CORBYN MP

Thursday looked a dull day; the intracacies of Company Law fascinated only the money lenders and Company Directors. Out of duty I went to the Parliamentary Labour Party evening meeting. Like most PLP meetings it cannot take decisions and we are there only to receive our "whipping" for the following week.

Stan Orme opened with an off-the-cuff statement that he had heard Lawson had resigned but was having it checked. Amid laughter and disbelief the meeting began — and then we found it was true!

The House was a forest of points of order. The government whips were non-plussed. For once, Tory efficiency had collapsed. Eventually the Speaker suspended the sitting for ten minutes to allow the "usual channels" to meet.

This is a euphemism for the shabby little chats that go on behind the Speaker's Chair or in a mysterious committee room so that governments govern and oppositions oppose — within limits.

Finally, at 8pm a po-faced Sir Geoffrey Howe levered himself to the dispatch box to tell the world what everyone knew.

Lawson had gone. Hurd had become Foreign Secretary, (an expression on his face like one reprieved from hanging). Major had become Chancellor (a supercilious smile from one who knew he would always get the prize). Everything else was normal.

There was not a word about the country houses that were such a feature of the July "reshuffle" plot.

Howe looked sad; gone forever were the beize tables of the world's capitals and first class hotels. He was reduced to reading the business for next week — like being demoted from anchoring *Panorama* to Radio One News.

Due to having to answer business questions from 3.30 until 4.30 every Thursday he missed the key plotting time and couldn't pursue his own ends.

Lawson

Lawson then put the boot in and told an incredulous House full of Tories (more prayed that day for seats than since the dramas of 1979) and noisy Labour MPs that the Prime Minister didn't really believe in Cabinet Government. As if we didn't know already.

The Tories in the tea room were talking in hushed whispers about "the PM" and her "problem".

When the big debate came on Tuesdy Smith and Major did their Party pieces about supply side economies and other mysteries studied at the LSE. But who made the real case?

"It is not Alka Seltzer the government is administering to the population of Britain and especially its workers; it is arsenic.

"I wish to approach the debate from a slightly different angle. I wish to interpret and concentrate on definition of 'economics' as 'the way society distributes its goods and benefits to the population'.

"I do not believe that it is morally defensible that there are beggers on the streets of Britain."

Well said, Dawn Primarolo, Campaign Group member and MP for Bristol South.

Roll on Television so that, with a bit of luck, Dennis Skinner, Tony Benn, Dawn Primarolo, and others who do not apologise for socialism or revel in the "club" will be seen and heard.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Dawn Primarolo MP addresses the Socialist Movement Conference in Chesterfield, October 1987. Now she is speaking out in parliament as the Campaign Group push Party policy.

Socialist Movement

The Socialist Movement after Brighton

The tame acceptance of the Policy Review by the Labour Conference in Brighton last October underlines the importance of the Socialist Movement, founded this June in Sheffield, at the third Socialist Conference.

For whatever merits the new-style Labour policies may have as a means of winning the next election (and that is highly questionable) no one could argue that they were in any way socialist in their analysis or their remedies.

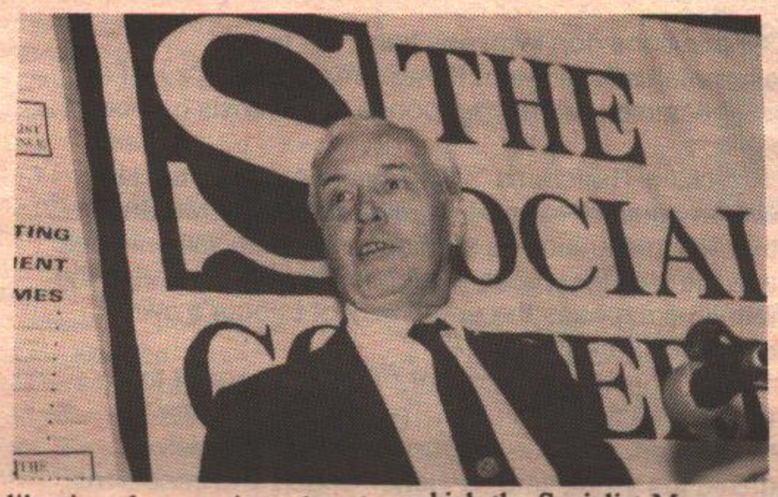
The most generous explanation of why these policies went through so easily was that delegates, and especially the general secretaries of the major trade unions, were afraid of saying, or doing, anything that might be interpreted as undermining the party leadership in the run up to polling day.

This argument does not, however, explain why, at the very moment when the Tories are rapidly losing public support because their policies are failing, Labour should be told that it must move towards those very policies in the apparent – and possibly vain – hope of winning the backing of the establishment, the media and the middle ground on the basis that we are now seen as safe, and hence will be electable.

By Tony Benn MP

It is not the socialists, or the left, who threaten this strategy, but the harsh and dangerous realities of Britain's present situation – economic, political, social and industrial.

Our economy is in deep trouble after a decade when market forces have been allowed to inflict terrible damage on our manufacturing base; when the public services and local government have been deliberately starved of the resources they need; when civil liberties, democratic and trade union rights have been systematically attacked; when the gap between rich and poor has widened sharply; when environmental issues have been ignored; and when Britain's deep-seated constitutional defects have been completely neglected.



These are some of the issues which the Socialist Movement has been addressing in its own Policy papers, and which are to be discussed again at future conferences.

For members of the Labour Party who despair at the vacuum of thinking that has opened up, this new Movement provides a real opportunity for thought, discussion and campaigning, and for those non-aligned socialists, feminists, greens, and others, links are being forged that can strengthen their work for some real transformation of society.

All this is happening at the very moment when many people are actually seeking out an alternative and we aim to provide that alternative.

***Reprinted from the Socialist Movement Newsletter No. 2 November/December. New newsletter out now, with details of all current initiatives, dates, etc., sent free to all Socialist Movement members and affiliates.**
To join the Socialist Movement write to The Socialist Movement, PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UT.

Anti-deportation

No more deportations!

Beatrice Offeh will stay!

Beatrice Offeh, a 25-year-old Ghanaian woman living in Lewisham, London, is threatened with deportation.

She has been living in this country for six years and has a 15-month old son, who was born here and whose father is a British citizen.

Although she no longer lives with the father she is in regular contact with him and his sister and mother continue to give Beatrice support in raising her son.

Since coming to this country Beatrice has built up a life here, working to support herself and her chid. She no longer has any family or any way of re-establishing herself in Ghana.

Beatrice is appealing against the decision to deport her, but the government has recently changed the law to limit the rights of people like Beatrice who entered the country less than seven years ago.

Unless we stop this deportation the Home Office will send Beatrice to a country where she knows no one and has no immediate means of supporting herself and her child.

The Home Office will thus prevent the child from seeing his father and separate him from the only family he has.

The fight for the right to live without threat of legal harassment or dpertation goes on.

Contact: Beatrice Offeh Defence Campaign, c/o LAP, 192 Evelyn Street, London SE8 5DB. Tel: 01-692 1308.

GUILDFORD 4 ARE FREE!
Celebration Social
Friday 24th November, 8pm
Haringey Irish Centre, Pretoria Road (off White Hart Lane), London N17
Admission: £3.50, £2 (concessions)
Disabled access & facilities
Organised by Haringey Irish Working Group

Labour Briefing AGM

"Watch my lips"

Expecting the worst — sectarian, unitelligible infighting — I went to the *Briefing* AGM and was pleasantly surprised!

Scheduled to begin at 11am we predictably got underway at 11.45am with an introduction from Gill Lee and a panel discussion featuring Graham Bash, Tessa van Gelderen, Mandy Moore, and Ken Livingstone.

Graham Bash spoke about the past year's events and the current political scene (*see abridged version of his speech, p.7*). Mandy Moore talked about the Socialist Movement and Tessa van Gelderen about the importance of trade union work.

Ken Livingstone dealt with Labour Party Conference and mentioned a discussion — presumably in a smoke-filled room — at the last Socialist Conference where various people had allegedly talked about "leaving the Labour Party".

Livingstone's contribution rather dominated the morning debate. How many times do we need to say we are *not* leaving the Party? In the words of one comrade, "watch my lips".

It's funny, but until Saturday the idea of leaving the Labour Party hadn't even crossed my mind. So being accused of this particular "thought crime" was a novel experience. Anyhow, enough of Ken.

The afternoon kicked off with various international reports on Ireland, Namibia, Palestine, and Iran.

By Rhoda Mathews Brighton Kemptown CLP

Unfortunately only 40 minutes were given to this session — and they were dominated by discussion of the recent allegations of human rights abuses by SWAPO.

On to the workshops — on the Labour Party, local government, trades unions, and the environment. The local government workshop was the largest and, I hear, very useful.

I went to the Labour Party one and found it quite interesting, although it seemed to swing wildly from national politics to specific London wards — not entirely gripping when you live outside London.

After an hour we all came back to discuss and vote on the main political resolution (with various amendments) and a resolution on local government calling on *Briefing* supporters not to stand in Council elections.

Mercifully

Mercifully, the debate on the main resolution was brief and to the point and it was accepted overwhelmingly.

The second resolution needed and had more discussion.

I felt that the debate really did help clarify the issues around local government with contributions ranging from the need to oppose Tory legislation to fears of where *Briefing* would get its copy if we did pull out!

The resolution was rejected by a large majority — albeit in a very comradely spirit.

By this time it was past 5pm so a "Rally for Socialism" with Reg Race, Mandy Mudd, and Jeremy Corbyn was necessarily brief but nevertheless encouraging. I left feeling reasonably positive!

Overall, the day was pretty good. The discussion was informative and the atmosphere remarkably unintimidating and positively comradely.

My only real gripe is how late it was in starting and therefore ending. Bear in mind that some of us have a one and a half hour journey home — or even more. So finishing an hour late was a real pain!

Other than that I enjoyed the day. People didn't seem as gloomy as I'd expected so soon after "our" Conference.

It seems to have had the reverse effect, making many people on the left more determined than ever to win the Labour Party to socialism and achieve a socialist Labour victory.



PHOTO: Terry Conway

At our AGM, Briefing supporters end the day with communal exercises, on the Japanese "team" lines, preparing ourselves for the challenges ahead. Who can fail to quake in their boots before this?

Behind the Lawson-Thatcher split

The EMS bust-up

Thatcher and Lawson split over how, when, and possibly even whether to join the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) of the European Monetary System.

The seriousness of the disagreement is partly due to the ever-worsening state of the British economy.

This has made all decisions on economic policy much more acute and critical. It was bound to bring out submerged differences within the government and the ruling class.

The EMS debate is partly tactical, concerning the level of interest rates and of the pound in the next two years or so. It is partly to do with *political* strategies towards Europe and the USA.

But it also involves profound long term *economic contradictions* for both the British and international capitalist class.

Two major problems are involved: a general dilemma of whether and how to manage exchange rates and the particular question of Europe and the EMS. We'll look at these in turn.

By Jamie Gough
Holborn and St Pancras CLP



Is Thatcher still in the driving seat?

Do they sincerely believe in markets?

The direct issue surrounding ERM membership is:

•should the value of the pound (the "exchange rate") be held by government intervention at a more-or-less fixed value against the other West European currencies?

•or should it be allowed to "float" at a level determined directly by the currency markets and indirectly by government action in those markets and through use of mechanisms such as interest rates?

From the point of view of international capital, there are both advantages and problems in either fixed or floating exchange rates. We can understand these contradictions by looking at the history of exchange rate systems since the Second World War.

At the Bretton Woods conference in 1944, the major capitalist powers agreed a system of fixed exchange rates. Each currency was pegged against the dollar, which was itself pegged against gold.

Currencies were of course adjusted in value from time to time — for example, Britain's major devaluation in 1967. But most of the time firms could be confident about the future level of currencies.

This had obvious advantages in planning international trade and the location of productive investment.

The system of fixed exchange rates was thus a major factor in the enormous increase in world trade and in productive investment that took place during the postwar boom and indeed partly fuelled it.

In 1971 the system came unstuck — partly because the level of currencies is determined in the long term by levels of labour productivity in the different countries.

Growth of productivity in the US and Britain was consistently much lower than in Japan and West Germany, which put constant strain on fixed exchange rates.

The problem was also partly one of renewed world inflation and the different inflation rates in different countries. Inflation was itself another sign that currencies had got out of touch with production.

The new system of floating exchange rates which started in 1971 tended to disrupt international trade and production.

But it had advantages. *Market rates tend to make the level of the currencies correspond more closely to the real conditions of production in each country.*

They thereby exert "discipline" on both firms and governments.

They prevent governments from maintaining exchange rates too high (thereby damaging domestic industry), and they prevent governments from keeping the currency too low (and thus feather-bedding industry).

Floating exchange rates therefore formed a part of the international bourgeoisie's strategy of disciplining both the state and the firms, of forcing currencies and money into line with real values.

But it wasn't so simple.

In capitalist societies, money is not only a *measure of values produced.* It is also, in the form of money capital, *a means of storing value and of accumulating value as interest.*

Floating exchange rates brought money capital into play in new ways.

•First, the "real" market rates were disrupted by enormously increased *speculation* in currencies.

•Second, governments had a new freedom to manipulate currency levels, especially through *interest rates*, with the aim of *competitively* reducing inflation.

For example, for the last few years the British government has pushed up the level of sterling in order to try to reduce inflation *relative* to other countries.

Third, some governments — notably the USA — continued to *borrow money* to finance trade or budget deficits, thus again indirectly distorting the level of the currency.

Floating exchange rates have thus tended to produce *greater* instability. The end result of these contrary tendencies has been international currency chaos.

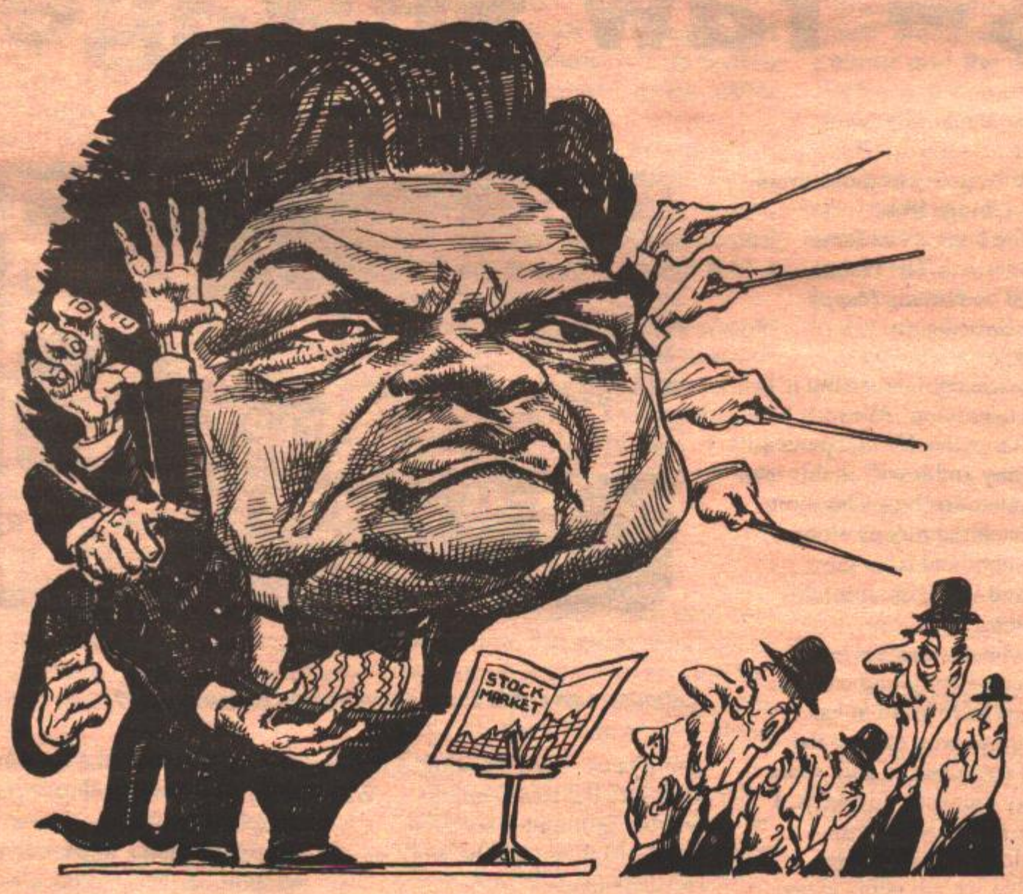
Instead of currencies reflecting long term real productivity levels, they have gone up and down like yoyos. Money as a store of value has contradicted money as a measure of value produced.

