LABOUR
BRIEFING
No. 95 January 24th-February 6th 1990

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40p

TUC: organise solidarity action!

CALL US OUT!



PHOTO: Tim Nolan

Ambulance workers demonstrate January 13th

The ambulance dispute is now at a critical stage.

Despite many weeks of government pressure, the ambulance workers are resolute in their demand for a decent pay rise.

The government has added to its unpopularity and Kenneth Clarke has made the dubious achievement of getting three quarters of Tory voters to side with the ambulance workers against the government.

The situation is now at stalemate with a growing mood of frustration affecting virtually every ambulance station.

Given the huge public support for NUPE and the other ambulance unions, it seems surprising that the trade union leaderships can simply be frozen in fright like rabbits on a busy motorway.

Norman Willis appears occasionally with a bucket to help collections. Roger Poole appears on TV as NUPE's answer to Jason Donovan and Rodney Bickerstaffe seems to have a bad case of laryngitis.

What NONE of them have any intention of doing is organising industrial support that offends the employers or the government.

The December 6th "Day of Action" showed the potential, when 30,000 workers struck in London and sent a warning shot across the bows of the "official" trade union movement.

Groups of workers who normally are not "militant" or inclined to strike were willing to walk out in support of a cause they felt was just.

If the main ambulance unions — NUPE, COHSE, TGWU and NALGO — chose to use only a fraction of their industrial muscle this dispute could be concluded quickly in favour of the ambulance personnel.

Instead, the tactics seem to be to plead for a "Review Board", which separates ambulance from other NHS staff, rely on "public opinion", hope Kinnock wins the next election and (most unlikely of the lot) honours his pledge to introduce a national minimum wage.

By TONY CORDELL
Secretary, Hackney Council Joint Shop Stewards Committee

Such a passive strategy cannot win a dispute. Only the organised anger of thousands of trade unionists escalating the action can force a retreat by Thatcher and Clarke.

We have the power to do this but the leaderships of the unions are now a blockage to winning the dispute.

Ambulance union members are now balloting for all-out strikes and many individual drivers are stating bluntly that they have no intention of returning to their jobs unless they do secure a living wage.

There is now a real danger of the unity of this dispute being fractured by the vacillation of those charged with winning it.

The very limited call by the TUC for 15 minutes "contemplation" of the ambulance staff on January 30th offers an opportunity once again to show solidarity by widening this into a day of protest and industrial action.

In Hackney, for example, we intend to organise a demonstration of 5,000 people from local unions and the workforce to link up between the two local ambulance depots.

Virtually every other Council in London that has a Joint Shop Stewards organisation will be taking some similar form of action.

If it is possible for local union branches and shop stewards committees,with no real resources, to organise such actions, why is it so difficult for our alleged leaders to do the same?

This dispute can and must be won. Millions of workers in the public sector have wage demands in the pipeline. Their success hangs on the outcome.

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, Jan. 30th if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

AAM distortions

Dear *Briefing*

Another year, another Anti-Apartheid Movement AGM, another distorted and inaccurate report from Mike Phipps (*Briefing* no.94). He never lets the truth get in the way of a good argument.

His comments on the democracy of the AAM need close examination. Motions are necessarily composited or Mike would be complaining that not all the motions were discussed.

It is simply untrue that the Moses Mayekiso campaign was kept off the agenda and I was as disappointed as Mike that the Greenwich and Bexley composite on political prisoners was not reached.

In addition, the AAM has already launched a campaign around the Upington 14 and are planning more. The question is whether we give exclusive support to this one case.

For someone who claims to have a class perspective on the struggle against apartheid, I am surprised that he failed to mention the contributions of SACTU and Jay Naidoo, General Secretary of COSATU. Perhaps this would have revealed too much for his liking that COSATU and the MDM are very much in accord with the programme of the AAM.

We need no lessons from Greenwich and Bexley on mobilising the black community and women. Of their spokespersons at the AGM, none were black or women.

Just like in South Africa, the growing unity of forces under the leadership of the ANC is testing the "non-sectarian" credentials of some organisations. The increased majority in the AGM for the present leadership and programme will test the stated desire of Greenwich and Bexley for unity. My fear is that they are not up to it.

Colin Adkins
Brent South CLP and
Brent AAM

Disaggregation: "complicated and impractical"

Dear *Briefing*

I would like to make a few points in response to Bryn Griffiths, who has argued for the "disaggregation" of the block vote.

Bryn tells us that the LCC have seized upon the unpopularity of the block vote to launch an assault on the trade union link itself. But the LCC also supports "disaggregation" of the block vote, presumably as a step towards demolishing it altogether!

Bryn also tells us Labour's undemocratic structures helped CLPD's demands achieve such resonance in the early 80's. This of course is also true. But what Bryn neglects to point out is that these victories were won through the block vote.

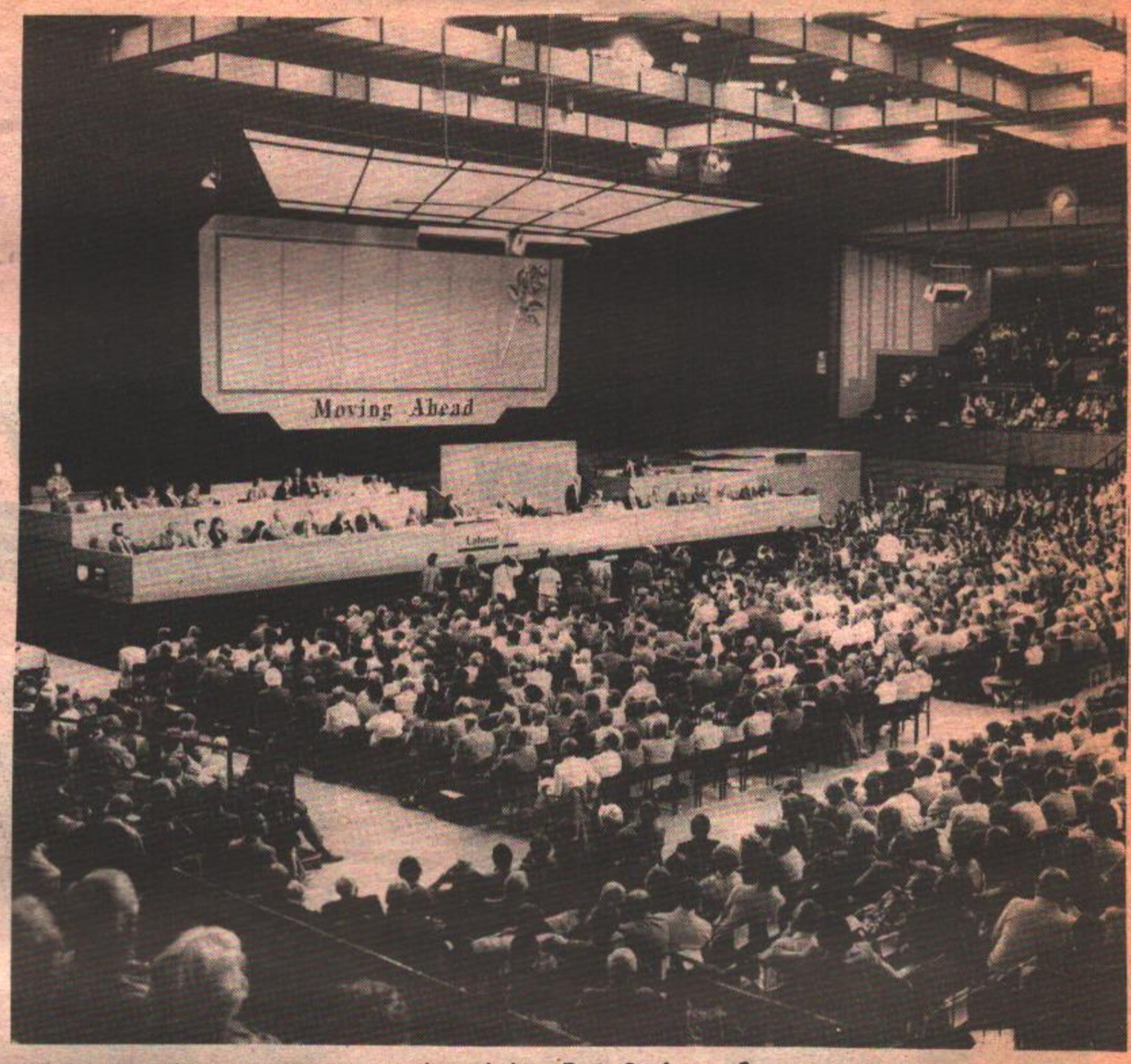
CLPD demands were overwhelmingly carried, as a result of motions coming from the rank and file. The trade union officials were therefore forced to vote for the demands at Labour Party Conference whether they liked them or not.

Bryn's article is an argument for increasing democracy within each trade union. With this we all agree. But there is nothing which really makes the case for taking the further, and very harmful, step of undermining collective decision-making by entering the bizarre world of "disaggregation".

"Disaggregation" would greatly increase divisions within the unions, since minorities would feel encouraged to ignore majority decisions. Bryn fails to explain why greater divisiveness can possibly be portrayed as more democratic.

Finally Bryn admits that "the mechanics of dividing up the block vote are extremely complicated." I would go further than this; they are not only very complicated, they are totally impractical.

Pete Willsman
CLPD



Will disaggregation cause more aggravation at Labour Party Conference?

Revolutionary recipe

Dear *Briefing*

I would be grateful if you would send me your recipe for "Post-war order crumble", as mentioned in your headline of *Labour Briefing* no.93.