Over the last few years the international capitalist class has attempted to combat currency instability through agreements between central banks on targets for the major exchange rates.

These attempts have had very little effect, partly because of the different — and competitive — interests of each of the participating countries.

The contradictory pressures can be seen in Britain.

The British government has been able to use the floating pound to combat inflation. Yet this has been at the expense of planned trade and investment and has distorted money capital markets by pushing up interest rates.



Nigel's days as conductor are over

Do they sincerely believe in Europe?

When British capital is involved in production and trade with Europe, it has an interest in the pound being fixed against European currencies.

But when British capital takes a money form, it can benefit from floating exchange rates.

For production and trade, a currency level corresponding to real British productivity levels is appropriate. But British money capital, in contrast, benefits from as high a pound as possible.

These pressures create dilemmas for the *whole* of British capital, not simply a fight between the banks and the "industrial" corporations.

Joining the ERM is supported by sections of British capital whose strategy centres on European production and trade.

But the ERM is now, more surprisingly, also supported by many "monetarists", including Lawson, Howe, *The Economist*, and the *Financial Times*.

One reason for this is that the monetarist fetish (using the *money supply* to discipline the economy) has proved a total failure. Its supporters now believe that a fixed *exchange rate* will perform this function.

They see fluctuating exchange rates as the result of undisciplined, abitrary government action.

In contrast, a fixed value of the pound, underwritten by the West German Central Bank, would stop governments engineering consumer booms leading to massive balance of payments deficits, like we've had in Britain since 1986.

They would also prevent any government — particularly a Labour one — from devaluing in order to "featherbed" industry.

In other words, monetarist supporters of the ERM see it as a way of fixing the currency at the real level of British productivity, neither higher nor lower — what the floating rate was supposed but failed to do.

ERM supporters think that Britain's improved productivity growth since 1982, compared with the rest of Europe, will make it easier to keep the pound at a fixed value.

Even if downward pressure comes on the pound in the next few years (which seems likely), these monetarists argue, with justification, that it is easier to steady the pound at a "fixed" value (using ERM) than at a floating value — thus allowing lower interest rates.

This is why some "monetarists", supposedly free marketeers, have come to support heavy state intervention in currency markets in the form of the ERM.

It is tempting for the British labour movement to jump onto the ERM bandwagon. After all, isn't it associated with planning of production and trade (by firms)? Isn't it against currency market speculation?

But it is futile for labour to support the productive role of capital against the money form of capital. The two are absolutely inseparable.

All capital always *flows between* production and money. It *is* both. Support for "productive capital" is support for capital full stop.

Labour Party

Reply to Ken Livingstone

Learning from whose mistakes?

In a *Tribune* article entitled "Learning from the Campaign Group's Mistakes" Ken Livingstone sets out his current strategy for the Labour Left.

He amplified some of the points made in the article at the recent *Briefing* AGM — and was strongly criticised from the floor.

By Mike Marqusee
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

Livingstone's strategy can be crudely summarised: no public dissent from the left, no challenge to the leadership, dump the Socialist Movement, and build bridges to the "soft left".

He points out the discrepency between left successes on policy (defence spending, black organisation, quotas for women — mysteriously lesbian and gay equality is ommitted) and defeat on the NEC.

He concludes: "the Party did not disagree with the policies fought for, but it disagrees with some aspects of the way they are being raised."

But the approval of the Policy Review was a bigger setback even than the NEC elections — where we lost Livingstone (a major reverse) but nothing else.

And how much weight will our victory on defence spending really carry? Support from NUPE and other unions was an easy way to mollify members over the more significant embrace of nuclear weapons.

The Campaign Group did a fine job raising Party policy on defence cuts in the House, but Martin O'Neill's reply (see article) makes it clear that the leadership feels under no pressure whatsoever on this issue. The NEC will simply ignore it.

Nonetheless, Livingstone is right to highlight the contradiction between support for left policies and loyalty to the leadership. Our object should be to explain and demonstrate to Party members that these policies can only be advanced by a change in the leadership.

The Party is afraid to criticise Kinnock. If the left succombs to this malaise it will simply reinforce it.

If we follow Ken's course, we will find that no matter what support we mobilise for our policies at the base of the movement, the leadership will feel free to disregard it because its own positions would not be under threat.

Livingstone goes on to identify as one of the left's key mistakes its public profile, in particular his own willingness to be interviewed on the steps of Walworth Road after NEC meetings.

"The membership," he says, "does not want these differences aired in the media ... In future the left must develop its own means of communicating its views to the membership rather than relying on the media."

Amen to the last bit!

The problem here is that for the forseeable future most Labour Party members will continue to rely on the media.

For all our efforts, *Labour Briefing*, *Campaign Group News*, *Militant*, etc., will not even come close to filling the gap.

Moreover, these publications themselves are scrutinised by the mainstream media — criticism of the leadership cannot be kept out of the media unless it is abandoned altogether.

More importantly, without a clearly defined public profile the Labour left will find itself increasingly isolated.

People joined the Party in 79-81 because they were attracted by the struggle the left was then waging — in a highly public manner — within the Party.

The current message from the leadership is that they've got everything under control and the left is dead.

We have to say loud and clear that we're here and we have a serious political agenda for which we intend to fight at every available opportunity.

Because our agenda does come closer to meeting the real needs of Labour supporters, for instance on the Poll Tax, we will find an audience — but only if we're broadcasting.

Any strategy that relies exclusively on the existing Party membership (as opposed to its potential membership) is doomed. The Edmonds' proposals will only compound the difficulty. We could win policy votes at the base but there will be no means for them to be expressed at national level.

Ken also underestimates the extent of the Party's organisational decay. Too many of the existing structures are dead or dying. Too few rank and file members play any role in the Party at all.

Without fresh blood we will make no progress at all and will lose what base we have left.

Linvingstone's alternative is an alliance with the "soft left". He criticises the Benn-Heffer leadership challenge for "pushing the right wing and the soft left together".

But just what is this "soft left"? Its main features are uncritical support for the leadership and unremitting hostility to the left.

While we can certainly work with individuals on specific issues — and shouldn't turn our noses up at any opportunity to do so — we should recognise the essential role played by this group in shifting the Party to the right in recent years.

They are now far too closely tied to the fate of the leadership and too integrated into the Party bureaucracy to mount a serious challenge on any issue, let alone a central one like unilateralism.

The two key organisational foci for the "soft left" (soft? left?) are the Tribune Group and the LCC.

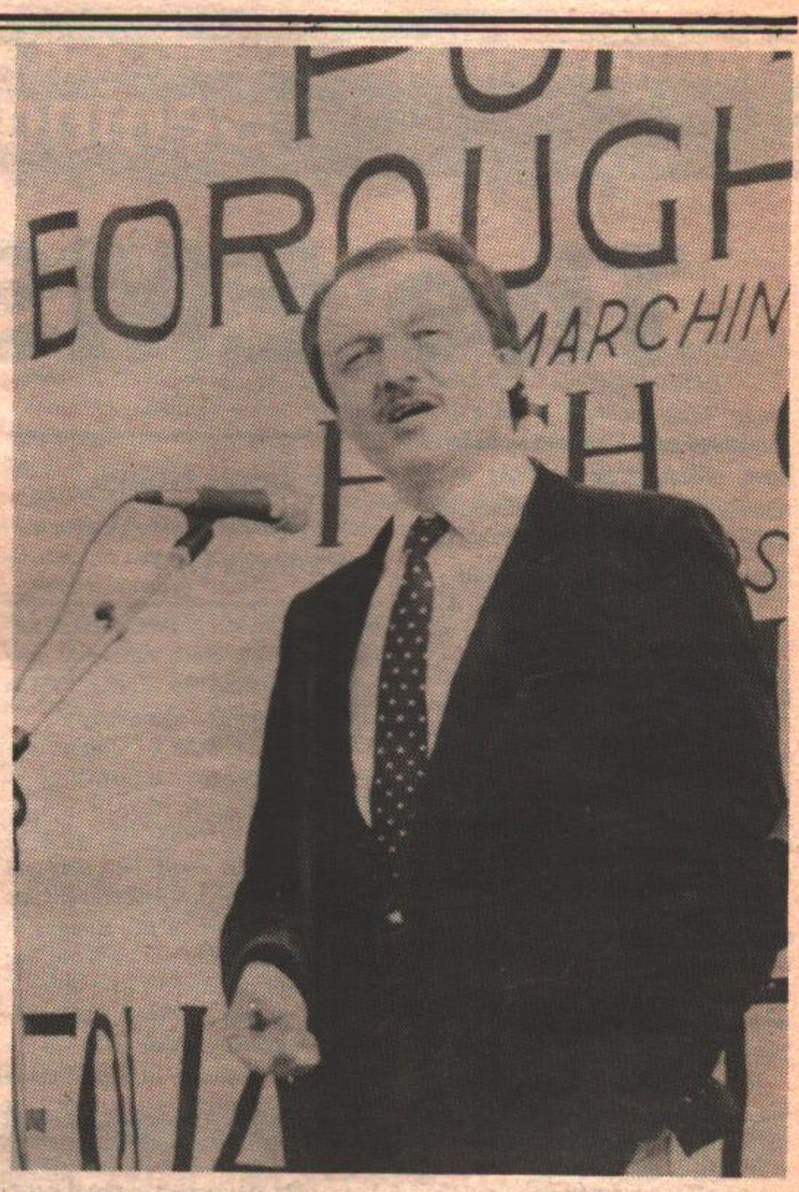
Both are small caucuses of careerists who have no interest whatsoever in responding positively to Livingstone's overtures. Now that he has been booted off the NEC, they have other horses to back.

The left vote for the NEC in 1988 — the year of the leadership challenge — was better than in both 87 and 89, a temporary reversal of the left's downward trend since the early 80s.

The reason is simple: the leadership contest provided a focus for left opposition and a much-needed organisational boost.

As Livingstone correctly observed at the *Briefing* AGM, this boost was not translated into permanent regional and local left networks.

But whose fault was this? The Campaign for Socialism which emerged from the Benn-Heffer challenge was strangled at birth by Labour Left Liaison, Livingstone's closest allies.



Ken: bridge builder?

Livingstone concludes his article by claiming that "the position of the left was further weakened because it divided its limited resources into the so-called 'twin track' strategy...

"The Campaign Group did not work with existing pressure groups within the Party ... but instead threw its lot in with the Socialist Conference."

This is a milder version of an "argument" used by Anne Pettifor, *Socialist Action*, and others who wish to scapegoat *Briefing* and the Socialist Movement for the setbacks in Brighton.

As *Briefing* supporters made clear to Livingstone at the AGM, we work week in, week out at the base of the Party building the left. We resent being lectured about the extent of our Party work.

The notion that thousands of people were running around building the Socialist Movement *instead of* attending Ward meetings, caucuses, GCs, LGCs, etc., would be risible if it were not so offensive.

Indeed, one of the main reasons thousands of people attend Socialist Movement events is to recharge their batteries for the often grim struggle inside the Party.

They are not prepared to keep their heads down, pass model resolutions, and in effect ignore the class struggle going on outside Party structures.

In the Socialist Movement, they see neither diversion nor escape, but a potential resource for the Labour left on policy, organisation, and united action on many fronts.

One thing Livingstone says I strongly agree with: "The Labour left is significant precisely and only because it has support in the Labour Party".

The question is how to build that support. Livingstone's strategy will result in a repeat of past failures.

Still, at least he's spelled it out.

Labour Party Conference

Edmonds proposals – 'raw sewage'

Graham Till, NUR member and Conference delegate from Derby North CLP, galvanised the last session of this year's Party Conference in Brighton with a swingeing attack on John Edmonds' proposals for "reorganising" Party Conference.
By popular demand, *Briefing* brings you the full text of Graham Till's speech.

"Composite 3 contains more raw sewage than the North Sea. In common with most of the radical and sweeping changes which have been put before you, it is nicely packaged and well presented. It is a silken noose which will tighten around the democracy of this Party — what's left of it.

"It is a composite which has been cunningly drafted — probably by some yuppie trade union political officer. The same person probably wrote John Edmonds' speech for all I know. It's all clever stuff, but it's a curates's egg, and the bad parts stink with the odour of undemocratic intrigue.

"We're told the NEC would consult widely and report back to the 1990 Conference. We've heard all that before. They said that about the Policy Review. And it's worth pointing out that the trade union leaders speaking in support of Composite 3 are the very same people who cast their block votes to stop Conference amending the Policy Review. Hypocrisy, comrades, hypocrisy.

"When those first two composites went down the tube on Sunday night the remainder of the Conference became superfluous. All that was left was a Mandelson PR exercise. Who elected him? Who's he accountable to? TV rules OK!

Seating

"Delegates have complained about the cramped seating in the Conference hall. Well comrades, you want to make the most of your seats. You'll be standing up in future. You'll be dancing in the hall wearing straw boaters with pink ribbons, waving roses. You'll be holding placards aloft bearing the name of your delegation.

"You'll be going to the rostrum and saying things like 'Derbyshire announces for its favourite son...'. The Hammond Organ will be playing *Happy Days are Here Again.*

"It'll be a damned poor, undemocratic conference but it'll be 'good television'. We may be able to charge the TV companies more money and it will enable us to prostitute ourselves a bit more. We can bank the money along with that obtained from the NIREX and BNFL stalls at this Conference.

"The wheeler-dealers in our Party must be delighted with the way things have gone. It has enabled those who oppose the forces of socialism to gain some temporary victories this week. I admit we have had defeats.

"But don't think for one minute that we are going away! When we leave Brighton we are going back to the constituencies, back into the trades unions ... We will be fighting for socialist policies and we will be working for socialism.



Labour's new credit card — a mortgage on the House?

"At the end of the day we'll be coming back and the Labour Party *will* be accepting socialist policies. Only then will we properly defend, and receive the support of, the working class of this country."

Campaign Group back Party policy

Defying the Whip on defence cuts

Martin O'Neill, Labour's Front Bench spokesperson on defence, devoted much of his time in the annual Parliamentary debate on defence spending attacking Labour Party policy.

Campaign Group MPs, led by Tony Benn, tried to introduce an amendment in line with the policy (passed at Conference with 75% support) of cutting defence spending and transferring resources to social need.

Though the Speaker did *not* allow the amendment to be put to the House, it formed the focus of much of the debate.

O'Neill insisted, "That point will not appear in the Labour Party manifesto," and went on to justify, at length, the necessity of Britain spending a higher proportion of GDP on defence than France, Germany, or Japan.

"We must take account... of our geostrategic position... We have assumed, correctly, naval responsibilities far greater than those of any other European NATO partner...

"If the United Kingdom were to move to the average level of our Western European allies — whatever that means — it would have to slash the pay and conditions of our armed services or introduce conscription.

"The Labour Party will not go down that road. We will seek reductions and economies and pursue a value-for-money policy, but not at the expense of our responsibilities to NATO..."

By a *Briefing* Parliamentary correspondent

O'Neill then turned his ire on the Tories — for not spending *enough* on defence:

"Defence expenditure in the UK stood at 5.3% of GDP in 1984; by 1988 it had fallen to 4.3%. The government now spend more on health and education than on defence..."

There was a good deal more in this vein ("the defence of the United Kingdom and the home base will continue to be our closest concern...").

Tony Benn rose to challenge this shower of chauvinism:

"If we pass these estimates tomorrow everybody in this country... will be taxed £371 to pay for [them]...

"We are being asked to commit more than £21 billion to defence in 90-91 — 3.9% of our gross national product.

"We are the third largest exporter of weapons in the world. It would be naive for us to discuss defence without examining the commercial interests in defence...

"The eleven top defence contractors in Britain... make operating profits of £3,310 million...

"I tried to discover what could be bought with the savings of £3 to £4 billion... 120 hospitals, 64,000 houses, or — for the benefit of Conservative members — a 2.5p cut in income tax.

"I am talking not about total defence expenditure but simply the difference between European expenditure and ours...

"Everyone, both East and West, wants to spend money on peaceful development.

"However, Britain, because of its absolute obsession with the idea that it remains a semi-superpower, is dragging its feet and denying its people the industrial development and public services they need more than anything else."

Benn was supported by strong speeches from Eric Heffer and Harry Cohen.

After the Front Bench "amendment" to the estimates was defeated, only the following left and nationalist MPs remained to vote against the Tories' militarist policy:

Harry Barnes; Tony Benn; A. Bennett; Ron Brown; Dennis Canavan; Bob Clay; Ann Clwyd; Harry Cohen; Bob Cryer; Margaret Ewing; Terry Fields; Martin Flannery; Mildred Gordon; Bernie Grant; Eric Heffer; David Hinchliffe; John Hughes (Coventry NE); Ieuan Jones; David Lambie; James Lamond; Eddie Loyden; Max Madden; Alice Mahon; Bill Michie; Chris Mullin; Dave Nellist; Robert Parry; Dawn Primarolo; Alex Salmond; Jim Sillars; Dennis Skinner; Dafydd Elis Thomas; Pat Wall; Audrey Wise; plus tellers: Jeremy Corbyn; Ken Livingstone.

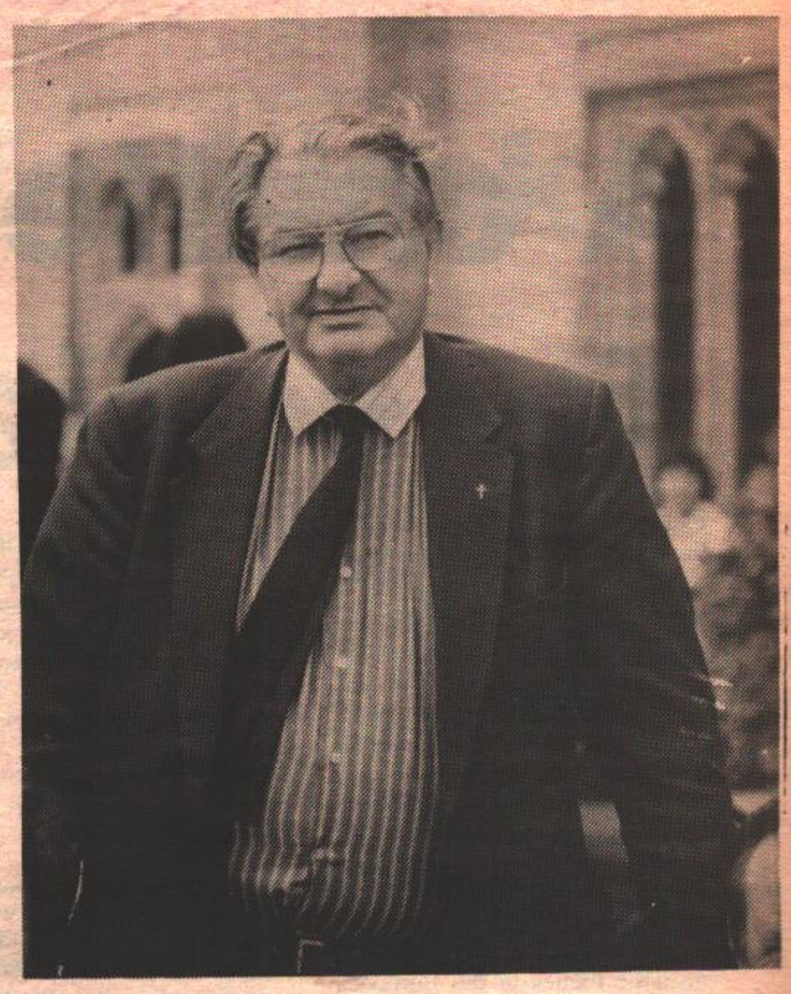


PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Eric Heffer: "strong speech against defence spending" in pursuit of Party policy.

Equal age of consent

Benn promotes Party policy

On Tuesday October 24th Tony Benn, supported by nine other Socialist Campaign Group Labour MPs, presented a Bill in the House of Commons to equalise the age of consent for all sexual acts at 16 years.

The provisions of the Bill would implement the resolution passed at Labour Party Conference and would amend Section 1 of the 1967 Sexual Offences Bill.

Presentation Bills, unlike Ten Minute Rule Bills, do not allow for any speeches to be made, but at least the Bill will be printed so as to allow public discussion and fire a warning shot to the rest of the Parliamentary Labour Party.

"This Bill, when enacted, will remove an anomaly that has caused great injustice to those who have suffered discrimination under the present law," said Tony Benn:

"and I expect that it will receive a sympathetic response from all fair-minded people."

Besides Tony Benn, the Bill is backed by **Audrey Wise, Jeremy Corbyn, Alice Mahon, Dennis Skinner, Diane Abbott, Tony Banks, Dawn Primarolo, Harry Cohen, and Mildred Gordon.**

Sexual Offences Act 1967 (Amendment)

A

B I L L

TO

Secure equality of treatment before the law in respect of sexual behaviour. A.D. 1989

Whereas it is desirable that sexual acts between consenting persons over the age of sixteen should receive equal treatment in law, and that all legal discrimination between men and women in respect of such acts should be ended forthwith;

Be it therefore enacted by the Queen's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:—

1. Section 1(1) of the Sexual Offences Act 1967 is hereby amended to provide that the words "the age of twenty-one years" shall be deleted and the words "the age of sixteen years" shall be substituted; and all other statutory provisions relating to the age of consent shall be amended accordingly. Amendment of Sexual Offences Act 1967.

2. This Act may be cited as the Sexual Offences Act 1967 (Amendment) Act 1989. Citation.

3. This Act shall come into force immediately. Commencement.

Briefing's future

Time for a new turn

Four years ago at the *Briefing* AGM of 1985, at the end of the miners' strike with Labour incapable of winning the next election, I moved a change of direction.

The old alliances built through *Briefing* had split apart under the pressure of defeats. We could no longer straddle the divisions.

Many of the old left, including some of our supporters, realigned into the camp of the LCC or worse.

We decided at that time to tighten our political definitions and partially to disengage in order to re-engage again when we were politically strong enough to do so.

If we hadn't gone along that road, there would be no defined political current around *Briefing* today. We would have been part of the realignment, part at best of a fudge, part of the problem rather than the seeds of a solution.

But it's not 1985 any more. For the first time in years our movement is beginning to feel its strength. For the first time in years we have won some industrial battles against the government.

Extracted from Graham Bash's speech to the *Briefing* AGM.

A class feels its strength not only from within — but also through the mirror of the other side's weakness.

For the first time in years, our movement feels the vulnerability of the government, can see that it is out of control and isolated, and knows that it can be beaten.

The growing strength *should* find expression in the Labour Party. It *should* strengthen the left because the left, and the left alone, bases itself on the strength and militancy of the working class.

Isolated

But in the short run, and certainly until the general election, far from being stronger, the left in the Party is weaker and more isolated than at any time since the 1960's.

We are in a period of contradictions: between the growing strength of the working class and the continued isolation of the left in the Labour Party; between the increasingly good electoral prospects for Labour and the ill-health of the Party at the base, which has rarely been in a worse state.

There may be a temptation in this period to downgrade the centrality of our work in the Labour Party. To do so would be a fundamental mistake. The Labour left has been shattered in the last six years.

Our task is to rebuild the base of the Party and regenerate the Labour left. We can't do one without the other.

And unless we do this, the working class will reach an historic impasse from which it could take decades to recover and all of the struggles outside will be left without political focus or direction.

Reconstructing

There is *no* alternative to the task of reconstructing a class struggle based Labour left.

But it is equally wrong to believe that the struggle in the Labour Party can be won only internally. The present left is just too small, too narrow, and in many cases, too rotten for the task ahead.

We cannot address this problem solely from within, solely by internal struggle, even less by merely constitutional struggle.

We can only rebuild our forces by looking outwards — to the struggles that are taking place and will take place, with or without us, and by supporting them and bringing them into the Party.

To do this we must change course and lose some of the habits of the past few years — habits perhaps of *oppositionism*, sometimes *abstentionism*. engage, to intervene, to construct new alliances wherever possible with those forces disaffected by the ever rightward move of the Labour Party.

This may mean working with, allying with, those whom we were previously denouncing last year, last month, even in the last issue of *Briefing*.

We have a responsibility to do this not just in the Labour Party but also in the Socialist Movement, where we will have to work with people many of us — including me — do not regard as natural allies.

The next period will be dominated by the coming General Election. In that period, we must be the best fighters for a Labour government. *No abstention on this is possible.*

We must get stuck into that fight because we know that for the working class and for the left the return of another Tory government would be an unthinkable disaster.

We know that the election of a Labour government, even a Kinnock government, would open new possibilities for our class.

But we have another task. It won't be easy. Recognising the overwhelming desire in the movement for unity, we must nonetheless ensure that the voice of socialism is not silenced.

We must fight for a Labour government, but not for one moment can we concede an inch to the programme of our leaders.

The next election will be fought on the most reactionary Labour manifesto ever: not just nuclear re-armament; not just sub-Thatcherite market economics — but anti-trade union legislation that is there not just for electoral cosmetics, but to be *used* against our movement.

We must help build new alliances to construct a socialist campaign for a Labour victory, perhaps through the forum of the new Labour Party wing of the Socialist Movement.

Labour Briefing remains a key instrument in all these tasks — not in isolation but as a vital component of a broad alliance.

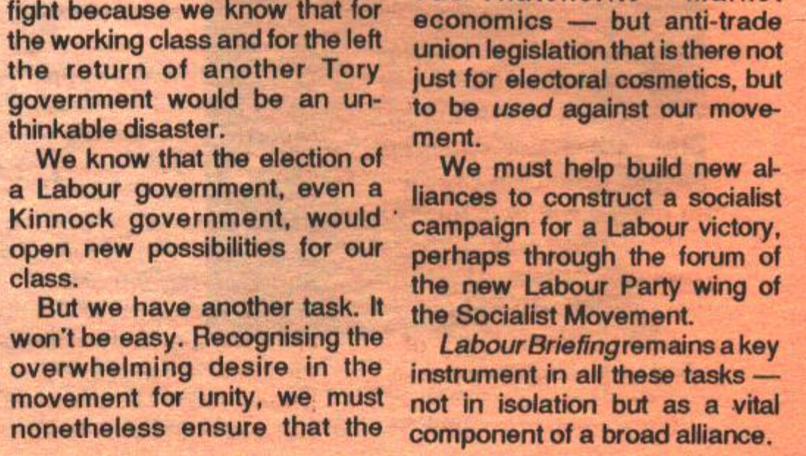


PHOTO: Tony Conway

Graham Bash speaks in the opening plenary at the Briefing AGM. For report: see page 4.

The Single European Market

A challenge for socialists

From being the most anti-EEC "socialist" party in Europe, the Labour Party, has moved to whole-heartedly embracing the proposed Single European Act.

Having abandoned "Keynsian" policies, the Labour Party has aligned itself with that section of the ruling class that is looking forward to the Single European Market to pursue its drive for industrial restructuring and austerity.

The Labour Party and the TUC have argued that the dominance of Socialist Parties in the European Parliament and the Commission would exert pressure on the Thatcher Government.

This would help defend and extend the conditions and rights of the working class.

They also argue that the capitalist Europe is the best framework for an economic upturn, on condition that social, industrial and regional policies are brought into line.

Nothing is more dangerous than to believe that the social gains of the working class can be defended by exerting pressure within the institutions of the European Community or negotiating with the employers without the pressure of industrial action.

The employers want to create a "unified" Europe with the same austerity policies they have implemented in individual countries in the last decade. The profits of "today" are supposed to pay for the jobs of "tomorrow".

But the restructuring of steel, mining, textile, shipbuilding, etc. has not produced new jobs or an economic recovery. Now we are told that this is because of "national egoism".

Indeed, the employers are continuing to push through attacks, hoping to achieve higher productivity by brandishing the threat of competition from American and Japanese companies.

It is in this context that the "Social Charter" which is supposed to protect thirteen "fundamental social rights", has been promoted by Jacques Delors, the President of the European Commission.

By Fred Leplat Camden Labour Briefing

It is designed to win working class support for the Single European Market, and to draw the trade union bureaucracies into active support of the European Community institutions by giving them the carrot of a European-wide "Social Contract".

Apart from legally enforceable regulations on health and safety in the workplace, the employers and the European Commission have made it clear that there is no question of introducing regulations to impose common social measures.

Jacques Delors stated in June this year that he "never said that it (the Social Charter) would be a directive. A solemn declaration would be of considerable moral value"!

The Single European Act will not lead to the creation of a new European capitalism or homogenous Europe. Instead, it fits into the dynamics of the world capitalist system.

European companies are going into mergers and restructurations in order to incorporate technological innovations and make their products viable on a world scale by achieving dominance in Europe and North America.

The mergers and restructurations are not a symptom of a speculative "casino economy", but are part of a strategy whereby companies sell off secondary lines in order to be world leaders in their speciality, or are diversifying into more stable lines.

The Single European Act will intensify this dynamic, and introduce other dangers to the working class.

Employers will adopt the most advantageous conditions for them, for example by re-locating in southern Europe where social costs are lower, thereby increasing regional disparities.

Attacks on conditions will intensify with short-term contracts, flexibility, higher taxation and cuts in social budgets, all being pushed through by the un-elected European Commission.

The immediate problem socialists face is not the capacity of the ruling class to build a European state, but the political and social damage for the labour movement that this attempt to pursue European integration is going to cause.

Nor should we fall into the trap of accepting this united Europe as inevitable, or as the dawning of a new age. Bureaucratic unification, like market unification, is a source of inequality and oppression.