Chris Hampshire
Brighton



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

Palmer's parochialism?

Dear *Briefing*

Dave Palmer's article "Prepare for crash landing" presents a parochial view of Britain's economic prospects.

From 1945 the world saw the longest sustained boom of capital accumulation. The post-war boom ended in the recession of '74.

If the rise in the organic composition of capital caused the falling rate of profit that hampered accumulation and sparked recession, then the enormous integration of the world's capitalist economies meant the recession hit all.

As the bourgeois pundits have it, "when the US sneezes the world catches a cold!"

A partial recovery only gave way to a more intense recession in '81. The US led the world out of this recession with a boom based on weapons and debt.

But the recovery has now run its course. The Americans, always more willing to acknowledge the cyclical tendency towards recession, are frankly talking of recession.

We can be confident that the next recession will first, be soon coming; second involve all capitalist economies; and third threaten financial infrastructures.

Japan and Germany, everybody's miracle economies, owe their prosperity to massive export sales. They cannot remain unharmed by recessions in the US, Britain and other countries.

There is a key difference between the recessions of '74 and '81 and the depression of the 30's. The post-war recessions badly shook financial institutions but the essential fabric of those institutions survived.

By contrast the 30's saw the collapse of large swathes of the financial system.

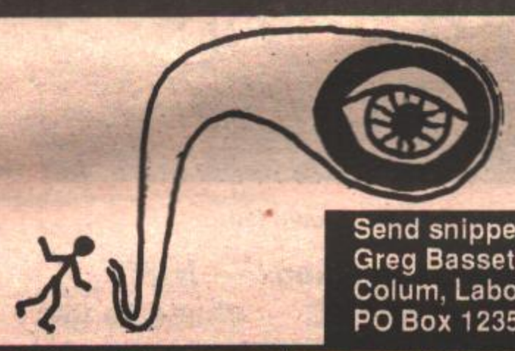
Briefly surveying world capitalism indicates that financial structures do not look strong. The level of debt being carried by US companies, the US government, South American governments and British property companies gives pause for thought.

So we are in for international recession threatening fundamental capitalist structures. Specific local circumstances suggest Britain will suffer early and badly.

But it is the development of the system as a whole that must be grasped before we can concentrate on local details!

Will Brown
Bristol

PERISCOPE



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

Obituary Thomas Gerard ("Gerry") Healy

Readers of *The Guardian* (daily organ of the central committee of the wet tendency of the English bourgeoisie) must have been surprised to see a wildly sycophantic obituary by Vanessa Redgrave as its only comment on the passing of a man who probably did more damage to the left in Britain than Thatcher, Callaghan and Wilson put together!

One should not speak ill of the dead — but in his case I am happy to make an exception.

Gerry Healy may have seemed an irrelevance to younger activists. In the 50s and 60s, however, his baleful influence was capable of blighting the political development of thousands of socialists and trade unionists.

Healy entered politics just before World War II and afterwards became involved in the Revolutionary Communist Party (RCP). He acted firstly as an agent of Michael Raptis (Pablo), then after breaking with him, established his own group.

When the RCP broke apart Healy was able to establish his organisation as the largest one to the left of the Communist Party (CPGB) in Britain.

Hungary 1956 and the ensuing crisis of Stalinism following Krushchev's speech allowed Healy his "finest hour" when he succeeded in recruiting many of the best elements who resigned from the CPGB.

Launching the Socialist Labour League (SLL) in 1959, Healy took it into the Labour Party Young Socialists and recruited many young workers appalled at betrayals of Gaitskell and Brown over CND.

However, from 1962 onwards the organisation descended into the sectarian and ultimatist sect that destroyed its own recruits.

Convinced that a revolutionary crisis was always imminent, Healy took his organisation out of the Labour Party and turned to paper selling and staging "spectaculars" at rallies and conferences.

All internal dissent was ruthlessly suppressed and critics were dismissed as either "mensheviks" or police agents.

The last 20 years of the SLL (from 1973 the Workers' Revolutionary Party, and following the split in that party circa '85, the Marxist Party) has seen a complete wasting of every opportunity offered it — whether it was the Oxford TGWU militants, the film star actors or thousands of young socialists — burnt out by demands of paying high subs, selling totally unreadable newspapers or "building the party".

Healy never understood the mass organisations — the unions and the Labour Party — and probably never wanted to. Like Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh or the Reverand Moon, to him objectives were nothing and the organisation everything.

He died discredited, surrounded by scandals but still lionized by a clique of middle class disciples.

Nevertheless, as an SLL member for two and a half years in the early 60s, I can allow one small tear for a lost opportunity.

The 57 varieties of left groups in the late 60s arose in the vacuum left by Healyism. A sane Marxist leadership at that time would have developed a depth of organisation to win the battles of the late 70s and early 80s.

Healy died around the same time as Ceausescu — the latter as violent tragedy and the former as sad farce. Despite this, they had more than a few points in common!

Keith Veness

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Turn support into action!

The January 13th demonstration in London showed the enormous popular support which exists for the ambulance workers. January 30th must now be built as a huge message of solidarity to ambulance crews and of opposition to the government's policy of wage restraint.

The decision of West Sussex and other crews to come out on all-out strike show the way forward in the dispute. Crews themselves must decide on the level of accident and emergency cover they offer.

Control of the dispute must be seized from the unaccountable NUPE officials who have used public support as the reason to restrict action, rather than a way of spreading it. NUPE's policy of using public support to force Clarke to back down has little hope of success. Escalating the dispute is the best way forward.

The TUC's call for 15 minutes strike action on January 30th must be used to argue for more extensive solidarity action. Where possible, workplaces should prolong the 15 minutes to half or whole day strike action.

Of course the TUC is opposed to such action and has insisted that workers must have their employers' agreement before doing anything! As Norman Willis has stressed, "this is not a call from us, or from the ambulance unions for industrial action under any guise".

On December 6th over 30,000 workers took solidarity strike action in support of the ambulance workers in London without a single victimisation. The TUC are running scared of the anti-union laws. In fact, these laws are only effective when the unions bow before them.

Defiance by millions on January 30th would make it almost impossible for the bosses to take court action and could illicit a major defeat on the anti-union laws.

Such action would also, of course, strike a major blow in support of the ambulance crews and against the NHS white paper, which relies for its implementation on an acquiescent workforce.

The other way in which workers can help the ambulance crews is to use the political pressure on the Tories as a result of the dispute to press their own claims on wages and other issues.

Isolated in struggle the ambulance crews can be beaten. Faced with simultaneous national strikes in a number of different sectors the Tories could be trounced.

Soviet Stalinism; the crisis deepens

The post-war era is over. A new era is beginning.

1989 opened the terminal crisis of the Stalinist regimes in Eastern Europe. 1990 opens with the extension of that crisis to the republics of the USSR itself.

Last month Western politicians talked glibly of freedom in Eastern Europe, as though the process of self-determination and self-government were completed. Now they are less confident as the process of clearing out the old Stalinist apparatus deepens in Romania and East Germany.

They realise that whilst the old dictators have gone, the bureaucracy is trying to limit the damage. Police forces, armies and privileges are still intact. The anti-Turkish chauvinism stirred-up in Bulgaria by supporters of the ousted Zhirkov shows the bureaucracy can counter-attack.

Nor has the process stopped at the borders of the Soviet Union. Lithuania, annexed by Stalin at the start of the Second World War, now seeks independence from Soviet rule.

Socialists uphold the right of the people of oppressed nations to determine their future. A self-governing Lithuania would be an advance for all oppressed nationalities in the USSR.

At the same time, it is necessary to go beyond simplistic nationalism. Whilst Lithuanian nationalism against great-Russian chauvinism may be a progressive force, it is reactionary when turned on that country's own minorities — for example, the Poles.

In many of the Soviet republics, pure nationalism has been fuelled by the outlook of the local bureaucracy. This is clearest in the dead-end civil war in the Caucasus.

Even in the Baltic, the Communist Parties have adopted nationalist ideas as a way of clinging to power. But within the national aspirations *of the Baltic peoples* there is a range of political opinions from right-wing chauvinism to democratic socialist.

As Eastern Europe has shown, the masses, not the bureaucracy, will determine the future.

Behind the headlines

Eastern Europe

Democratic Socialism: the only answer

We print here extracts from a paper written by Eric Heffer presented to the Campaign Group of Labour MPs in December 1989 on the situation in Eastern Europe

The first point I would like to make, is that, despite what has and is happening in Eastern Europe, it is not the end of Socialism or Communism. It is the political revolution long predicted by Trotsky and others.

It was clear that a political revolution was essential once Stalin had got in power through the transformation of the Bolshevik Party. Despite the oppression and state terrorism it was only a matter of time before the revolution took place.

The October Russian Revolution of 1917 was the first and only successful workers' revolution in the world.

The brief period of democracy in the Soviet Union under Lenin was destroyed under Stalin. All democratic processes were destroyed. Stalin used the state apparatus, the secret service, the police and armed forces, to destroy the opposition.

The truth is that in place of the workers being the dictatorship over the capitalists, the Party and ultimately the leadership became the dictatorship over the workers. The socialist critics of the Soviet leaders strongly argued about the nature of the Soviet Union.

Personally I am not sure what type of society it created but the socialised base of society cannot be ignored. It was clear the political revolution would demand the need for free and independent trade unions, that there should be free elections, freedom of speech and the press, and that more than one political party of the workers should be formed.