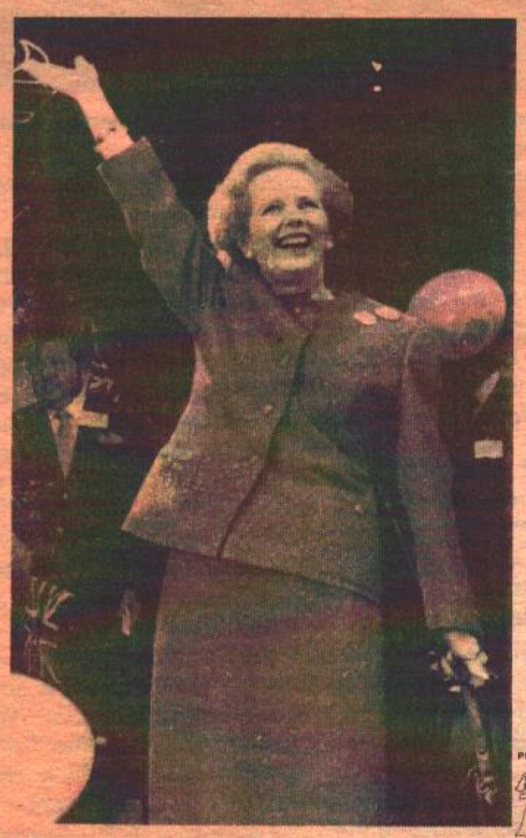
We should still be against the EEC, and it may be possible to put on the agenda again the need to break with the Community as opposition develops against the disasterous social consequences of capitalist European integration.

We must therefore oppose without equivocation the Single European Act, and develop a new internationalism that answers the bosses' demands for co-operation and unity.

There is a renewal of debate in the labour movement on how to protect ourselves against the new multinationals and the economic crisis.

There is therefore a possibility for international co-ordination and solidarity by the labour movement.

That is why for socialists, the European challenge today is our ability to struggle together — sweeping aside national boundaries — for the same objectives.





Europe for the bosses?

Broad Lefts and Rank



Winning the u back for the m

With the economy heading for recession, the strike by members of the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions for a 35-hour week with no strings is of critical importance.

But only 24 hours after the strike began, Bill Jordan declared on television that he would settle for 37 hours.

He has refused to challenge the claim by the Engineering Employers Federation that the 35-hour week would make British engineering "uncompetitive".

Once again, at the onset of this major struggle, workers are faced by the obstacles thrown up by their bureaucratic leadership. How can we deal with them?

This debate has too often become an arid exchange between supporters of the "Broad Left" and the "rank and file" approach.

The old Broad Left tradition aimed at taking over the union structures from the right and using them to win better living standards and promote the return of a Labour government.

As a strategy, it depended on an expanding economy and full employment, a situation in which concessions could be wrung from employers without serious threats of job losses or closures.

The high point of the influence of the old Broad Lefts was the successful campaign to destroy Heath's Industrial Relations Act.

Mobilised

Against a background of mass agitation — the biggest march of the time mobilised over 250,000 trade unionists in London — workers took militant actions that went well beyond what was acceptable to the "lefts" they had voted into office.

But the balance of forces between the apparatuses was such that the workers went ahead and did what was necessary to win. In London, a general stoppage developed which freed five dockers imprisoned for secondary picketing.

But Labour, returned to power and faced with an investment strike by big capital and a run on the pound, pursued a vicious austerity policy policed by the very "lefts" the shop stewards and Broad Lefts had put in power (i.e. Jack Jones and Hugh Scanlon).

By SIMON PATTERSON

The movement was completely unprepared to fight this sell-out.

At this point the Communist Party — the main force behind the Broad Lefts — should have broken with the trade union tops and taken the movement forward around an anti-austerity programme.

A mass assembly of shop stewards, held in Birmingham in 1976, was attended by over 3,000 delegates from all the main sectors. It was chaired by the most powerful convenor in the land — CP member Derek Robinson.

But the organisers refused to call any action. Instead, they urged backing for the lefts in the TUC and the government who were trying to moderate the sell-out.

This left the way open for the employers' offensive, which was later to claim Derek Robinson himself — sacked by Michael Edwardes who'd been appointed by Labour to sort out British Leyland.

But the "rank-and-file" tradition, represented by the SWP, also failed to present an alternative. Entering full bloodedly into every trade union struggle, they quickly won over some of the best activists.

They were deeply hostile to the undemocratic machine politics of the Broad Lefts and felt that Labour was at best an irrelevance to the ongoing wave of strikes.

But while they were prepared to take both shop stewards' and convenors' positions they posed a false dichotomy between the shop stewards' movement and the official union structures.

As a result they ended up abstaining from the fight against the right. They refused to work in the Broad Lefts. They were therefore totally unable to take advantage of the failure of the CP in the 1974-79 period.

Later, they developed the "Theory of the Downturn" which decreed it was essential to hang on to the cadres won to "the Party". The organised "Rank and Files" were ruthlessly shut down and as a result most of the best stewards left the SWP.

Unofficial

Luckily, there is a third way, best shown in the Miners' Strike of 1984-5.

From the mid-1960s Scargill and his comrades adopted a strategy of building self-organisation of the ranks, in this way improving conditions through the establishment of unofficial rank-and-file bodies called "panels".

This was combined with a fight for progressive policies through the structures of the union and for left wingers to win positions.

After the victorious 1972 and 1974 pay strikes, Scargill was elected President of the Yorkshire NUM By then he was regarded as the leading left trade unionist in the country.

At Saltley Gates coke depot in Birmingham he had led a mass picket which closed the works and effectively won the dispute.

and Files



nions
nembers



Arthur Scargill

He stood on a broad ranging ogramme which placed the ques-n of pay and conditions in the mework of a non-nuclear energy licy and a safe, publicly owned d expanding coal industry.

He warned of coming attacks on industry and also raised en-onmental issues.

In the Great Strike itself he based nself on the self-activity of the mbership. But he didn't ride on back of the struggle. Instead, he ve clear leadership, supporting workers he represented in the th of the full mobilisation of the te.

But the Great Miners' Strike was ch more than a re-run of the ss militancy which Scargill had previously at Saltley Gates.

A radical mass popular move-ment took shape in solidarity with the miners. The best sections of the social movements thrown up by the decline of British imperialism came together with left activists from the local Labour Parties and from other unions.

It wasn't simply an arithmetical adding together of these different people. The politics of the social movements — black, lesbians and gay, women — fused with the organised strength of the industrial working class and the communities in which it was based.

Anyone doubting this process should remember the organisation of the Miners' Wives Groups. The political and ideological gains of the women's movement had reached deep into society as a whole. Working class women in the mining communities were no exception.

Their self-organisation, born out of the material need for food and clothes to continue the fight, politically galvanised a hitherto doubly-oppressed section of the working class and gave it the weapons and inspiration actually to relaunch the strike and maintain it for a further six to nine months!

What's all this got to do with Bill Jordan? Everything!

Jordan and the rest of his rotten gang have never been so scared as during the 12 months of the miners' dispute.

The support movement, a mass break from the collaborationist politics and methods of organisation dominant in the British labour movement, clearly challenged the power and position of *every* trade union bureaucrat.

To win back the unions in Britain for the members so that they can fight the bosses and their government effectively, socialists have to challenge both the politics and the organisation of the labour and trade union leaders head-on.

Black Sections Trade Union Conference

New agenda for black workers

On Saturday February 10th 1989 the Black Section will hold, in London, a National Conference for Black Trade Unionists.

You might say this is not something extraordinary — there are an increasing number of these conferences held throughout the year, called by various organisations.

The significant difference here is that this Conference is called for Black trade unionists by Black trade unionists, instead of by the TUC or other organisations (progressive as some of them may be).

The purpose of this Conference is primarily to develop a network of Black activists across the trade union movement.

This will consolidate the activities already in progress in individual unions and will also show the rest of the movement how really to build community links, something which the TUC in particular talks about but simply does not have the credibility and knowhow to achieve.

Community activity is already at the heart of Black political activity and has been a resource so far ignored by trade union officialdom.

The Labour Party Black Section continues to campaign within individual trade unions, alongside activists within those organisations for the right of Black members to organise ourselves within the movement and to prioritise anti-racism.

A few examples are:

MSF:

A National Executive position supporting the rights of Black members to organise themselves within the trade union movement. The Conference next year at Harrogate will be given the opportunity fully to discuss Black self-organisation.

By Roger Mckenzie
National Trade Union Organiser, LP Black Sections

TGWU:

Progress towards developing a structure that enables the concerns of Black members to be raised. Whilst there is much to be done to force the TGWU to realise that the arguments around self-organisation have already been won, the first steps have been taken with recent alterations to national structure.



Now organising in the trade unions

NUPE:

Continued support for Black Sections motions at party Conference and increasing demands from Black members for steps to be taken towards self-organisation within the union.

NUJ:

A powerful call for self-organisation within the union has been coming from Black members for some time. A recently held Consultative Conference for Black journalists reaffirmed this demand.

NALGO:

the NALGO Black Members Group is resisting attacks mounted by the union bureaucracy against their rights to self-organise.

NATFHE:

Black members have begun to put the issue onto the agenda.

Labour Party Black Section

THE NEW AGENDA:

A Conference for Black Trade Unionists

Saturday February 10th, 1990

The Asian Centre, 8 Caxton Road, Wood Green, London N22

Registration Fee: £3 waged, £1.50 unwaged/low-paid (payable on the day).

For further details contact Roger Mckenzie, 5 Beatrice Road, London N4 4PD, tel.: 01-802 3111 ext. 125 (daytime).

Lesbian and gay rights

Self-organisation is the key!

The Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights won a tremendous victory at the Brighton Labour Party Conference.

This victory demonstrated that support for lesbian and gay equality as a basic democratic rights issue now permeates almost every level of the labour movement.

By Rebecca Fleming
Socialist Movement Lesbian and Gay Policy Group

The Socialist Movement Trade Union Conference provides an excellent opportunity for consolidating and deepening that support.

The consistent work of LCLGR and many individual activists has combined with the impact of Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners and the Printworkers and the Stop the Clause Campaign.

This has resulted in the majority of unions having adopted lesbian and gay rights policies in recent years. The main focus of the struggle now is to get these paper policies implemented.

This means ensuring that unions defend their lesbian and gay members from harassment and discrimination — actively challenging heterosexism both in the workplace and in society as a whole.

The case of Austen Allen — the Bradford teacher who was sacked after coming out to his pupils and then reinstated after a vigorous campaign by the local NUT branch, including a threat of strike action — shows what can be achieved.

Unfortunately the cases of lesbian and gay workers who have been left completely undefended by their unions for whom coming out to their branch would have just added to their problems are still all too numerous.

Central to taking the fight for lesbian and gay liberation deeper into the unions is the principle of self-organisation which lies at the heart of positive action.

NALGO leads the way in the level of self-organisation for lesbians and gay men but unions such as ACTT, NATFHE, NUCPS, CPSA and the NUJ all have well-established lesbian and gay groups while the NUT organised its first lesbian and gay conference earlier this year.

This virtual white-collar monopoly is also about to come to an end as, following their success at biennial conference, lesbians and gay men in the TGWU begin to get organised.

Such self-organised groups not only provide vital support for lesbian and gay workers but are also the primary motor for implementation of national policy

They ensure that those experiencing discrimination play a leading role in deciding how to combat it and how to take these issues into a wider political context.

The inclusion of an out lesbian speaker in the opening plenary is an excellent beginning to the Socialist Movement conference.

This event should not only be motivating individual union activists, branches, and Broad Lefts to fight for lesbian and gay rights but also arm them with the arguments and practical proposals necessary to take the struggle forward.

The Women's Page

NAC Conference

Danger: new time limits Bill coming up

At its annual conference at the end of October, the National Abortion Campaign agreed to mount a major campaign to oppose the expected renewed attempt to reduce abortion time limits.

Diane Abbott warned that even some pro-choice Labour MPs were prepared to support a 24-week limit — in the mistaken hope that this would stop the anti-abortionists mounting further attacks.

The proposal includes exceptions for foetal abnormality and rape and incest.

NAC has always opposed the idea that any grounds other than the woman's wish for an abortion should be required. The decision to have an abortion should also be entirely separate from any decision to report rape or incest.

At the moment, rape and incest are not specific grounds for an abortion under the 1967 Act and it would be very unfortunate if Labour MPs were responsible for introducing them into law.

The conference had a report on RU486, the "abortion pill", and agreed to campaign for its immediate introduction into this country.

There was a discussion on the embryo Bill, which some delegates wanted to oppose, but Diane Abbott and many other speakers emphasised the importance of taking a positive position on the controversial issues raised by the Bill.

By Leonora Lloyd

The Conference agreed to support the Bill in general, but to oppose any time limits on embryo research, which give credence to the idea that embryonic life is sacred.

One of the more inspiring contributions came from Patricia Ireland, an executive Vice-President of the National Organisation of Women.

She described the rise of Operation Rescue, the anti-abortion group which is terrorising clinics in the US, and how the pro-choice movement is organising against them.

A number of visitors to the Conference came from abortion clinics and advice services, including some which have been the targets of the British Rescue operation.

Manchester NAC organised a demonstration near the site of one such clinic in Stockport to show that there was a sizeable local opposition to their activities.

There was a lively discussion about how best to stop Rescue, and the general principle that action should be taken only after consultation with clinic workers (not the owners!) was agreed.

Patricia Ireland also gave an account of the current situation in the US, and the conference watched a video *Abortion: for Survival* produced in the States as the answer to the notorious *Silent Scream*. (*Abortion: for Survival* is available from NAC to buy or hire).

Karen Quinlivan, Women's Rights Officer of the Union of Students in Ireland, told the Conference how they had got an injunction brought against them by SPUC to prevent them giving information about abortion lifted and the case referred to the European courts.

However, *Cosmopolitan* magazine has now agreed to self-censorship by removing a page advertising abortion services from copies going to Ireland starting in January. NAC agreed to campaign against this decision.

Over the next year, the main attack will be the proposed reduction in time limits.

Speakers agreed that this attack would be extremely serious and a hard one to fight, both because it appeared that it would be part of a government bill (and therefore with plenty of time to discuss it) and because there was growing support amongst MPs for a 24-week limit.

NAC agreed to call a meeting to bring all those interested in fighting such an attack together to launch a campaign without delay.



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

FAB: demonstrating last year against David Alton's attempt to reduce time limits for abortion.

nac news

Affiliate to NAC!

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

Affiliation rates:
Under 18, £1; Unwaged, £3; Low-waged, £5; Other waged, £7.
Youth Groups, £5; NAC, Women's Groups, Trades Councils, FE Colleges, £10; Trade Unions, Student Unions, political and other local groups, £15; National Organisations, £30.
Subscription rates for four issues:
£3.50; multi-user rates, £8; overseas rates on request (state airmail if required).
Please make cheque payable to National Abortion Campaign and send to NAC, Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, London WC2B 5AU.

Quotas

For action on positive action!

***Briefing* readers will be familiar with the "dirty tricks" campaign being run by the LCC to ditch women's autonomy in the Labour Party in favour of swift career advancement for individual women.**

This factional manoeuvring tramples right over Women's Conference policy.

Labour Party women in Women for Socialism have been discussing how to take forward the campaign for positive action and real power for an autonomous Women's Organisation.

Ideas and suggestions are welcome.

In the meantime, here is a resolution put by Islington North WS to the Greater London Labour Party Women's Conference (to be held on January 27th 1990).

You may like to use this as a model resolution or amendment in London or other Regional Women's Conferences. It could also be the basis of resolutions to the 1990 National Labour Women's Conference.

Conference notes:

1. the major campaign for quotas for women in the Party;

2. that the quotas issue emerged suddenly shortly before the 1989 National Labour Women's Conference;

3. that it was presented to the National Conference without any opportunity for consultation on the issue;

4. that it was coupled with a proposal from the NEC Women's Committee that "no action be taken" on the NLWC's longstanding demand that it should elect the five NEC Women's Places, until the Conference can be seen to be "working effectively";

5. that a Labour recommended pamphlet, "Women's Votes: the Key to Winning", positively reports Bryan Gould's proposal that with a 40% quota on the NEC the Women's Section could be abolished;

6. that the merger of the National Labour Women's Committee with the NEC Women's Committee into a restructured NEC Women's Committee accountable to the NEC and not to Labour Women through their National Conference means that the Labour Women's Organisation is now headless and unempowered;

7. the valid concern that the new Committee's method of representation could lead to a disproportionate number of trade union representatives as compared with women directly representing CLP women.

Conference supports in principle quotas for women as a form of positive action and believes that the five NEC Women's places are a form of positive action quota.

Conference further believes that:

1. quotas (40% or otherwise) are *not* a substitute for Labour Women's longstanding demands for effective power;

2. campaigning for quotas should *not* be counterposed to, but coupled with, continuing without delay Labour Women's campaign for effective power, specifically:

a. NLWC electing the five NEC Women's places;

b. five resolutions from Women's Conference to go to Annual Conference to be debated as of right;

c. Labour's National Women's Committee being directly accountable to Labour Women;

d. trade union and CLP representatives to have equal representation.

Conference therefore mandates the London Women's Committee immediately to campaign on that basis.

To join Women for Socialism, or for further information, write to:
Ruth Clarke, 7 Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY.

Lesbian mothers

To impregnate or not to impregnate?

The rabid right is not content with the "softly, softly" approach precluding lesbians from access to artificial insemination by donor (AID) contained in the government White Paper on embryo research.

They are going for the full frontal assault.

By Rebecca Fleming
Women for Socialism

An Early Day Motion tabled on October 25th and solemnly entitled "The Impregnation of Lesbian Women" (so as not to confuse them with lesbian men?):

"notes with profound concern the recent revelation that 55 lesbian couples and eight single lesbians have been impregnated by one sperm bank clinic alone during the last year."

It goes on to express "great dismay at the ease with which those and 2,000 other unmarried women who are not infertile" were able to gain access to such facilities.

Because, continues the Motion, "such practises undermine the status of marriage; corrupt the family unit and leave the ensuing children at grave risk of subsequent emotional harm."

The motion calls for preventative legislation as a matter of urgency. Its eight signatories include such heroes and heroines from the Bigots' Hall of Fame as Teddy Taylor, Dame Jill Knight and the Winterton "family unit".

It is gratifying to know that it only takes eight single lesbians to shake the foundations of British capitalism.

But this is a clear signal of parliamentary attacks to come. They must be actively fought against for what they are and not get submerged under defence of the 1967 Abortion Act.

Hornsey & Wood Green Labour Party Women's Section
Presents

A Central and South American evening for women

Friday 8th December at 7.30pm
Station House Community Centre
Stapleton Hall Road, N4
Bar, food, music, singers, video, stalls and goods from Chile, El Salvador, Nicaragua
£6 waged/£3 unwaged; ticket price includes food.
For tickets phone
Jane on 01-881 8471 or Maggie on 01-341 4376

BOOK REVIEW

Benn: against the tide

Against the tide. Diaries 1973-76, **by Tony Benn,** *Hutchinson*, **£20.00.**

Is the purpose of history is illuminate the politics of the present through a greater understanding of the past?

If so, the third volume of Tony Benn's political diaries, with its account of the collapse of the Heath government, the return of a Labour government on a radical manifesto, and its subsequent failures, fulfills that purpose admirably.

By Richard Heffernan
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

The first years of the Wilson and Callaghan administration 1974-76 are covered by Benn from his position as a member of the Cabinet — and from the perspective of a socialist Minister in a non-socialist government.

Much has been made of the light that the diaries throw upon the character of Tony Benn himself, and the diaries in their entirety will certainly prove of interest in this regard.

But the special usefulness of this volume is its description of the stormy financial and economic pressure which was brought to bear on the Labour government.

Similarly useful is the description of the powerful influence exerted by the establishment, by a hostile and obstructive civil service, and by a mass media uniformly opposed to the progressive policies upon which the government had been elected.

It offers a close-up narrative of the process by which the promise offered by the electoral success of the Labour Party (produced by the industrial upsurge against the Heath government) was slowly dissipated in the ignominious failure of Labour in office.

The Cabinet cast aside progressive Party policies in favour of an unquestioning acceptance of economic orthodoxy and Treasury policy.

Immediately on its return to office the government was engaged in arms sales to Pinochet's Chile and involved in naval manoeuvres with South Africa: no break was made with the traditional foreign policy of the British state.

Benn illustrates the power of Prime Ministerial government as Wilson and then Callaghan exercised their authority by attempting to silence Ministerial dissent.

The government quickly committed itself to the pursuit of the interests of capital and consistently rejected any proposal that would limit or even challenge the power of the ruling class.

By July 1975 Benn records that: "The government had been elected on the basis of the Social Contract, full employment and an interventionist industrial policy to which the movement is committed.

"Now we are being told not only to accept real pay cuts, rising unemployment and public expenditure cuts of £2-3 billion but also to push for higher profits in the hope that this will lead to investment through the market mechanism."

This illustrates the fact that even before the infamous IMF debacle of December 1976 (which Benn recounts in detail) the Labour government was long committed to the monetarist policy which was to be adopted with a vengeance by the Conservatives after 1979.

Both the Wilson and Callaghan Cabinets brought about huge reductions in public expenditure.

They simultaneously forced down living standards through incomes policy whilst accepting a steady increase in unemployment as part of a deflationary strategy.

Against the Tide also provides a damning indictment of the way the Party itself allowed its programme and principles to be case aside by an autonomous Parliamentary leadership which saw its task simply as presiding over the status quo.

The lessons of 1974-79 are very real and never more relevant than today.

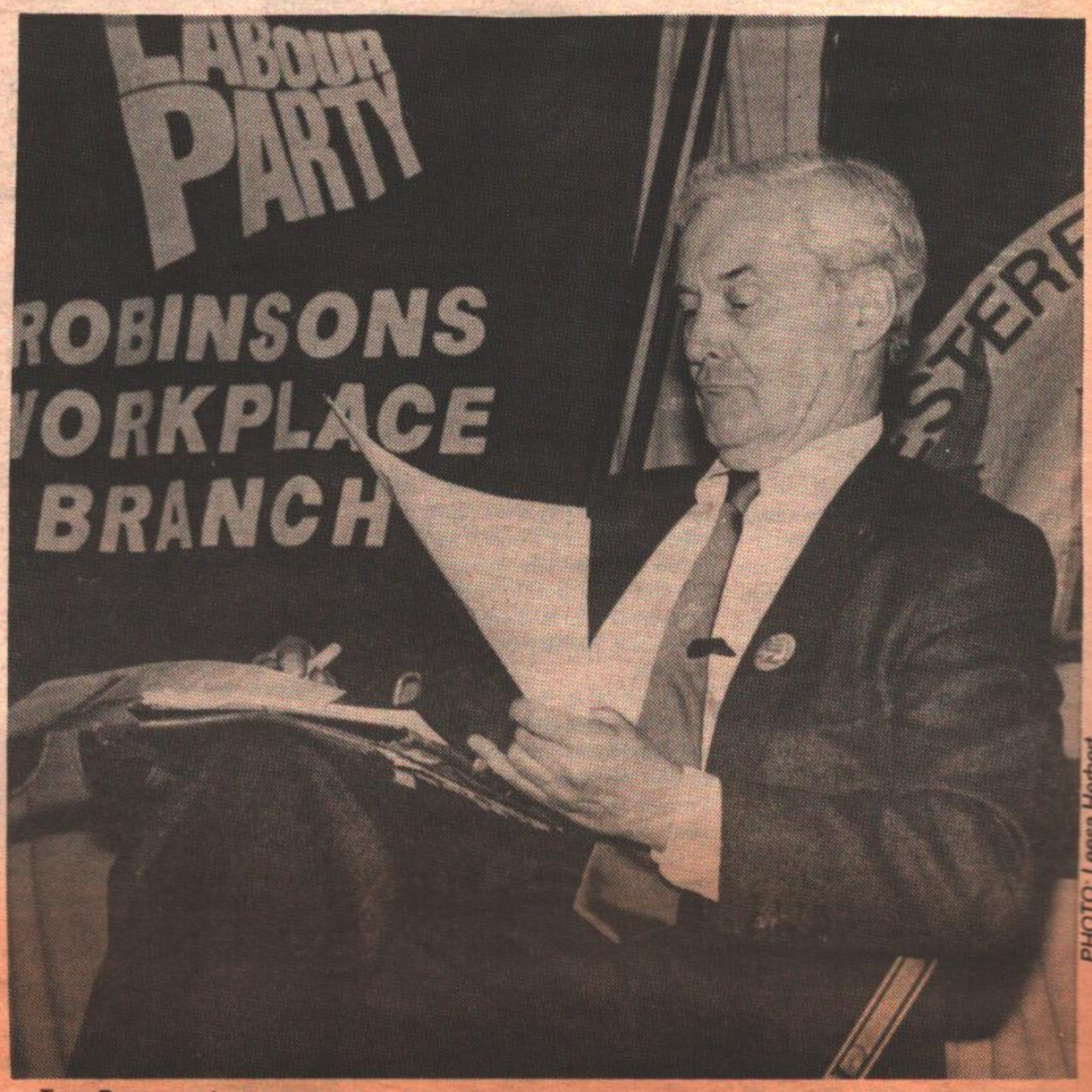
Labour in office, unable to resolve the contradictory interests of capital and labour, chose to intervene on the side of capital and paid the price in 1979 as millions of disaffected Labour voters turned to the Tory "alternative".

The upsurge within the Labour Party both before and after 1979 was based upon the demand that never again would Labour in office act as had the previous government.

This volume of Tony Benn's diaries serves as a firm warning to the Party. As such it should be required reading not only for the left but more importantly for those who support the current direction of the Party.

With the possibility of the return of a Labour government becoming more real by the day, the Party has the responsibility to work not only to win the election but also to ensure the political success of a new Labour government.

"Those who forget the past will be condemned to repeat it," would be an apt motto for *Against the Tide*. We must ensure that the failure of Labour in office in 1974-79 is never repeated.



Tony Benn — unique eyewitness to history

BOOK REVIEW

A sea-captain's tale

Umbala, **by Captain Harry Dean & Sterling North,** *Pluto Press*, **paperback.**

A 19th century sea captain makes a vast fortune through trading and decides to found a model African colony based on a grand education programme for "the natives".

Sound abhorently familiar? Be patient.

By Mike Phipps
Chair, Greenwich & Bexley Anti-Apartheid

This is not quite imitation Ryder Haggard where the kind hearted imperialists sort out tribal rivalries in South Africa — although there is a bit of that.

For a start, Captain Harry Dean was a black American. He had circumnavigated the world by the age of 15 and had his own ship at 30. The first quarter of the book is an exciting account of his initiation into seafaring life.

But Dean was a man with a mission. The profits made from marine trading were to go towards the foundation of a free Africa where black people, liberated from colonial slavery, could compete on equal terms for a share in the world's resources.

For Dean, black subjugation was due to the absence of an African merchant fleet and control of the land.

To redress this at the turn of the century may have seemed a utopian pipedream. It led Dean to try to buy the Portuguese colony of Lourenco Marques — in the middle of the Boer War!

His school building and land acquiring projects led him to diamond smuggling and deals with a variety of swindlers who in the end stole his fortune and expelled him from Africa.

But in the meantime there were some amazing adventures — from narrow escapes at sea to exploration in uncharted jungles.

In Dean's dealings with Africans, there is still an element of the "civilised man" helping out the "primitives". But this is matched by a burning contempt for the racist white settlers.

Harry Dean was a romantic but also a man of action. He once suggested to the black anti-imperialist writer WEB Dubois that he (Dean) should lead an African army across the straits of Gibraltar to liberate Black Africa.

Book

The appearance of the book itself is no mean feat.

Dean told his story in 1928 to Sterling North, an American student. There were no tape recorders then: North would listen to the old man for a couple of hours and then write it up from notes and memory on his typewriters.

The Pluto edition, with its scholarly introduction by George Shepperson, is a welcome reprint of an anti-imperialist masterpiece.

MAGAZINE REVIEW

Ten years of freedom

Nicaragua Today, **magazine of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, Autumn 1989, price 60p.**

The autumn 1989 issue *Nicaragua Today*, produced by the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, celebrates ten years of freedom. July 19 was the tenth anniversary of the Sandinista revolution which overthrew the Somoza dictatorship.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

Three central issues are addressed in this issue of *Nicaragua Today*. First, the Central American peace process grinds slowly on, with Nicaragua and those genuinely seeking peace maintaining the initiative and US policy still in disarray.

Meanwhile, the contras are militarily defeated, demoralised and, according to reports, selling their guns to El Salvador liberation fighters!

Secondly, there are signs that a corner has been turned in Nicaragua's protracted economic crisis. Inflation — which ran at 26,000% in 1988 — was a mere 10% for July 1989. This crisis has bitten heavily into living standards and sparked off strikes even among long-time FSLN supporters, such as the teachers' union ANDEN.

Election

Thirdly, preparation for the general election in February 1990 is underway. The Sandinistas will face a National Opposition Union which includes Alfonso Robelo's MDN, the first Contra party to gain legal status, alongside the "Socialist" and "Communist" parties. All are united only in their opposition to the FSLN.

Solidarity with the Nicaraguan Revolution and its pressing tasks of reconstruction continues to grow. In July over 400 delegates representing 126 solidarity committees in 40 different countries met in Managua to take forward their work.



Ambulance dispute

NUPE stands firm

As *Briefing* goes to press, NUPE has escalated the national industrial action being taken by ambulance workers in their fight to win a major pay claim.

By CHRISTINE FRASER

NUPE restricted all qualified ambulance personnel to doing Accident and Emergency work only as from midnight on Sunday November 5th.

Unqualified staff, mainly on day shift, whose regular commitments include ferrying the elderly on trips to day centres, are to work normally.

Unqualified staff may be able to take on some extra duties, but the qualified staff's action will certainly cause major disruption to admissions and discharges of patients.

Now we must wait to see whether management remains intransigent, or whether their recent tough talking is just bluff and bluster. The last few weeks have seen management enter talks with the unions largely as a face-saving exercise.

Herring

For while they were waving the red herring of a "long-term pay review" (which made up for the offer of a larger pay rise this year, with a probable pay cut next), they were also planning to bring the troops in.

Management know that troops, with only a few days' first aid training, could not replace skilled ambulance staff. It's not the ambulence workers' action which is putting patients at risk — but management's determination to break that action!

NUPE members were ready to meet the threat of troops by "working-in": being there to answer emergency calls, and demanding that unionised control supervisors, who take the calls put through to the emergency services, continue to pass messages to them, and not the army.

Ambulance

The ambulance service, which comes under the NHS rather than the Home Office, is not recognised as an emergency service on a par with the firefighters, police, and coastguard.

Hence ambulance staff have missed out on pay rises enjoyed by other emergency workers and have fallen behind. The government's parsimony to the ambulance workers is also in sharp contrast to the recent 10.7% pay rise enjoyed by MPs.

There is an intense mood of anger amongst ambulance workers, who are fed up at not getting decent money for doing what everyone knows is a dangerous, highly skilled, and essential job.

Other healthworkers fully support their claim.

Whilst workers have welcomed the NUPE leadership's escalation of the action, they know that this has been won by the tremendous rank and file pressure on their leaders.

Management

Management are trying to play off District against District, and contacts between ambulance branches remain at unofficial level. Organised regional meetings could help break the isolation felt by some branches and activists and play an important part in keeping management on the defensive.