The hopes for that were dashed after the Second World War. The capitalist powers, together with the Soviet Union, agreed that the world, especially Europe and the Middle East, should be divided up into spheres of influence between them.

Power

The truth is that Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, East Germany, etc. could not have become so-called People's Democracies had not the CPs been put in power by the Soviets.

Stalin immediately after the War made sure that the people in control of the Communist Parties in Eastern Europe were his creatures. That is why the trials of innocent people took place. That is why the purges took place. That is why any semblance of democracy was destroyed.

There have been demands for democracy and freedom in Eastern Europe for a long time. That demand is not a bourgeois concept, it is in fact a workers' demand.

During the upsurge in Eastern Europe, the demands were for free elections, free trade unions, workers' control of industry, more than one political party, free publications, freedom of speech, freedom to meet and demonstrate.

What is important is to remember that the upsurge in Easter Europe began not from below recently but because the Soviet bureaucracy has split.

Once section accepts that the problems of production in the Soviet Union cannot be solved unless there are changes of a democratic nature. The old bureaucratic system is no longer adequate.

The move then comes from the top, from within the bureaucracy but of course is welcomed by others.

The bureaucracy, that is the section who recognise the need for change, nevertheless want to make sure that change is strictly controlled and that everything is done with Party control and agreement.

If this was not so the other section of the bureaucracy, the conservatives, could in the long run win and Gorbachev's reforms come to an end. At that stage the political revolution could perhaps turn into violent revolution.

The truth is that differing sections of society have different interests and they will increasingly demand that those particular interests are looked after. The fact is that nationalists see the opportunity to get greater democracy.

There are reactionary forces amongst some of the nationalities. That of course is not true for all but we should not welcome every move because on the surface it appears democratic. It is also clear that in some of the ex-satellite countries there are people who wish to restore private capitalism.



PHOTO: Lesa Herbert

Eric Heffer: telling the truth about Eastern Europe

I believe we must declare our support for the democratic process but at the same time give our full support to those who, like Dubchek, argue for socialism with a democratic face.

We should send delegations to these countries to meet up with all the opposition forces as well as Communists. We must work for peace, for disarmament, for nuclear-free zones in Europe, ending up with the end of NATO and the Warsaw Pact.

We need contact with the free trade unions, including those in the Soviet Union, and talk to them about the nature of capitalist countries. They must learn from us ad we can learn from them.

We must put forward the concept of a United Socialist States of Europe that is federated together. We must work to ensure that the people of the Soviet Union in rejecting bureaucratic authoritarian society do not get conned and accept that right wing social democracy is the answer or that capitalism can solve their problems.

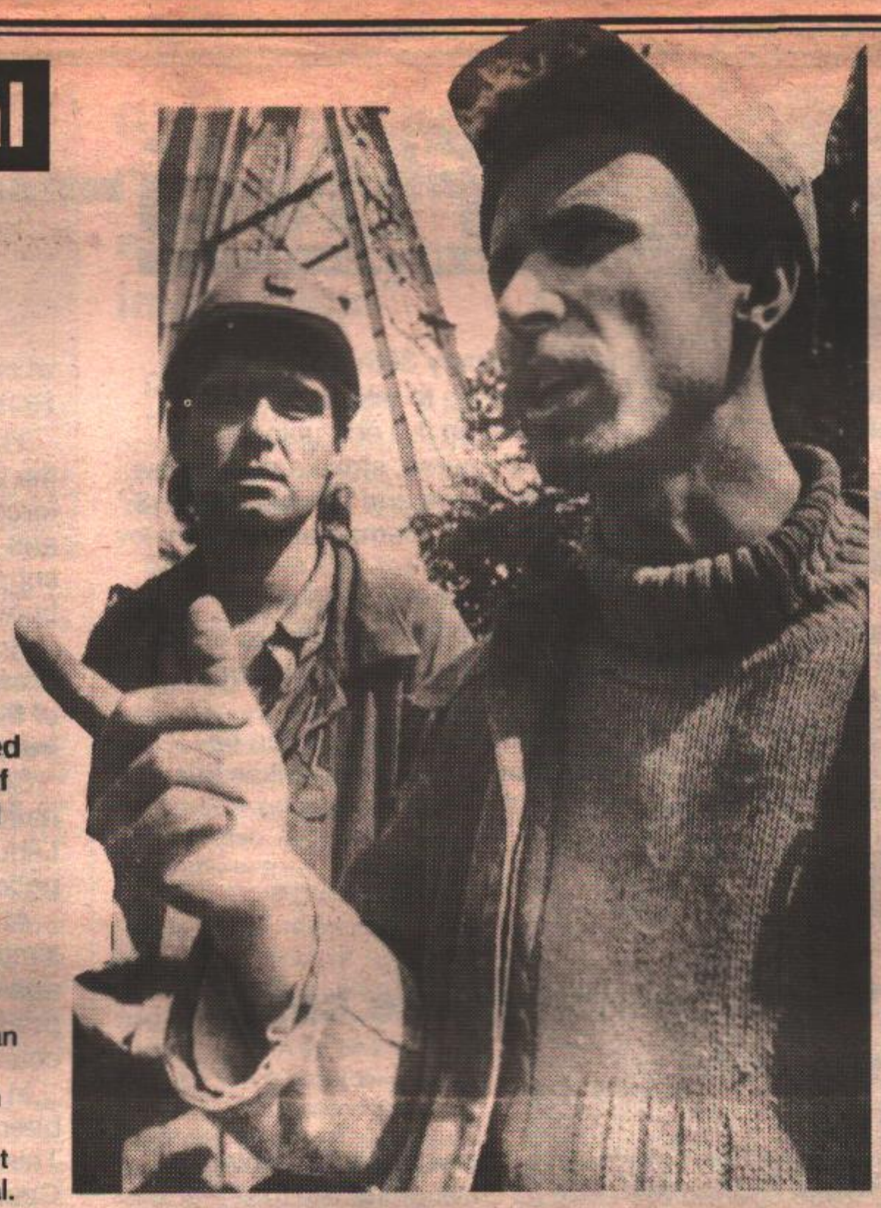
We must explain to them what is happening in Latin and Central America, what is happening in Africa and Asia and the point that although the struggle in capitalist society and in the Soviet Union has different aspects it is really the same struggle.

Democratic

Democratic socialism is still the only answer. We have to go out and fight for it throughout the world.

Socialist Movement

SOTSPROF Appeal
Solidarity with USSR independent unions



With revolution in Rumania and dramatic changes sweeping Eastern Europe, the great need in those countries is the emergence of political currents linked to the working class who can point in the direction of a new genuine democratic socialism, and not radical marketisation or western-style parliamentary "democracy".

It is important that we give all possible support to such currents as they emerge.

When Boris Kargalitsky, one of the founders of the Moscow Committee for a New Socialist Party, was in London to deliver the Isaac Deutscher Memorial Lecture last October, he made an appeal to the British left to raise resources for SOTSPROF, a new independent trade union federation in the USSR based on socialist principles.

Some of us met with him on behalf of the Socialist Movement and he urged us to fully back and help organise such an appeal.

Since then various individuals — Tony Benn and Hilary Wainwright from the Socialist Movement, Paul Foot from the SWP, Oliver MacDonald from *Labour Focus on Eastern Europe*, along with Tamara Deutscher and the Campaign Group of MPs — have organised an appeal for material help for SOTSPROF with Alice Mahon as its treasurer.

This appeal should be given full support by all socialists. SOTSPROF is a new and growing trade union federation which has legal status in the USSR. In past weeks they have held a conference in Moscow of over a hundred delegates, from 70 regions of the USSR, representing tens of thousands of workers — many of them miners.

Yet SOTSPROF has virtually no material resources at all. They are in the process of setting up offices but have little equipment to go in them. They need computers, photocopiers, and other office equipment and they are appealing to socialists in Britain to help in this.

The appeal is linked to a planned speaking tour of Britain by SOTSPROF representatives which is planned for February — although the final arrangements for this have yet to be completed.

Further information on the Tour can be obtained from Alan Thornett on 01-800 7460.

Financial contributions are urgent and should be sent to Alice Mahon MP, Treasurer, PO Box 2988, London N3. Cheques to Alice Mahon, SOTSPROF.

By ALAN THORNETT



Russian miners

Diary of activities and events

February 10, 1990
Labour Party Socialists Steering Committee, Sheffield (phone Bryn Griffiths 01-801 6041 for details).

May 19/20, 1990
Labour Party Socialist Inaugral Conference, Sheffield Polytechnic.

Mar 17/18, 1990.
National Green/Socialist Movement Conference, London.

Other initiatives:

Lesbian and Gay Working Group: is aiming to produce a Lesbian and Gay agenda to develop and broaden the work of the group and to enable it to take its work and policies into the wider Socialist Movement and beyond. If you want to get involved ring Rebecca Flemming, 01-354 1402.

Students: We are beginning to organise a series of public meetings at universities and colleges and a fringe at the NUS Conference. Ring Geoff Ellingham, 01-250 0955.

Media Strategy: We are developing a Media Strategy team to give us a national profile in the media. Ring Alan Slingsby, 01-274 9182.

Poll Tax: We are hoping to set up a Poll Tax working group to continue and develop the initiatives of the Socialist Movement on this issue. Ring Terry Conway, 01-263 8289.

Economic Notebook: Thatcher versus Kinnock

What's at stake for British capital?

Thatcher's economic strategy is in deep trouble.

Is this because she has not adequately served the interests of British capital? Would Kinnock do better?