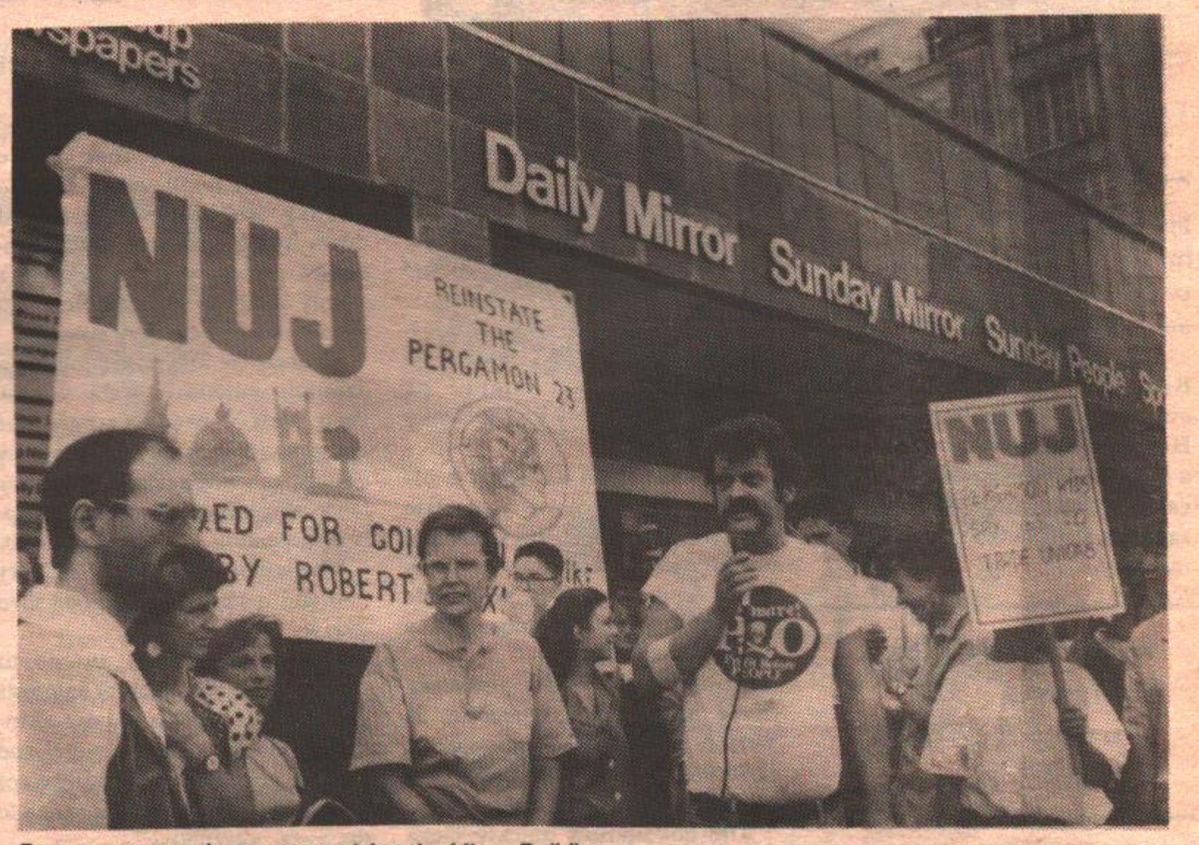
Pergamon:

Six months on strike

The Pergamon 23's dispute is now in its sixth month.

The Chapel is mobilising for a rally in London's publishing heart, Holborn, on Saturday November 25th to mark our six months on strike for reinstatement and union recognition at Maxwell's Oxford-based publishing company, Pergamon Press.

Over the last few weeks the Pergamon strikers have built up international support to add to the solidarity already received from French journalists and print unions.



Pergamoners and supporters picket the Mirror Buildings.

By Pergamon Press strikers

The Chapel recently sent a delegation to Germany as guests of the German federated media union, IG-Medien. The strikers were delighted to receive full backing from the 180,000 strong union which is keen to co-operate in international campaigning.

The German trip coincided with the Frankfurt Book Fair, where a demonstration and lobby confronted Maxwell's large publishing presence.

The strikers also travelled to meetings in Stuttgart and Munich and shared a platform with trade unionist and historian Bernt Engelmann at a Book Fair fringe meeting.

Engelmann, a survivor of Dachau and chronicler of the Third Reich, discussed the French Revolution and warned the Frankfurt audience against Thatcherism and employers like Maxwell.

On October 18th four strikers spent the day in Brussels as guests of the TUC delegation at the Euro-TUC rally on the Social Charter.

They discussed the dispute with trade union delegations from France, Germany, Belgium, The Netherlands, Italy, and Spain.

Most were familiar with Maxwell's reputation as an employer and were keen to co-operate with the NUJ.

Maxwell is looking to expand his operations in Europe in the run- up to 1992.

This partly accounts for the support the Pergamon strikers have receive from many European media unions.

As we go to press, Maxwell has just announced the closure of his Paris press agency, the Agence Centrale de Presse, following the breakdown of negotiations over a so-called "survival plan".

The journalists union at the ACP, which welcomed a delegation of Pergamon strikers in June, has now turned to the British NUJ for support in its own fight.

Your support is welcome, as are donations to the strike fund. Please make cheques payable to the NUJ Pergamon Press Chapel and send letters and donations to the Pergamon Press NUJ Chapel, c/o 60 Cricket Road, Oxford OX4 3DQ; tel. 0865-63437 ext. 34 (NUJ).

To mark six months of fighting for trade union rights at Pergamon Press a march is being called for November 25.

MARCH AGAINST MAXWELL!

November 25th

Assemble: 12 noon at NUJ HQ, 314 Grays Inn Road (Kings Cross tube)

Rally at Holborn outside the Mirror building

Speakers from: national and international unions and Labour Party

BRING YOUR BANNERS!

CSEU 35 hour week campaign

Spread the struggle!

The Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions (CSEU) has rightly made the 35-hour week the top issue in its bargaining and campaigning agenda.

With a slump developing in the engineering industry the 35-hour week would help preserve jobs and unite workforces in resisting redundancies. But the CSEU's approach to the fight is hopelessly inadequate.

With just three of the Confederation's 1,000 firms targetted for strike action, most employers will not be affected at all. A handful of other firms are to be balloted at some unspecified time later in the campaign.

None of the firms selected are important to the other firms, i.e. they are not major component suppliers. If Lucas, for example, had been out then most of the motor industry would have been affected.

The three plants on strike (British Aerospace at Chester and Preston and Rolls Royce at Hillingdon) will not lead to any other firms being affected. Nonetheless British Aerospace has sought an injunction to stop the strike.

The ballot votes among manual workers in these firms were won by 2-1, a clear indication that virtually any firm could have been called out. These votes are not surprising considering strike payments of £125 are being made.

White collar staff voted against the action because they already work fewer hours and obviously didn't think they could win any further reductions.

The "softly, softly" approach of the CSEU leadership is hardly surprising.

Only weeks ago, Bill Jordan said that neither side could afford a strike now that the industry was in recession because jobs would be lost. In effect he was using the old employer's threat of unemployment.

A year ago, the AUEW Executive was ready to accept a deal with the employers that stipulated complete flexibility, in work and hours.

Committee

It was thrown out by the union's National Committee. No wonder Jordan keeps saying there is very little separating the two sides.

The employers are looking to the kind of deal offered at Vauxhall, increasing the working week by one hour to 40, but calling it a "38-hour week" with the accumulated two hours added together to give extra holidays.

This amounts to annualisation of hours. No doubt the extra holidays would be at times of least demand. This would go along with compulsory overtime at peak demand periods.

These productivity deals are the biggest danger facing the CSEU campaign, especially with the likes of Jordan at the helm.

When the working week was reduced to 39 hours many workers lost tea-breaks, washing-up time, and other relief time. In some factories they ended up working for *longer* than they had previously.

The reduced working week must be gained with no productivity strings. It must be seen as a method of saving jobs and a step to full work sharing on full pay.

Gains in conditions and especially any genuine reduction of working hours will only be won through a full "gloves off" fight with the employers.

The decision in effect to shield the motor industry from the action is wrong and will isolate and weaken the strikers at the three plants.

These strikers should take a lead by going to the key component firms and demanding that the workers there join with them. Ultimately, a strike by all union members affected by the deal should be organised.

NATFHE pay claim

All out November 23rd... then escalate

Support for NATFHE's first ever national strike shows that members are willing to take strong industrial action.

However, to win a decent pay rise without strings further national strikes are needed.

The NATFHE leadership has no intention, at the moment, of organising any such action. They are offering various non-strike action (cover bans, exam sanctions, etc.) together with selective strikes in some regions and areas.

But last year total reliance on limited selective action and other sanctions served to divide rather than unite the membership.

We must organise to change the NEC's plans. But we cannot wait until the end of November when National Council meets.

We must act now to organise further national strike action. If the NEC refuses to give us a lead then it's up to us to do it ourselves.

The Socialist Lecturers Alliance supports the call for a national strike on 23 November. Please try to get the following motion discussed in your branch as soon as possible.

This branch calls on Regional Council/Liaison Committee to:

1. Organise a ballot under rule 25.3 for a one day strike on Thursday 23rd November.

2. Instruct the NEC, through National Council, to organise an immediate programme of escalating national strike action in both sectors.

3. Requisition a Special Conference under rule 14.2.2 to discuss the current pay campaign.

For more information about the SLA contact: Barry on 021-554 0056 (home) or Sue on 021-554 3188 (home) or at their workplace on 021-551 6031x249.

**From a Socialist Lecturers Alliance leaflet*

Civilian Resistance

A non-nuclear alternative

With Labour jettisoning unilateralism and the peace movement in the doldrums, PETER TATCHELL proposes a new emphasis on "civilian resistance".
What do *Briefing* readers think? Write in and let us know how you would like to see the peace movement develop.

Amidst the rows over Labour's increasingly compromised non-nuclear defence policy, one thing is clear.

Both sides in the debate over unilateralism have internalised the military view that the only effective form of defence is a military one.

The reduction of defence policy exclusively to questions of *military* strategies and weapons systems ignores the most vital element in any defence policy.

That is the consciousness and will of the people and the possibility that the civilian population can be mobilised to resist aggression.

Civilian resistance, or *citizens self-defence* as it is sometimes known, organises the civilian population to deter and defeat aggression by making the country *ungovernable* by a foreign invader (and unsupressable by a military coup or right-wing dictatorship).

It is based on the recognition that all governments, even those imposed by brute force, rely to some extent on the compliance of the cvilian population in order to function.

After all, no invading army can organise the whole state administration and run the all the essential services by itself.

It relies on the subjugated people being willing to continue to work and carry on life as usual.

Without this compliance, even a very large occupation force would find it impossible to administer the entire civil service and local authority apparatus.

This is not to mention operating all the power stations, mines, railways, docks, telecommunications, manufacturing plants, and other vital economic installations.

Civilian resistance therefore seeks to render an occupation regime *unworkable* by withdrawing all co-operation and refusing to collaborate with an invading army.

It uses methods of mass protest and disruption including strikes, absenteeism, go-slows, economic sabotage, boycotts, destruction of official records and forms of civil disobediance such as demonstrations, occupations and tax and rent refusals.

The objectives of these civilian resistance tactics are twofold.

•To *deter* attack by demonstrating to apotential aggressor that the population has the capacity to frustrate its will by rendering the country *uncontrollable* and by making the disadvantages of occupation outweigh the advantages.

A good example of this was Yogoslavia's post-war preparations for civilian resistance which, in conjunction with plans for partisan warfare, are generally credited with deterring a Soviet invasion in the late 1940s.

•If deterrence fails, civilian resistance seeks to defeat aggression by ensuring invaders are denied any benefits from their occupation — the aim being to paralyse an occupation regime and ultimately to force its collapse and withdrawal.

An example of effective civilian resistance to invasion occured in 1923 when the French occupied the Ruhr to extract its vast industrial wealth as repayment for German war debts under the Versailles Treaty.

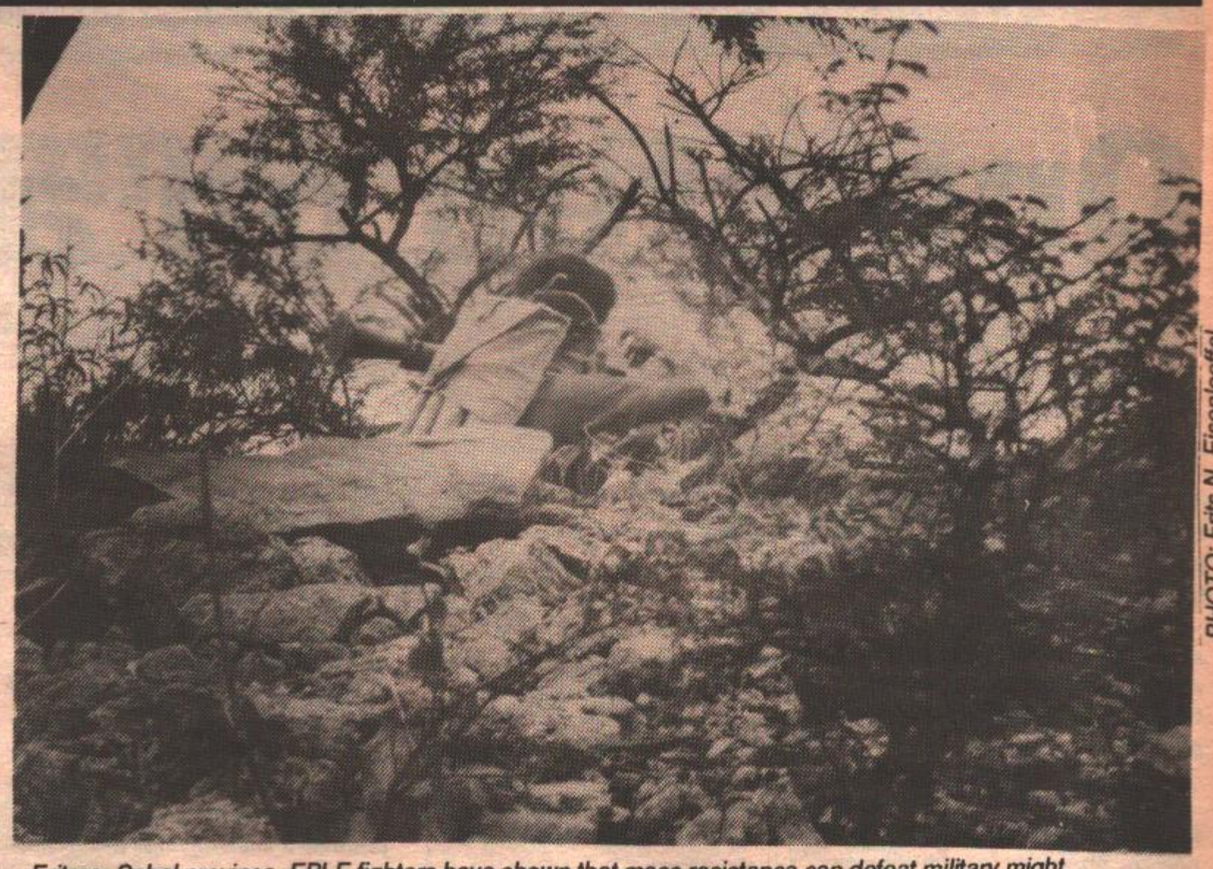


PHOTO: Frits N. Eisenloeffel

Eritrea, Sahel province. EPLF-fighters have shown that mass resistance can defeat military might.

Responded

The German trade unions and left-wing parties responded with a campaign of "citizen's resistance".

To prevent raw materials and manufactures being seized and shipped back to France, industry was brought to a standstill by a general strike.

Vital parts were removed from factory machinery; lorry and train engines were sabotaged; canals were blocked with scutlled barges; railway lines and bridges were blown up; and telegraph and electricity lines were cut.

With their objectives frustrated, the French were eventually forced to withdraw and, chastened by this experience, were deterred from ever again attempting an occupation of the Ruhr.

The principle advantage of Britain havng a defence system at least partiallly based on civilian resistance is that it would offer a method of defence which was simultaneously effective and *non-provocative.*

By being strictly self-defensive and posing no threat to the security of other states, a greater reliance on civilian resistance would therefore reduce the motive for pre-emptive strike in the event of crisis or war.

It would generally contribute to the de-escalation of the arms race which threatens the future of all Europe.

Already, the Swedish, Yogoslav, Dutch, Swiss, Danish, and Norwegian goverments have either made concrete plans for civilian resistance as part of their official defence policies organised studies into its potential.

At the very least, the next Labour government ought to set up a Special Defence Commission to investigate the possibilty of making civilian resistance an integral part of our non-nuclear defence strategy.

Peter Tatchell is the author of *Democratic Defence — A Non-Nuclear Alternative* published by GMP, £3.95.

CND Conference

Unilateralism is more relevant than ever

CND's annaul conference takes place on November 18th and 19th at London's City university.

It comes just a few weeks after the Labour Pary dropped its policy of unilateral nuclear disarmament.

While CND has been on the defensive recently, it has actually increased its membership, partly because of the focus on Labour's policy.

One key item on CND's agenda will be constitutional amendment from Southfields CND proposing the remval of the word "unilateral" from CND's statement of aims:

"The aim of the CND is the *unilateral* abandonment by Britain of nuclear weapons and nuclear bases."

Those who have argued against unilateralism in the past suggest that more can be gained by negotiations than individual gestures.

But in practice, dumping unilateralism means either consultation with Britain's "allies" or negotiating with Britan's "enemies" as a precondition for any initiative in Britan to get rid of nuclear weapons.

Both views are misconceived. They imply that people in Britain are *protected* by NATO's nuclear umbrella and *under threat* from the Soviet bloc. Neither is true.

In fact, many people are increasingly aware that there is no soviet threat. With the USA totally opposed toa nuclear-free Europe, a British unilateralist stance could spur other European countries to a similar position, which might open divisions in the US line.

By JOE JARVIS

The Southfields amendment is unlikely to get much support. More attention will be given to CND's campaigning themes next year which are centred on a nuclear-free Britain on land, sea and air.

But to carry the arguments forward, there needs to be more up-front initiatives, including large demonstrations, on a unilateralist basis.

More emphasis needs to be placed on opposing NATO as a nuclear alliance and more importance attached to the principle of unilateralism, rather than simply criticising particular weapons systems.

There is also a move at this year's conference to replace Bruce Kent, CND Chair, by a supporter of Labour's Policy Review. On the other hand, Walter Wolfgang is running for Vice-Chair.

Labour CND are sponsoring a workshop where Ken Livingstone will debate a member of the Green Party, and the Campaign for Non-Alignment are planning a workshop and fringe meeting.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Livingstone: to debate the Greens.

All CND members are welcome at the conference, and credentials are available from CND at 21-4, Underwood Street, London, N1. Phone: 01 250 4010.

Remembrance Sunday

Stop the NF!

By Anti-Fascist Action

On Remembrance Sunday, November 12th, Anti-Fascist Action will hold a demonstration to try to stop the nazi National Front marching from Victoria to the Cenotaph.

All anti-fascists should meet at the junction of Victoria Street and Bressenden Place, London, SW1 at noon.

For the last three years AFA has protested against the NF's Remembrance Sunday march by holding its own march to the Cenotaph to lay a wreath in memory of present-day victims of fascist attacks.

There have been at least fifty racist murders since 1980 and last year an estimated 70,000 racist attacks in this country.

This year we will not be marching. We have decided that the best way to prevent the growth of a fascist organisation is to *stop it organising.*

Recent nazi gains in Europe shoud be a cause for concern to all anti-fascists in this country — and only go to show that ignoring them won't make them go away (and that in any case they never went away after World War II).

There are now 21 neo-nazi members of the European Parliament and that doesn't include the Italian fascists of the MSI. In Flanders nazis of the Vlaams Blok won 20% of the vote in May.

In recent West German elections the neo-nazi Republican Party won 2.75 million votes and has six MEPs. In Norway the Progressive Party leapt from two to 22 seats. In France the National Front, contrary to popular belief, has held its own.

In London racist attacks have risen by over 60% in the first half of this year — according to the Metropolitan Police.

Against this background of spreading racism and fascism we call on all anti-fascists to join us and stop the NF march. History shows thart disunity, complacency, and cowardice strengthen the hands of the fascists.

Anti-Fascist Action was established in 1985 to unite indviduals, community groups, and political organisations against fascism. London AFA can be contacted at PO Box 273, Forest Gate, London E7.

International Briefing

Namibian elections: SWAPO's role

One step on a long road

The UN-supervised elections for a Namibian constituent assembly, to be held November 7-11th, are a major advance for the national liberation movement.

At the same time, they are also a daring move by the South African ruling class, which hopes to ally itself to imperialism's plans for the region.

In itself, the UN plan will not lead to full national self-determination for Namibia. In addition, the elections have been clouded by recent allegations of serious human rights violations in SWAPO's camps in Angola and Zambia.

There is little doubt that SWAPO will win a majority of the 700,000 votes as long as the UN poll watchers don't allow the South African officials running the ballot to completely rig it.

But SWAPO needs two-thirds of the 72 constituent assembly seats in order to vote through its own constitution. It might have to ally with small parties, which, though ethnically-based have anti-colonial programmes.

Even then, this election is only the start of a long, dangerous haul. The UN Plan allows Pretoria to continue its colonial administration and deploy its police force until independence is declared.

Quite apart from its economic stranglehold over Namibia, South Africa is also allowed to retain control of Namibia's only trading port, Walvis Bay, until some future post-independence deal is worked out.

This partnership of international bureaucrats and apartheid officials has resulted in widespread manipulation of the independence process by the South Africans and their local clients.

On 1 April, Pretoria's locally-recruited killer squad "Koevoet" (crowbar in Afrikaans) attacked SWAPO combatants who thought they could gather peacefully in UN-monitored bases. Over 300 were killed.

Although the bulk of Pretoria's massive army had pulled out by the end of June, its 20,000 local militia have been "demobilised" but kept on the army payroll, while the Koevoet killers have been incorporated into the local "police".

Together they have continued to terrorise SWAPO supporters and force people into the camps of the Pretoria-backed Democratic Turnhalle Alliance (DTA), led by tribal puppets.

The UN also allowed the colonial administration to register nearly 15,000 South African residents as voters on the grounds that they have a natural parent born in Namibia.

In addition, about 15,000 Angolans who fled their own country when Unita was driven back in 1976 and who now live in northern Namibia were also registered.

One of the few opinion polls conducted in Namibia (between April and June, before the SWAPO election campaign got underway) showed that 67% of Namibians supported SWAPO and 15% the DTA.

But the voter registration distortions, plus employer and other intimidation against SWAPO supporters, as well as the use of SWAPO's torch and fist symbols by other parties on the ballot papers (in the context of 60% illiteracy) could combine to deny SWAPO its two-thirds majority.

The seven reactionary client parties (including local white Afrikaaner Nationalists) stand to gain most from this bias, but some liberal pundits have also expressed relief that it may prevent the SWAPO leadership from winning the magical 48 seats.

They hope that a SWAPO coalition with other small "progressive" groups (the Namibia National Front and the United Democratic Front) will open up public debate and ensure a pluralistic policy.

These small groups are ethnically restricted and their programmes are little different from SWAPO's newly projected Mugabe-style mixed economy platform.

By Ben Campbell

But the recent revelations of serious human rights abuses by SWAPO security officials during the war have enabled NNF and UDF supporters, who include some ex-SWAPO detainees, to argue that such a coalition would be preferable and more democratic than a SWAPO-only government.

The charges against the SWAPO security officials and some of the political leadership vary depending on which group of ex-detainees they are made by.

Some have remained in SWAPO; some have allied with the DTA or joined the UDF or NNF. But of the 484 released in May those who have since spoken publicly appear to agree that SWAPO officials in exile ordered the detention of over 1,000 supporters.

It seems that this action was taken after a 1982 crisis in the organisation, prompted by South African military incursions into southern Angola, although some people had been detained earlier. Most were said to be tortured and many victims are now reported killed.

A recent UN investigation, which SWAPO leaders reluctantly conceded, pointed to 315 detainees still missing and 115 reported killed. The report has been rejected by many ex-detainees as inadequate and some have taken civil court action. The UN says it is still investigating the missing names.

SWAPO claims that it had to respond to South African espionage in order to save lives. Some 20,000 Namibians were killed in the war; another 50,000 are calculated to have died indirectly; and, apart from many thousands wounded, maimed or detained without trial, over 150,000 were forcibly displaced.

Some SWAPO leaders have admitted that security officials did commit crimes and say they will be dealt with by SWAPO in due course, but not through the South African courts. But other leaders have not conceded criticism and there is speculation that some have colluded in abuses for political gain.



PHOTO: NCCT/John Liebenberg

SWAPO rally in Windhoek, July 1989

Many detainees were young, educated urbanites, not from SWAPO's predominant Ovambo constituency, and with varied politics.

While Pretoria and its allies have churned out propaganda portraying SWAPO as the local monolithic wing of a totalitarian evil empire, traditional supporters of SWAPO in the Stalinist and third world countries, as well as liberals in the British Anti-Apartheid Movement leadership, have vetoed any publication of information on the SWAPO detainee saga.

Inside Namibia SWAPO's main support newspaper, *The Namibian*, has tried to cover the story. An indication of the tensions within SWAPO over this issue came out at a huge rally in Windhoek. When SWAPO's head of security in exile was introduced to the 50,000 crowd, they remained silent even though they had cheered other leaders.

To view a mass, populist movement like SWAPO as a homogeneous entity is simply not tenable. While most of its exiled leadership stagnated under the weight of Stalinist ideas during the 80s, inside Namibia its cadre build relatively vibrant and democratic youth and trade union movements.

The leadership's tolerance, even promotion, of these movements stands in stark contrast to its ultra-patriarchal stance towards the SWAPO Women's Council.

Despite the tactical blunder of its military high command in April, the role of SWAPO's military wing in tying down a collosal SA Defence Force presence during 23 years of bush war, and in driving the SADF out of Angola's Cunene Province last year (with Cuban reinforcements), has earned SWAPO a reputation amongst Namibians for combativity and not just rhetoric.

Most Namibian militants know that the Western idea of a parliamentary road to socialism in one country is bankrupt, especially in a tiny country being severed from the adjacent apartheid state through a diplomatic deal sponsored by the "great powers".

The impoverished Namibian working class has a low level of technological skills and massive land hunger and unemployment.

The local economy is highly dependent on expatriates, the export of diamonds and uranium, imports of food, transport via South Africa, and a huge debt.

Namibia is now a laboratory for imperialist strategies in South Africa itself. The idea is to test out de Klerk's white-controlled multi-racialism and to tame the ANC in protracted talks.

Socialists in Britain must actively support the anti-colonial forces in Namibia, especially the youth and trade union movements, and expose imperialist "solutions" like the UN Plan.

De Klerk tries to ride the tiger

The people unban the ANC

The huge rally held in Soweto on Sunday, 22 October, to greet Walter Sisulu and the other six ANC leaders released from prison, was a clear indication that the vast majority of the people of South Africa support the ANC.

The government, perhaps taken in by its own propaganda, was patently surprised at the demonstration's size.

On 29 June, a cabinet member, Stoffel van der Merwe, in an interview with *The Independent*, said:

"We have done intensive scientific research among blacks. A number support the ANC, a decreasing number, but most people, 85% of the black population, want peace, negotiations, prosperity and jobs. Why should we negotiate with 15%?"

Thatcher probably uses the same statistics to back her claims that a majority of black people are opposed to sanctions.

The astonishing decision to release the prisoners, whatever the reasons behind it, will have a dramatic effect on the future of South Africa. It creates a new situation which requires not only tactical changes but a wide-ranging strategic debate.

By CHARLIE VAN GELDEREN

What is certain is that Nelson Mandela, himself still a prisoner, albeit one with exceptional privileges, played a leading part in the events which led to the freeing of the prisoners.

On the eve of the announcement of their release, the seven senior ANC leaders were taken from Pollsmoor prison to meet Mandela; they then learned that he had been having talks with senior members of the government for some time.

In a guarded statement after his release, Walter Sisulu acknowledged the existence of a document on negotiations prepared personally by Mandela but denied that this was cause for friction between Mandela and the ANC leadership.

Although Sisulu would not go into details about the document, it was clear that the main emphasis was on negotiation.

At the Soweto rally he repeated the point that negotiations did not mean the abandonment of the armed struggle.

"The armed struggle", he said, "would have to be treated separately; in other words there must be negotiations on the basis of military operations.

"The ANC took up arms against the South African government... because all legal avenues were narrowed down or eliminated."

Sisulu also made clear that in general he was in agreement with the recently issued ANC guidelines about the future of South Africa.

He was not concerned at present in promoting socialism, which was "merely an ideal", but with achieving a broad and unifying national democracy.

It remains to be seen whether the government and the moderate wing of the ANC leadership between them can tame the tiger which they have unleashed.

The people, rightly, see the release of the prisoners and the effective unbanning of the ANC as *their* victory, *their* reward for two decades of struggle.

And having tasted some of victory's fruits they will now go on to demand the whole orchard.

Indian Elections

Corruption and communal strife

Between November 24th and 26th the biggest exercise of the franchise in human history will take place.

Five hundred million Indian voters will be eligible to take part in elections to the country's parliament, the Lok Sabha.

Rajiv Gandhi's Congress Party is defending the huge majority it won in 1984 in the wake of his mother's assassination.

He was elected with high hopes. "Mr Clean" aws expected to "modernise" the country by clearing out corruption and bureaucracy and importing technology.

His five years in office have seen some economic growth — but no reduction in poverty, inefficiency, corruption, authoritarian methods, or communal violence.

Mass disillusionment with Rajiv is, however, unlikely to lead to victory for the opposition.

Ideologically, there will be little choice on offer. With the partial exception of the heavily Stalinised left, all of the political parties advocate continued economic *liberalisation* and political *non-alignment.*

This may seem an odd combination, but remember: India is dominated by a relatively independent industrial bourgeoisie, the only significant section of world capital to have forged a long-term alliance with the Soviet Union.

By MARK SEATON

Despite (because of?) the lack of policy debate, the election campaign will be ruthlesss, with mud-slinging and flagrant vote-buying on all sides.

The Bofors scandal — in which Congress and Rajiv are personally alleged to have received kickbacks on a huge government contract with Swedish arms manufacturer Bofors — has ruined Rajiv's *Mr Clean* image.

But the opposition will not benefit much — because in the eyes of the electorate they are just as corrupt as Congress.

Rajiv's Congress, a feeble descendent of the Indian National Congress which led the freedom struggle, is now a political machine run from the top down solely on the basis of patronage.

Nonetheless its association with "stability", its nation-wide organisation (unmatched by any other political force), and its control of the state machinery means that everything else in Indian politics is defined in relation to it.

The current leader of the opposition coalition, VP Singh, is himself an ex-Congress Finance Minister whose breakaway several years back owed more to frustrated personal ambition than anything else.