There have been two broad views on the left about Thatcher's relation to British capital. The first, which has generally held sway on the far left, is that her policy serves the basic interests of capital.

The second, which has been pushed by the Eurocommunists and the right wing of the labour movement, is that her policy has been above all a *political and ideological* policy aimed at forming a populist right wing bloc, but has been *economically* irrational from the point of view of British capital.

There is a danger that the present crisis of the government's economic policy will cause people who held the first view to abandon it for the second.

In fact, neither of these traditional views of Thatcherism is adequate. This is because there are no simple interests of capital. There are simple end results which capital wants, like high profits and compliant workers. But *actions* undertaken to get these things are always more complicated.

The accumulation of capital, what capital is about, always involves a myriad of contradictions. Consequently, a policy which seems to *solve* one of capital's problems nearly always *transmutes it* into a different problem.

By Jamie Gough
Holborn & St Pancras CLP

Thatcher's policy has been centred on enhancing two classic means by which capitalist economies in crisis renew themselves. First, destroying capital so as to reduce competition and leave remaining capital with higher profits. Second, raising unemployment to discipline workers.

To these she has added two policies relevant to advanced twentieth century capitalism; reducing taxation of profits and of those living on profits; and transferring activities from the state to private capital, thus creating much-needed new investment opportunities.

These policies have had many benefits for capital. But they have also produced problems.

Firstly, the destruction of capital using deflation is a very messy business. It has destroyed not only the weakest sections of capital but also some advanced and productive parts.

Moreover, free international trade and the unequal productivity of capital in different countries create problems in carrying out this policy country-by-country.

Countries which deflate strongly, as Britain did in the first half of the 1980s and is doing again now, destroy parts of their own capital but not that of competitor countries. Oversees producers therefore move into the markets.

The result of these two problems of deflation has been the massive balance of trade deficit.

Secondly, Thatcher has done less than nothing to counteract a chronic problem of capitalism — underinvestment in shared infrastructures and in areas which give returns only over long periods.

Capitalist production is a strongly social process, more now than ever before. If capitalists in one industry do not invest enough it harms capitalists in other industries.

Each firm pursuing its own interests, which Thatcher has preached as the best foundation for economic prosperity, completely misses these interdependencies. Long term investment has been especially badly hit by the generally low rate of profit.

Resolution about the wrong policies will eventually come unstuck

Thatcher's policies have made this worse. The market discipline she has intensified has increased uncertainty of long term conditions. Cuts in public expenditure have damaged the state's role in providing infrastructure, a necessary role given capital's reluctance to undertake these investments.

The result is now outright crises in the provision of training, in the supply of skilled labour, in transport and in telecommunications, which are severely damaging capital's profitability.

Thirdly, Thatcher's policy for the control of work in the workplace only addresses half of capital's problems. British capital, aided by Thatcher's deflation, has had some success in intensifying its dictatorship over workers in the workplace. This has enabled speed-up and reduction of slack time.

But this does not necessarily make for the most profitable production. For much of British capital it has been a *substitute for*, rather than a *complement to* to, investment in new machinery. If this were the key to capital accumulation then the Third World would be the most powerful capitalism.

Worse, in many industries capital needs more than submission from workers; it needs their *active collaboration*. In many work processes, management cannot solve all the problems and dictate every detail. It relies on workers' initiative. This is a vital ingredient of Japanese and West German capitalism's relative successes.

But Thatcher's ideology, and her policies, have aimed simply to grind labour into the ground.

In these and many other ways, Thatcher's policies have been contradictory for capital. Kinnock wants to step into this breach and propose policies which solve capital's *new* problems. But could they succeed?

Read the next issue of *Briefing* for the answer to this question, and many more.

Privatising the airwaves

Open the box and take the money

The Government's Broadcasting Bill was published just before Christmas. Few people outside of broadcasting and the transnational media empire will bother to read the Bill, but its impact will be as dramatic as other privatisation.

Like the other sell-offs, "de-regulation" of broadcasting is being hyped as increasing competition and hence consumer choice — in this case that of viewers and listeners. The actual consequences will be similar to the privatisation of water; if you think you are drinking shit now... !

The Broadcasting Bill's strategic aim is to drive down the programme standards of terrestrial stations and so open the market for an explosion of satellite and cable channels. This will be achieved through a pincer movement.

First, the BBC, hardly mentioned in the Bill, will be starved of cash through de-coupling the licence fee from inflation. As programme quality falls in the run up to the renewal of its Charter in 1996 its continuing subsidisation will be questioned.

Second, the Broadcasting Bill replaces the IBA, which shares the BBC's public broadcasting responsibility, with the "light touch" Independent Television Commission and an independent Radio Authority.

The ITC will auction the franchises for the new Channel 3 stations to replace ITV. To head off criticism the Government is playing up the quality thresholds franchise bidders will have to meet. But whereas the IBA has clear powers regarding programming range and scheduling the only programme the ITC can insist on is the news.

By Mick Gosling Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom

And once a franchise bidder has convinced the ITC it can pass the quality thresholds and is financially viable, the ten year Channel 3 licence will be awarded to the highest bidder.

Viewer choice will suffer as money for programme making is used to win the franchise. The Government's claims for competition are as bogus as its promises for consumer choice. Licence holders will be able to apply for renewal after six years and the ITC may not refuse without very good reason. There will be no new auctions.

Channel 4 will have to sell its own advertising airtime whereas currently ITV companies sell airtime on Channel 4's behalf. Competition for revenue means competition for ratings which inevitably undermines the public service programme remit retained for Channel 4 in the Bill.

Declining standards will open the market to cheapskate satellite and cable stations which will simply be flogged off for 15 years at a time to the highest bidder. A never ending diet of second rate soaps, game shows and middle of the road music stations is threatening, as Channels 3, 4 and possibly 5, satellite and cable and dozens of new radio stations compete for limited advertising revenue. Advertisers and sponsors, not viewers and listeners, will have the real choice.

Murdoch

The Bill apparently proposes to stop concentration of ownership within and across the broadcast media. In reality there is every opportunity for media conglomerates to form and expand, and nothing to stop Rupert Murdoch owning five national newspapers, four satellite stations and having interests in cable and publishing houses.



Faces of the future: a never-ending diet of second rate soaps

PHOTO: ©The Grundy Corporation

De-regulation will be coupled with greater state interference. The Government's indifference to programme range is only matched by its concern for taste and decency. The recently formed Broadcasting Standards Council will be given statutory powers to lay down guidelines for programme makers and producers.

Obscenity

Broadcasting will also be brought under the Obscene Publications Act 1959. The police will no longer be required to have a warrant to seize television films and scripts if someone of superintendent rank or above is convinced it contravenes either obscenity or public order legislation.

Following the broadcasting ban reporting on the north of Ireland is liable to be even more inhibited and subject to self-censorship.

Tory plans for broadcasting mean more channels and less choice, more money for the media multinationals and few quality programmes for viewers and listeners.

Socialists have no interest in the present mechanism of regulation, based as it is on rotten patronage whereby the government appoints its placemen and women to the boards of the BBC and IBA.

However, we do have an interest in promoting the principle of public service broadcasting that programmes should inform, educate and entertain and be diverse in terms of subject matter, times of day and days of the week on which they are broadcast. And there is no reason why the regulatory body which ensures these principles are adhered to should not be democratically elected.

The broadcast media are immensely powerful institutions within our society. Using technological advance to increase diversity, accountability and public access is the socialist alternative to privatising the airwaves.

The fight against the Broadcasting Bill can be supported by joining the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom. Details from: CPBF, 9 Poland Street, London WC1V 3DG. Telephone 01 437 2795.

Kudlip Singh Sekhon

Racist murder in Southall

The brutal murder of Kudlip Singh Sekhon, a worker at Heathrow Airport and a part-time taxi-driver has shocked the Southall community and left a grieving widow with five young daughters.

Kudlip Singh Sekhon was born in India 35 years ago and came to Britain in 1979. He was a working class man — a machine operator at SAS Caterers and active in his trade union. To supplement his income he began work as a mini-cab driver only a few months ago.

In the early hours of Saturday 11th November, Kudlip Sekhon picked up a passenger or passengers from Telford Road, Golf Links in Southall and took them to the Redwood Estate in Cranford, Hounslow. There he was set upon and brutally stabbed fifty four times.

Kudlip Sekhon wasn't robbed. He was the victim of a racist murder. Steven Coker, a white man, has been charged with his murder.

A meeting was held on Sunday 10th December in Southall to discuss the implications of this murder both locally and nationally.

Suresh Grover informed the meeting that Kudlip Sekhon's assailant is known to be part of a group of four or five white youths responsible for previous attacks on several Asian families.

This killing follows on the vicious racial murders of Aboul Malik in 1974 and Gurdip Singh Chaggar in 1976, both in Southall, and is one of 30,000 racial attacks racial attacks in this country each year.

A resolution was agreed at the meeting with a plan of action for the Kudlip Sekhon Family Support Group, including letter writing; trying to get the support of Kudlip Sekhon's union — the TGWU — for the campaign; demands for an independent public inquiry into racial violence in Ealing and Hounslow and culminating in a march and rally on the day of Kudlip's funeral, with the closure of Ealing schools, local council offices and local businesses.

The level of violence used against Kudlip Sekhon is unprecedented, a tragic and disturbing omen for the 1990s.

The following is a draft motion for trade union branches; "This branch notes the increasing level of racial violence experienced by black people in this country. We pledge our support to the Sekhon Family Support Group for a national protest against racial murders to coincide with the date of the trial of Kudlip Sekhon's attacker."