His party, the Janata Dal, with its base among sections of the rich peasantry in the Hindi-speaking belt of Northern India, is in alliance with a variety of regional parties and local caste-based power-brokers.

It is also making "seat arrangements" with the two Communist Parties.

The Communists are in power at state level in West Bengal and Kerala and only in these regions and a few others can the left command any real electoral support.



Opposition to Rajiv: a gathering of opportunists.

Across large regions of the country it has no presence at all.

It criticises the authoritarianism and corruption of Congress and advocates moderate social welfare programmes. But electrolism long ago blunted its radical edge.

The other important national political force is the Bharatiya Janata Party — a right-wing Hindu chauvinist gang rooted in the RSS, a religious-political order somewhat like the Orange Lodges.

The BJP's base is in the towns and cities of the northern Hindi-speaking states. There it is a powerful and well organised force which can make the difference between success and failure for the opposition coalition.

Hindu-Muslim communal violence in the run-up to the election has been the worst since partition.

The BJP has been organising a nation-wide "agitation" around the town of Ayodhya in Uttar where a 16th century mosque is built on the site of a Hindu shrine.

This hasn't been an issue with the local people for several centuries but interventions by Hindu chauvinists (aided by sectarian Muslim leadership) have led to riots in scores of towns and cities — and now, ominously, the countryside — and over 600 deaths.

While the BJP hopes to use this latest act of the communal tragedy to extend its base into rural areas and increase its leverage inside the opposition, Rajiv also expects to benefit.

Indeed, the opposition regularly accuses Congress (with justification) of deliberately fomenting the turmoil in order to attract Muslim and minority votes as well as others seeking "stability" and the kind of "answer" to the communal problem that comes frm state repression.

Anti-communal slogans and "unity marches" have been the stock in trade of the Communists for decades but they have little else to say about the current nightmare.

Since they are part of an opposition block which includes communal elements, their credibility on this issue is poor.

All of which points to continuing Congress rule, albeit with a reduced majority, and no solution whatsoever for any of India's battery of social and economic problems.

Students face up to Ireland

"Time To Go" — when?

The British state has been forced to concede on the Guildford Four.

Daily there are revelations on the Birmingham Six and the role of the RUC in supplying Loyalist killers with the names of Republican sympathisers.

This in the climate in which students are once again taking up the issue of Ireland.

Students cannot shield themselves from the effects of Britain's rule in Ireland. For example, the NUS and Union of Students in Ireland (USI) have joint "authority" over the North of Ireland.

In recent years increasing numbers of Irish nationals have applied to British colleges as part of a wider youth emigration from the South, itself largely caused by British interference. Applications to Polytechnics are up fourfold in two years!

by Ian McClarty

Formally NUS has an excellent policy on Ireland — supporting self-determination and troops out now. However practise has lagged behind policy.

For example, when NUS member Mairead Farrell was murdered, the Executive opposed a statement being read from conference floor on the circumstances of her death.

The NOLS leadership had twice promised to prioritise a Guildford Four relative speaking at conference but this support was never delivered.

Because of this inactivity on a potentially excellent policy the "Students Say Time to Go" conference on November 12th in Sheffield should be welcomed.

Unfortunately the organisers of this event — the NUS leadership — have used the slogan "Time To Go", which does not mean troops out now, let alone self-determination.

This means that the event is organised on a line that is to the right of NUS policy.

Equally regretable is the fact that the conference is seen as a rally rather than a launching pad for activists to go back to their colleges and build solidarity with the Irish struggle. No resolutions will be allowed at the event.

As a result differences will not be clarified and the fight for student solidarity with the Irish people could be delayed.

We will get big name speakers (Clare Short et al.) to cheer, but no chance to argue through the way students can best support those in Ireland struggling against British imperialism.

Progressive students must build for this conference, otherwise this initiative will be a series of national events that fail to involve students in individual colleges.

The campaign could be hijacked by those who have used "Time To Go" to cover their lack of support for a united Ireland and for immediate withdrawal of British troops.

The high registration fee for the conference makes it crucial that students attending this event are supported by their colleges.

It is also essential at this conference and at subsequent events attempts are made to reach out to groups outside the student movement including LCI, TOM and the IBRG.

Ireland

Irish socialist on Loyalist deathlist

Peoples Democracy, the Irish section of the Fourth International, has revealed that one of its members is among those whose photos and personal details have been leaked to the Scottish newspaper *The Daily Record.*

Former Peoples Democracy Councillor for West Belfast, John McAnulty, said, "this is proof positive that political and trade union activists are targeted by the UDR, RUC and British Army — and subsequently by their henchmen in the Loyalist organisations.

"The member concerned is a longstanding member of our organisation and a bona fide trade unionist who has played an important part in major industrial disputes. He has never been a member of Sinn Fein or the IRA.

"His only arrest arose from a May Day demonstration in 1981, and this was the only occasion on which an official photograph was taken. We believe it is this photograph which has been leaked.

"The fact that our member's photograph was included in a photo-montage shows that this involvement in perfectly legal political and trade union activity was considered sufficient for him to be routinely harassed and put at risk from Loyalist killer squads — for these groups the leak of the document would be sufficient grounds for murder.

Civilians

"It has to be asked just how many of the 'random killings' of Catholic civilians are the result of malice and political bias by the state forces coupled with collaboration with Loyalist assassins.

"This malice and bias extends to the RUC's response to the leaks. Our member was informed by a shoddy piece of photocopy paper pushed under his front door.

"Nothing could more clearly indicate the RUC's contempt for his rights and his life.

"The 'leaks' issue is not about pieces of paper but about the involvement of all sectors of the state forces in murder.

"Any serious proposal to end this threat would result, at minimum, in the immediate withdrawal of the RUC and British Army from nationalist areas."

City of London A-A Group

South African disinformation

It has been brought to the attention of the City of London Anti- Apartheid Group that a bogus press statement is being circulated in our name.

The bogus statement, dated October 8th 1989, appears on a badly photocopied copy of City A-A headed notepaper and claims that:

"The City A-A Group particularly condemns the murder and imprisonment of dozens of Namibian patriots in SWAPO detention camps in Angola. These Namibians were seemingly victims of SWAPO sectarianism..."

City A-A has never made such a statement.

The bogus statement goes on to quote "City A-A Namibian coordinator Adam Bowden". No such post exists in City A-A. We have no member by the name of Adam Bowden.

This is not the first time that bogus statements have been issued in City A-A's name. We have no doubt that these statements were produced by agents of the Apartheid regime who have an obvious interest in dividing anti-apartheid forces both in Southern Africa and Britain.

***From City A-A press release**

LABOUR BRIEFING

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November 25th Conference

New directions for anti-Poll Tax movement

A new, national anti-Poll Tax newsletter "3D" ("Don't Pay, Don't Collect, Don't Implement") has been produced by the Steering Committee elected at the September 3rd national meeting. 3D is standing a slate for the three national officers to be elected by the November 25th National Conference Against the Poll Tax. TERRY CONWAY from *LABOUR BRIEFING* spoke to DANNY BURNS and JANE CONNOR, who are both on the 3D slate, about the key issues now facing the movement.

LB: Can you say something about your involvement in the anti-Poll Tax movement?

Danny: I became involved last year having heard what was happening in Scotland and realising that the Poll Tax would devastate poorer communities.

At the time I was involved in a housing co-op. Together with local Labour Party and other groups, we set up a local anti-Poll Tax Union early in 1989.

We held public meetings, distributed posters, and then collected names of those who put up the posters in their windows to form the core of an anti-Poll Tax Union.

It now has over 300 members. We have street reps and are conducting door-to-door canvassing throughout Bristol and Avon.

I went on to become Secretary of the Avon Federation, which has given me a wide range of experience — organising demos, designing canvass cards, sending out minutes, etc.

The Avon Fed has been very successful, growing from 10 groups to 50, with 35 local groups and over 15 trade union affiliations. We had a large anti-registration demo where over 500 people burnt forms. We are now organising a demo for December 2nd.

Jane: I have been involved for over a year in Tottenham Against the Poll Tax. I thought the Poll Tax was going to be one of the biggest attacks the Tories would make on the working class.

Positive

I thought it was important that people from the Labour Party were involved in a community-based campaign, partly to ensure it had a labour movement orientation.

I have also played a role in developing the London Federation and, more recently helping, through the Socialist Movement, to set up the very positive September 3rd meeting, which I chaired.

LB: What do you think are the crucial issues facing the anti-Poll Tax movement?

Jane: First, there is the question of unity. The forces in favour of non-payment are probably dominant now; but there have been divisions and there continues to be a wing that has always argued against mass non-payment.

Some supporters of *Militant* have created problems by setting up parallel structures to the existing movement in a number of towns. I think we have to fight for principled unity built round commitment to the "3Ds".

Bureaucracy

Second, we must face up to the problems posed by the position of the Labour Party and trade union leaderships. We can't ignore the bureaucracy or go round it.

We have to build a genuinely mass movement that can put demands on the bureaucracy and eventually change their positions, or at least marginalise their influence.

Third, there is the question of precisely how the movement organises at local and national level.

Building unity in action is central — which is why the November 25th Conference is so important.

It's an opportunity to bring the whole movement together, to set up democratic structures to implement the decisions of conference, and provide an accountable leadership for the movement.

But any new national — and for that matter local — structures must be democratic and must fully involve those sections of the labour movement which want to take action against the Poll Tax.

Danny: The question of building confidence is crucial. We've suffered ten years of the Thatcherite onslaught and the Poll Tax is the pinnacle of her repressive legislation.

Despite massive movements in their support, the miners and the GLC were defeated. This left people feeling depressed, as if nothing could be done.

We have to get over that barrier. One million people in Scotland not paying shows that this is one issue we can win.

Once the labour movement and Labour Councils see that people aren't paying and are putting themselves on the line, it will be easier to develop strategies of non-co-operation.

Confidence

If we can build confidence in the communities, Councillors and trade union leaders will draw courage from those communities. It is not only that we won't pay, but we can't pay and we want the backing of our unions and our Councils.

The diverse political interests and experiences within the movement are a strength, but we have to work together and retain the confidence of the whole movement.

Unity must be based not on compromise but on democratically establishing political positions and then thrashing out strategies to implement them.

Diversity

LB: Why are you standing for officers positions on November 25th?

Jane: The diversity of the movement, which for me is a strength, not a weakness, should be represented in the national officerships and the Steering Committee elected from November 25th.

I'm standing specifically for the post of Treasurer partly because I've had a lot of book-keeping and fundraising experience for campaigns.

I also have a political perspective which I want to bring to the movement.

Mass non-payment has to be combined with mass non-implementation. The non-collection/non-implementation part of the strategy will be *harder* to build than non-payment.

This means prioritising developing links with workers involved in implementation — who have the power, combined with millions of non-payers, to defeat the Tax and pose an alternative that doesn't make workers pay for the Tories' economic crisis.

Danny: A number of strands of the movement have come together to organise the November Conference, but there have been problems.

As a member of the Steering Committee elected in September I think I have the confidence of different groups and can play a constructive role in bringing them together.

A National Federation has to offer support to local groups. With my history of local involvement, I think I can keep this perspective.

The tasks before us are practical. We have to develop legal strategies long before payment day, as well as strategies for involving the labour movement.

We have to build structures which allow communication between local groups and finances to take national initiatives.

I am convinced that we are going to win. We can see even now the confidence of Tories crumbling with the Lawson resignation and the various trade union victories over pay.

People feel the tide is turning, but we can't wait for a Labour government. We have to make it clear that if such a government is elected that we won't settle for a system that isn't based on ability to pay.

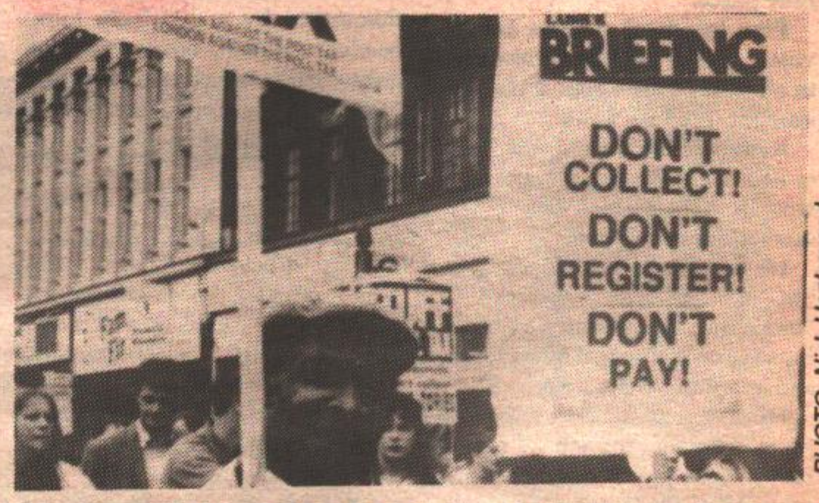


PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

Marching against the Poll Tax in Lambeth: part of building a national movement to resist the Tax.

Fiddling Poll Tax facts

Official figures show that non-payment of the Poll Tax in Scotland is averaging 23%.

Anti-Poll Tax campaigners believe, however, that they are on target for up to one million non-payers.

Top of the league table of non-payers are the Scottish Islands. Official figures show that 48% of Western Islanders, 40% of people in the Shetlands, and 33% of Orkney Islanders had paid no Poll Tax by the end of June.

Margaret Gear, Secretary of SCRAP (Shetland Community Resistance Against the Poll Tax) described the response to the campaign as "fantastic".

"We actually believe the number of non-payers to be over 50% but even the official figure of 40% is way beyond what we originally expected. We're absolutely delighted," she said.

In many Authorities, the true picture of non-payment is likely to be much higher than the official figures suggest.

Most Councils admitted to *Labour Research* that they have no accurate way of assessing non-payment levels and the methods they have adopted are under challenge from anti-Poll Tax campaigners.

Some finance officers are calculating non-payment on an aggregate basis — by dividing the amount of payments they have received by the number of people eligible to pay.

This method fails to distinguish between people who have paid a full year's Poll Tax, those who have paid one or more instalments, and those who have paid nothing at all.

Non-payment in Scotland's largest region, Strathclyde, is officially 20% — around 360,000 people.

However, the Strathclyde Federation of Anti-Poll Tax Unions believes there are some 550,000 non-payers — 30% of those liable to pay.

In Tayside, anti-Poll Tax Union Secretary Phil Stott believes there are 60,000 non-payers — 30% — in contrast to the Council's figure of 14%.

The cost of administering the Poll Tax is also proving expensive.

Councillor Eric Milligan, President of the Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities, told a Local Authority Conference in London in June that the cost of computer equipment and office accommodation for implementation of the Poll Tax in Scotland was around £30 million.

Running costs, including the cost of 2,000 extra staff, were around £45 million — £25 million more than the cost of administering the rates.

*Excerpted from *Labour Research*

3D hits the streets!

A new anti-Poll Tax newsletter has been launched in support of the slogans "Don't Pay, Don't Collect, Don't Implement".

Appropriately named "3 D", the newsletter is the offspring of the Steering Committee elected by the September 3rd national meeting, and aims to spread information about the non-payment campaign as well as debating tactics for the way forward.

3D is also standing a slate for the three national officers to be elected by the November 25th National Conference Against the Poll Tax.

The slate consists of:

- TOMMY SHERIDAN, a supporter of *Militant* and Chair of the Scottish Federation, for Chair;
- JANE CONNOR, a *Briefing* supporter active in Tottenham against the Poll Tax, for treasurer;
- DANNY BURNS, Secretary of the Avon Federation, for Secretary.

Stay in touch: get your copies of 3D from:
11, Springfield Road, Tottenham,
London N15 4AY.