For more information contact the Sekhon Family Support Group, c/o Southall Monitoring Group, 50-52 King Street, Southall. Telephone 01 843 2333.

NUS

Conference calls the shots!

The anger of students at the Government Top-Up Loans scheme and the widespread radicalisation it has provoked were clearly demonstrated at NUS Winter Conference in December.

By Alistair Chisholm and Rebecca Flemming

It took Conference a long time to get going and to gain enough confidence to express its anger and frustration. The NEC's well-practised manoeuvring and manipulation from the platform kept the lid on the early sessions. But when the first political debate — Grants not Loans — was finally reached, the dam burst and the NEC was swept away.

Conference passed by an overwhelming majority a strategy of escalating action encompassing joint campaigns with education workers, bank boycotts, coordinated 24 hour occupations, a mid-week demonstration in London and an education strike.

Not content with this, Conference went on to pass policy, by 2-1, in favour of a strategy of non-payment and non-implementation of the Poll Tax, in the face of an attempt by the National Organisation of Labour Students (no doubt prompted by Walworth Road) to ditch the previous policy of non-payment alone.

However, it must be said that most of these victories were achieved despite the activities of the large, established hard-left groupings in the NUS. *Militant*, SWSS and Left Unity/*Socialist Organiser* remained stuck in their own sectarian rut while Conference raced ahead of them.

Also, though the policy passed marks a significant breakthrough, the leadership of NUS remains the same so the fight is now on for implementation of all these democratic decisions of Conference.

The mass demonstrations in Manchester, London and Glasgow last year gave us a glimpse of the potential of the campaign against loans. The decision of the major clearing banks to pull out of the scheme will only add further fuel to the fire. It is essential that this potential is not wasted.

Contact Briefing

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Labour Party

Into the 1990s

What's Left for Local Government?

The last decade has been a significant one for local government.

With the election of Livingstone's GLC, left Labour Groups all over the country began introducing radical new policies, dealing with neglected issues like racial equality, equal opportunities, and local accountability.

By Peter Chowney
Hackney South CLP

But the new idealists, in their enthusiasm, forgot that they could never be more than custodians of a local executive of the central state.

The state responded with rate-capping and abolition and without genuine popular support, defeat was almost inevitable.

The collusion of the Labour Party nationally with central government and the lure of careerism ensured a crushing defeat.

The "discrediting" of the left in local government was seized upon by the leadership to increase their stranglehold on the Party apparatus.

And so the 90s dawn with bleak prospects for a defeated left in local government.

Or do they? While, as Lenin pointed out, we should not pretend our defeats are victories, we should also salvage what we can.

First, this analysis is very London-centred. Many Labour Authorities were untouched by rate-capping and unaffected by the local government revolution; cuts have never been made because there are scarcely any services to cut.

Sandwell, a Labour controlled West Midlands Borough, has reserves of some £14m — saved, it is said, "for a rainy day".

As one local Party member pointed out, they haven't noticed it's been pouring for years. Clearly, the left has a role to play here.

Division

But for those of us in the big cities, where the cuts have been deepest and have led to the bitterest rows between erstwhile comrades, a new set of tactics is needed.

The divisions that emerged over the cuts have failed to heal. They have allowed the right to capitalise on left disarray and take control of local Party apparatus.

The consequence has been that the left was absent from panels of Council candidates — either through disqualification, as in Haringey, or because of disillusioned abstentionism, as in Hackney.

Either way, the 1990 elections look set to result in local careerists of the sort we thought we left behind in the 60s.

But why was the left unable to win any ground back in the four and a half years since the rate-capping collapse? The answer must surely lie with our policies.

In 1985 it was still possible for Labour administrations to tell their officers to defy government spending restrictions, but the legislative framework has changed since then.

New regulations oblige Chief Executives to refuse to implement "illegal" decisions. Failure to do so would result in the Chief Executive becoming personally liable for all losses.

Even if a left Council administration could pass deficit budgets and refuse to collect the Poll Tax the Chief Executive would simply ignore it.

And just in case anyone tries to appoint a tame Chief Executive, the Secretary of State now has powers effectively to veto senior appointments.

So the left "vision" looks rather shabby. With the new legislation the simple refusal to make cuts can never be a workable policy because it simply cannot now be carried through.

Burdened with a policy which

The division of left local government politics into cuts versus no cuts has left many confused and disillusioned.

In some Councils, the cuts have been minimalised and kept away from front line services, marginalising the left "no cuts" position.

In others, cuts have been used as an excuse to centralise control of the bureaucracy. Fundamental principles like equal opportunities have suffered unnecesarily. Frontline services have disappeared.

Regrouping

The peeling away of support from New Realist Labour administrations has not led so far to any kind of political regrouping.

Often, Labour Group and local Party leaderships survive only because there is no co-ordinated opposition.

Approach

There would seem to be two levels of approach, according to local circumstances.

In those Councils still dominated by old guard underspending administrations, left comrades can get directly involved.

Learning from the experiences of the left in London and the big cities can help create new and unexpected centres of left control unshackled by immediate financial restrictions.

•In Local Authorities which have suffered from cuts and rate-capping, the tactics needed would seem to be rather different.

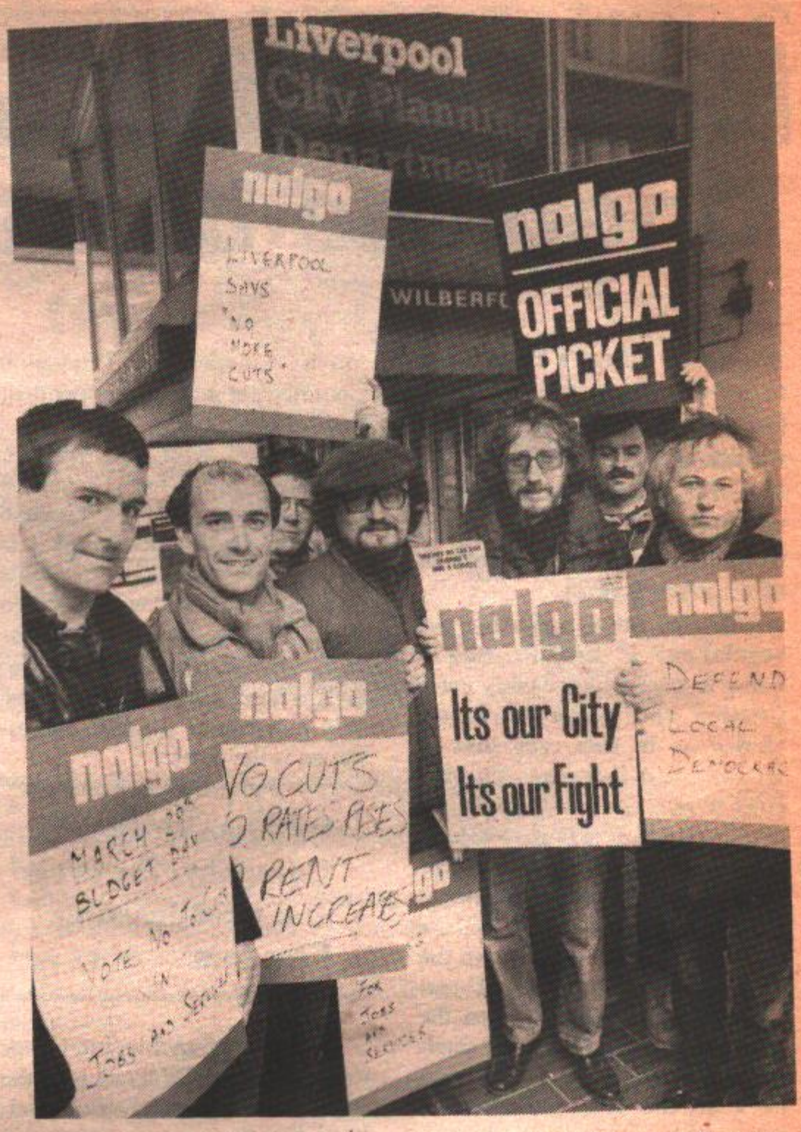


PHOTO: John Smith (IFL)

Liverpool 1984: local government workers united with councillors to defend jobs and services

Eliminated from new administrations, the left will need to take up specific cuts issues, working with tenants, anti-Poll Tax groups, trade unionists, promoting radical policies within these Councils, and the few remaining left Councillors.

We also need to regain control of the Party apparatus and use this to pressurise and expose undemocratic Labour Groups.

Policies

Because of the lack of a clear and coherent strategy for running inner city local government, we should support specific relevant local campaigns to rebuild the left and to put us in a better position to move back fully into local government when the national political climate changes.

But debate and the construction of new policies cannot take place in the framework set in 1986. We have forgotten that political groupings have to be *built* through hard work and debate.

Both in terms of creating new left interventions and in regaining control of the Party to support campaigns and put pressure on Councils, we need to look beyond the narrow boundaries of the absolutely righteous.

It may be necessary to clear away the barbed wire and explore new territory if we are to salvage anything from the 80s and rebuild the left in local government and in the Party in the 90s.

Camden witch-hunt

Mixed results for the left

Attempts by the right wing in Camden Labour Party to use a witch-hunt to carve out the left in the run up to the May Council elections have met mixed results in recent weeks.

Hampstead & Highgate CLP chair, Steve Taylor, lost a second appeal at the National Constitutional Committee against his exclusion from the panel of candidates by the Local Government Committee.

By Piers Mostyn
Holborn & St Pancras CLP

This was despite his CLP and a majority of existing Labour Councillors supporting his inclusion on the panel and opposing any move to exclude him.

This same LGC had seen fit to include John Mills — an arch right winger and ex-Docklands Development boss who has absolutely no standing in the local Party.

But an attempt to expel four left Councillors — Sandra Plummer, Graham Shurety, Caroline Holding and Dave Horan — from the Party or disqualify them from standing again for office failed.

Charged with a sustained course of conduct prejudicial to the Party at the NCC on January 4, they were faced with a 135 page dossier of "evidence".

The dossier effectively scapegoated them for three years of struggle by the community, the trade unions and the left in the Party against the Council's swingeing cuts.

They were found "guilty", but the punishment was limited to a warning as to their future conduct.

This effectively deprived the right wing of preventing them contesting the elections as part of a drive to shift the Labour Group further to the right after May.

The favourable outcome was clearly influenced by the way in which the four have distanced themselves over the last year from trade union and community struggle opposition to the implementation of cuts and the Poll Tax.

In that sense the decision was in line with the exclusion of Steve Taylor, who remains prominently identified with that approach.

The decision on the four was nonetheless a victory for the left, in that such charges normally lead to expulsion.

The entire anti-cuts campaign was effectively on trial, as was the right of Party members and Councillors to fight for socialist politics and be critical of Labour administrations that attack the living standards of the working class.



PHOTO: Chi Chan

Joan Twelves — who's cutting whom?

Local Government

LRB causes Lambeth cuts crisis

A London Residuary Body (LRB) claim for a rebate on rates for County Hall backdated to 1981 has plunged Lambeth Council into a financial crisis.

By Greg Tucker
Lambeth Councillor

Officers told a full Council meeting on January 17th that the LRB claim could not be calculated but that paying would leave a budget deficit of £3 million.

Despite the fact that the LRB made its claim in March 1987, Council Officers told Councillors the financial implications only last last week. Now the same Officers are demanding cuts and a recruitment freeze in order to pay the LRB.

A Section 114 Order forced the Council to discuss the matter, and officers are threatening to re-introduce it if cuts are not made.

Despite these threats, the leadership of the Labour Group has publicly pledged to make no cuts and to continue its recruitment speed up.

Ultra-lefts

Whilst ultra-lefts may believe that the leadership is secretly already committed to cuts, key decisions have yet to be taken and the leadership is committed to resisting Officers measures.

Council Leader Joan Twelves has already met the Council trade unions so that they are fully informed of the crisis and has their support for a campaign to ensure that cuts do not happen.

Party Democracy

Has Conference a future?



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

TGWU delegation at 1989 Labour Party Conference — will the bureaucrats vote to break their links with the Party?

***Has Conference a Future?*, by CLPD and Labour Left Liaison, £2. Available from CLPD/LLL, 10 Park Drive, London NW11 7SH.**

Any member of a local Labour Party General Committee faced with Larry Whitty's sham consultation on the *Reform of Annual Conference, policy making and the NEC structure* will find this a useful pamphlet.

Its strength is that it goes through the 16 page consultative document *Future of Labour Party Conference* refuting each of its arguments one by one.

The weakness of the pamphlet is that it fails to map out an alternative to the proposals of John Edmonds, the LCC, and others influential in the Party.

To be fair, Appendix V on the final page of the pamphlet includes useful suggestions for improving Conference. But even these ideas cannot be said to be new, creative thinking: most of them were put forward to the Party's Commission of Enquiry in 1979-80.

It is unfortunate that the CLPD pamphlet is so reactive in its character.

Activists are dissatisfied with the way in which they are excluded from decision making processes and they are looking for new ideas.

As Mark Seaton reported in the last edition of *Briefing*, the LCC are on the offensive and whilst their ideas are a complete travesty of democracy a defence of the status quo is a completely inadequate response.

By Bryn Griffiths
Tottenham CLP

Having criticised the pamphlet, I must say it would be churlish not to recommend it for its strengths.

Briefing's approach is to oppose the Edmonds proposals root and branch but welcome the opportunity to debate the Party's structures: the pamphlet will be invaluable in informing our opposition to Edmonds.

CLPD point out that the NEC's sudden interest in constitutional proposals was fuelled by the success of the constitutional reforms of 1979-81. The Parliamentary Labour Party (PLP) has always sought independence from Conference and sought to control it.

We now face a deluge of constitutional proposals designed to restructure the Party and permanently tip the balance of power in the PLP's favour.

In particular, those active in the Constituencies stand to lose two fundamental rights at Conference:

•the right to submit a resolution of our own choice;

•the right to elect representatives of our choice to the NEC.

CLPD point out that the *Future of Conference* is the Party leadership's next stage after the Policy Review.

Having sanitised Party policy, the leadership now wants to institutionalise their "leading role" with the PLP becoming accountable solely to itself.

Conference will become a safe public relations exercise with the CLPs prevented by a regional "sifting" mechanisms from even submitting policy resolutions.

Our role is to be reduced to one of electoral chores, leaving the power and decision making concentrated in the Party establishment — behind closed doors.

The Party is to be left with just two layers: a ruling parliamentary clique and a passive membership controlled by Walworth Road.

Weakened

The trade unions will also have their link with the Party weakened. The only remaining link will be at the level of the leaderships.

At a Constituency level the trade unions will be disenfranchised and their political involvement ended. This will be done by one-member-one-vote (OMOV).

It will not only apply to parliamentary selection but to NEC elections and major policy making decisions.

The Constituencies will have their NEC representation crushed.

MPs will be excluded from the CLPs section (exit Benn and Skinner) but special sections for Labour Councils, MEPs, Regional Conferences and the PLP (keeping shadow cabinet members such as Gould, Cook and Prescott) will be created.

CLPD quite rightly point out that Party representatives such as MPs, MEPs, and Councillors are already privileged to hold office in the Party's name. Why should they also have an extra vote on the NEC? They already have input as CLP members.

For all the talk of democracy, there is no recognition of the demand that Women should elect the Women's division of the NEC. Black representation is also ignored.

It would be fascinating to have Edmonds et al explain precisely how MPs, MEPs and Councillors are disadvantaged and excluded from power.

Proposals

The proposals are nothing new. Some emanate from the notoriously undemocratic continental social democratic parties, others recycle the tired old ideas of the Owenite Campaign for a Labour Victory.

In the early 80s the Labour left united behind the slogan "Never Again", referring to the Callaghan government. The PLP and Walworth Road have learnt from their mistakes — this time they want to cover their backs.

When the leadership's honeymoon with the Party ends in disillusionment at the next Labour government they want to be in an unassailable position.

Briefing supporters should use the CLPD pamphlet to marshall their arguments against Edmonds. In particular they should use its model resolution.

Socialist Movement

Labour Party Socialists Appeal

The last issue of *Briefing* reported on the activities of Labour Party Socialists (LPS). The LPS has now published an appeal for its founding conference to be held later this year. Extracts from the Appeal are published below.
The appeal will be circulated to CLPs with a request that they consider sponsorship. *Briefing* supporters should give it their full support and fight to get as many sponsors as possible.
The full text and further details can be obtained from: Labour Party Socialists, PO Box 114, Chesterfield S44 5UD.

"...it is vital to establish a democratic and non-sectarian forum ... meeting the real needs of socialists active at the base of the Labour Party...

The strategies and policies which we believe must be fought for include:

•unilateral nuclear disarmament, the closure of all foreign military bases, and major reductions in arms expenditure;

•a non-aligned foreign policy, based on the principles of self-determination, and a radical restructuring of international relationships, including the cancellation of third world debt;

•support for the struggles of workers and the oppressed, in Britain and internationally, East and West;

•radical ecological measures, recycling of resources, the phasing out of nuclear power, and major investment in new forms of energy and conservation;

•a socialist economic policy based on ecologically sustainable growth and support for democratic public ownership, and a democratically planned economy with control by workers and the community;

•the repeal of all anti-trade union legislation, support for the right to strike and picket effectively, and the right for workers to organise free of state interference;

•a far reaching redistribution of income and wealth and income, including... the creation of minimum income guarantees and a statutory minimum wage, reductions in working hours ... policies ... to equalise access for women and black workers...

•radical changes to the undemocratic British state, including the abolition of the House of Lords, support for national and regional assemblies, and root and branch reform of local government, including the abolition of the Poll Tax; and the repeal of all legislation contrary to civil liberties, including the Prevention of Terrorism Act;

•support for self-determination in Ireland through British withdrawal and reunification;

•a substantial programme of social reform, including progressive policies to ensure that decent housing, health, and transport facilities are available to all;

•freedom and dignity in old age for all sections of the population, through the provision of substantially improved pensions, recreational, cultural and artistic facilities, and opportunities to participate in shaping the world for the next century;

•a comprehensive and unequivocal programme for opposing and eliminating racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression, including abolition of all racist, sexist, and other discriminatory legislation and the introduction of positive rights for women, black people, lesbians and gay men, and people with disabilities...

We believe it is essential to create a democratic, non-sectarian movement inside the Labour Party which also addresses important questions of power inside the Labour Party.

As minimum demands we state the following:

•we will work for a democratic Party, which is controlled by its membership and not one run by an elite of parliamentarians based on deals with trade union leaders and implemented by unaccountable Party officials;

•we support the creation of autonomous Black Sections for black members of the Party, and the re-creation of an autonomous Women's Organisation within the Party;

•we must turn local Labour Parties into participatory and campaigning organisations reaching out to new forces in the community, supporting anti-Poll Tax campaigns, industrial disputes, and other struggles, and drawing new activists from those struggles into the Labour Party;

•a reversal of the wave of expulsions and disciplinary actions taken against individual members because of their political views, and against Constituency Labour Parties;

•the setting up of a broad based and democratic youth organisation;

•the thorough revision of the Party's relationship with the trade union movement, in order to strengthen and democratise the links between the Party and the unions at all levels."

Reproductive Rights

Stop the Amendment!

Defend abortion rights!

Women's reproductive rights face a series of attacks in the current parliamentary session (which began on January 22nd) with the re-opening of the House of Lords.

The threat will come in the discussion around the Human Fertilization and Embryo Bill which had its second reading in the Lords on December 7th 1989.

The issue of women's right to choose whether or not to have a child is totally left out of the debate, and this is particularly the case on the question of abortion rights.

Tory MP Ann Widdecombe has threatened to put down amendments to the Bill aiming to reduce the time limit for abortions. If debated this poses the most serious threat to abortion rights since the 1967 Act was passed.

It is possible, though unlikely, that similar amendments may be put down in the House of Lords committee stage.

The government's catch-all title for the Embryo Bill appears to be aimed at allowing amendments on abortion to be discussed.

The newly established Stop The Amendment Campaign (STAC), set up by the National Abortion Campaign (NAC), is arguing that the abortion issue should not be tied in with that of embryo research.

Only those reactionary forces who wish to establish rights for the foetus over and above the rights of women will seek to do so.

Some of the provisions in the Embryo Bill, such as the 14-day limit on research, lend themselves to use by the anti-abortionists in this way.

In the course of the debate in the Lords, a tactic has been adopted to attempt to separate the issues of embryo research and abortion.

The main advocate of this tactic is Lady Houghton, who has put forward a Bill to restrict women's abortion rights to 24 weeks, when dealing with social grounds, instead of the current legal limit of 28 weeks.

The aim of this Bill (which stands little chance of being passed because it is unlikely to be given government time for discussion) is to divert debate on abortion away from the Embryo Bill.

The argument is that since this Bill and any amendments *will* get time for discussion it represents a far greater threat.

By Jude Arkwright Dulwich CLP

At its conference on January 6th however, STAC voted to disassociate itself from Lady Houghton's tactic, because — no matter what its intention — its effect will be to legitimise the 24 week limit.

It was felt that any reduction in time limits, whether that be to 24, 22, 20 or 18 weeks, will represent a setback for women and will pave the way for further reductions.

Women's right to abortion cannot depend on the vagaries of medical science — in this case when a foetus is viable outside the womb. That right has to be absolute.

Lady Houghton's Bill, whilst it may divert the discussion temporarily, will merely serve to strengthen the hand of those who seek a reduction in the time limits and will undoubtedly insist on amending the Embryo Bill to that effect.

Since the Embryo Bill has unlimited time for discussion in the House of Lords it is not clear when exactly it will go before the Commons and at which stage the amendments will be put forward.

But pro-choice campaigners are already getting prepared up and down the country for an extra-parliamentary to defeat it.

Unfortunately parliament is not the only source of the attack on abortion rights.

A British version of "Operation Rescue", a US organisation, is harassing women going into abortion clinics up and down the country to stop them having abortions.

Manchester NAC, in particular, have been campaigning vigorously on this and are hoping to organise a one-day conference on this issue.

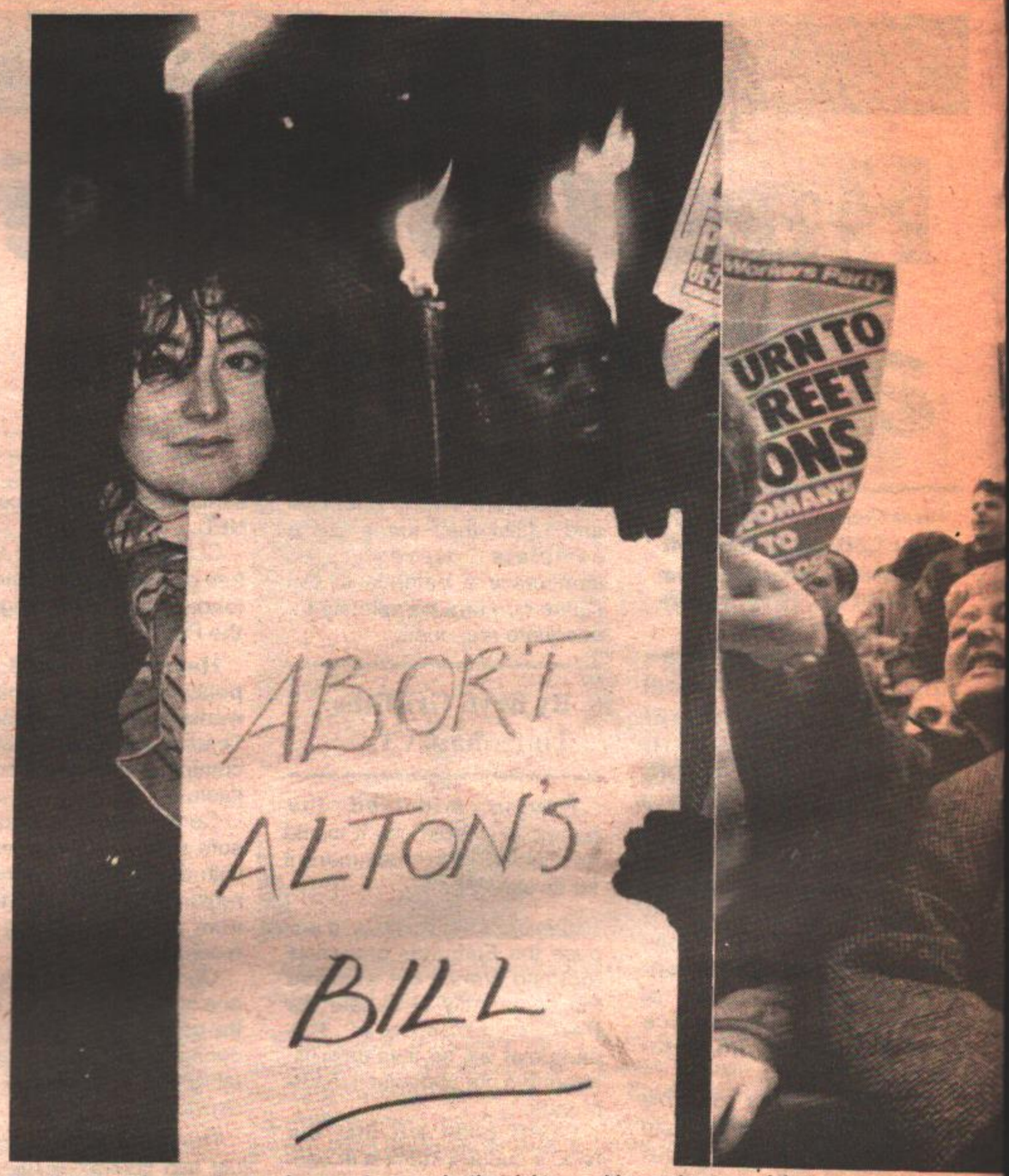
STAC campaigners at the January 6th conference also recognised that the attack on women's reproductive rights was not limited to abortion rights.

Other MPs are threatening amendments which explicitly deny the rights of single women, and especially lesbians, to artificial inspiration and infertility treatment in general.

The 100-strong conference voted to establish close links with CADI (Campaign for Access to Donor Insemination) and a liaison committee has been established to plan activities.

The meeting also agreed to organise a week of action in the week of International Women's Day, culminating in a central London rally.

The tactics of the anti-choice lobby are becoming more sophisticated and so increasing vigilance is required. However pro-choice campaigners are confident that a mass campaign can win.



The fight to defend and extend women's reproductive rights — old enemies, new debates

Human Fertilisation

Should we lea up to the scie

It is typical of this government that they should allow a Bill which purports to increase choice for infertile women to be used as a vehicle to cut abortion rights.

We can expect to see an amendment to the Bill to restrict choice for women needing late abortions.

It is once again being argued that in the foreseeable future, "technological advances in the care of newborns will enhance survival above 24 weeks."

This in no way contradicts the case put forward by the pro-choice members of the Alton Bill Committee for the right to abortion after 24 weeks, which is necessary in a small number of cases.

Pro-Alton Bill campaigners made quite clear during 1988 that they intended to fight on until all abortion rights were rescinded.

A reduction to 24 weeks would only be the thin end of the wedge.

The organisations that have successfully fended off repeated attacks on women's right to choose have been slow to mount a positive campaign for abortion on request up to 14 weeks.

Taking the power to decide out of the hands of doctors and placing it where it rightly belongs — with pregnant women — would certainly have the desirable effect of reducing the numbers of late abortions.

By Mildred Gordon MP

The French abortion pill Mifepristone (RU486) may prove to be a useful alternative method of termination of early pregnancy. Abortion up to nine weeks makes up about one third of the total number of abortions in England and Wales at present.

However, there is international anti-abortion pressure on the company making the drug which has received threats against its personnel and of an international boycott of its products.

The underlying issue at stake in the fight against the proposed amendment to the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill is the issue of control over the lives of women.

Women with money have always been able to afford safe abortions whatever the law: it is working class women who will be the major victims of regressive legislation.

A working class woman who knows she cannot have another child and keep her head above water will fight for an abortion to keep control over her own life.

It has always been so; but women of my generation remember only too well how many women had their health wrecked and how many others died through back street abortions.

It is obscene that the power to vote on this amendment should be with a body of people of whom hardly a handful have ever been pregnant, let alone faced the decision whether to carry the pregnancy to term or to terminate it.

Influence

It is perhaps because of the influence on me of Huxley's *Brave New World* and John Hersey's *The Human Time Bomb*, and more seriously the fact that I lived through the last war and remember the human experiments of the Nazis and the accounts of the secret experiments on prisoners and black soldiers in the USA, that I approach the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill with considerable apprehension.

There are more scientists erecting rockets than trying to improve the human condition. Science has equipped the capitalist class with ever increasing alien power arrayed against the populations of the



PHOTO: GM Cookson

Male Church, male Parliament ...and women MPs



PHOTOS: GM Cookson

Embryo Bill

Campaign for access to DI

The 1990's open with a renewed legislative assault on women's rights.

Though the issues and arguments are the same as ever — about women's rights to control their own bodies; about bizarre, religious concepts of spiritual "life" — they are being played out over largely new terrain: over embryo research, new reproductive technologies and donor insemination.

It is this last issue which has excited some of the most frenzied attacks from the far-right of the Tory Party.

Ann Winterton's Early Day Motion "The Impregnation of Lesbian Women" — seeking to ban access to DI by lesbians and single women — has received support from almost 30 Tory MPs, including Harry Greenaway who has sworn to table it as an amendment to the Government's Embryo Bill.

By Rebecca Flemming CADI

However, he has been beaten to it by the illustrious Lady Saltoun of Abernethy.

She has tabled a large number of amendments dealing with the complex implications of the Bill for the passing on of hereditary titles, particularly Scottish coats of arms.

A small number of amendments attempting to prevent all unmarried women receiving DI or IVF treatments in clinics have also been tabled.

Their wording is unequivocal, as was Lady Saltoun's contribution to the debate on the second reading of the Bill about the "highly undesirable" provision of DI to "single women, unmarried couples, and lesbian couples". Other Peers shared her prejudices.

Bill

Moreover, the Bill itself raises the spectre of state control over women's access to DI. The state has shown itself to be far from neutral on issues of sexuality and of the circumstances in which children are born and raised, as demonstrated most clearly in the context of Section 28.

The Campaign for Access to DI (CADI) has been set up on the initiative of the Rights of Women Lesbian Custody Project to combat these attacks and has drawn in a number of different women from different groups and backgrounds.

The central aims of the campaign are:

•To stop any legislation or other attempts to further restrict the access of lesbians and single women to DI.

•To campaign for equal access to DI by all women.

•To campaign for such equal access to DI within the NHS, regardless of the woman's financial resources.

And it intends to link up with other campaigns on women's rights, lesbian and gay rights, civil liberties campaigns, and the labour and students movement in this struggle.

It is crucial that socialists do not allow themselves to be confused or divided by the multifaceted nature of the current offensive of the Right, or accomodate to their attempts to mobilise popular prejudice around the issues of lesbian motherhood to drive their reactionary project through.

CADI must be strongly supported and build at all levels of the labour movement.

Further details from: CADI, 52-54 Featherston Street, London EC1.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Lesbians are mothers too

CADI Model Resolution

This ... believes:

1. That DI is a simple procedure that should be available for *all* women, provided on the NHS, regardless of the women's financial resources.

2. That sections of the government's *Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill* will worsen an already highly discriminatory situation concerning access to DI by lesbians and single women.

3. That amendments that seek to prevent access to DI by lesbians and single women are based on the view that the nuclear family is the only fit place to bring up children, and simple bigotry. What is really important is the love and care children receive, whether or not their home situation conforms with some government model.

This ... opposes:

1. Any attempt, including by legislation, to further restrict access to DI by lesbians and single women.

2. The attempts by the far right to whip up anti-lesbian prejudice around the issue of DI.

This ... resolves:

1. To campaign for equal access to DI for *all* women, and against the current legislative attacks on access to DI by lesbians and single women, this to include producing publicity on the issues, organising meetings, etc.

2. Support and participate in any demonstrations, lobbies, etc., organised against attempts to restrict access to DI.

3. Affiliate to the *Campaign for Access to Donor Insemination (CADI)*.

CADI can be contacted c/o ROW, 52-4 Featherstone Street, London EC1.

& Embryology Bill

ve it ntists?



Mildred Gordon MP

biological children: but will increased help for a few open up a Pandora's box?

These proposals need careful discussion by the left. We must not fall into the trap of accepting that all scientific development is *ipso facto* progressive.

In his later life Einstein said that if he had known the use to which his theories had been put he would have become a watchmaker.

Feminists have always said "Not the church, not the state; women must control their fate."

Are we now to give uncritical support to a Bill that puts so much power into the hands of scientists and those who fund them?

Despite the controls built into the present Bill we must demand real guarantees that it will not open up the road to human genetic engineering.

We cannot trust the proposed Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority which will consist of:

"(a)a chairman and deputy chairman;

(b)such number of other members as the Secretary of State appoints."

We have enough experience to know that any major scientific project must be scrutinised for its social and political implications.

world.

The Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists who enthusiastically support the Bill say they favour the continuation of research on embryos up to 14 days for three main reasons:

•to continue research into genetic disorders;

•to develop better methods of contraception;

•to improve the success rate in the present clinical assisted fertilisation programmes.

Of course we must reject the nonsense being put about by so- called pro-life groups which presents foetal cells as "babies", and we must accept that some thousands of infertile couples may eventually be helped to have their own

The Women's Page

Women for Socialism

Into the '90s

Women for Socialism comes into the New Year with a range of ideas and schemes to consolidate the socialist feminist movement.

This involves developing established areas of work in the trade unions and Labour Party.

A series of fringe meetings at trade union conferences (including NALGO, NUPE, CPSA, COHSE, and the NUT) is planned.

These will take the debates and proposals from the workshops at the Socialist Movement Trade Union Conference — about the changing patterns of women's employment under Thatcher; about positive action in the labour movement; and about the new attacks on women's reproductive rights — into the unions.

By Sarah Roelofs
Women for Socialism

In the Labour Party, Women for Socialism will be targeting this year's National Labour Women's Conference as a crucial chapter in the continuing struggle for a strong and active women's organisation, accountable to Labour Women, and socialist feminist policies in the Party.

Women in their constituencies and Women's Sections will need increasing support and co-ordination in the coming year.

It also means responding to current events and new developments. In particular the attacks on women's reproductive rights contained in the Embryology Bill and amendments to it will be a central focus for struggle in 1990.

A woman's right to control her own body is being assaulted from all sides — whether it is her right to abortion or her right to access to donor insemination.

Women for Socialism will not only be involved in all the campaigns to defend and extend women's rights.

We also intend to provide a forum for discussion on the issues raised by this new and doubly dangerous stage in the Right's crusade around women and the family.

Issues around lesbians' access to DI, embryo research, new reproductive technologies and state control which have needlessly confused and divided the left should be placed in the context of the right-wing offensive and within the framework of an understanding of women's oppression.

In a similar vein is Women for Socialism's Sexuality Conference planned for late spring.

The debate around women and sexuality has largely been hegemonised by radical feminism, almost by default.

It is essential that socialist feminists discuss both the specifics and the generalities of discourse, both to enable the issues to escape from the hands that hold them and to firm up a rather weak area of socialist feminist theory and practice.

The central initiative of Women for Socialism in international work is the women's delegation to Palestine.

Women from a range of different backgrounds, political experiences and areas of involvement in this country will be meeting women in Palestine, to witness their struggle at first hand and develop the international links essential for greater understanding and solidarity.

This year's Women for Socialism Conference and AGM has been put back slightly to the summer. The theme is to be "Anti-racism and Anti-imperialism".

The extra time will enable the event to be built on actual struggles — from women fighting for equality in newly "independent" Namibia to women campaigning around the national question in Scotland; from women organising in Central America to Ireland; from black struggles in Britain and Australia — rather than abstract ideals.

In the meantime all Women for Socialism members are invited to attend Steering Group meetings.

The next one on February 11th will be discussing the Embryology Bill and what Women for Socialism should do about it.

The following meeting on March 31st will discuss pornography — what role should Women for Socialism play in the debates and campaigns around the issue? So come along and get involved.

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

National Labour Women's Conference 1990

June 9-11 at the Embassy Centre, Skegness

Deadlines are:
Resolutions: Friday 16th February
Amendments and Delegates: Friday 20th April

Women for Socialism has two model resolutions, one on Women's Organisation (see *Briefing* 92) and one on reproductive rights as follows.

This _____ notes that:
a) women's reproductive rights are again under attack particularly from proposals in the *Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill* and proposed amendments to the Bill;
b) the proposed amendment to ban access to DI (donor insemination) by lesbians and heterosexual single women is based on the prejudice and ignorance expressed in the Ann Winterton/Jill Knight Early Day motion;
c) the proposed amendment to reduce the time limit for abortion is a severe attack on a woman's right to choose, especially given the lack of adequate abortion facilities across the country, the moral anti-abortionism that many doctors impose on women seeking abortions, and that many doctors already work well under the current time limit — any .eduction in the time limit will lead to a corresponding rise in enforced pregnancy (as formerly in Romania), and desperation and despair for women unable to obtain necessary abortions.
This _____ believes that:
a) all women should have the right to control their own bodies and lives;
b) the right to abortion and the right to access to DI by *all* women, including lesbians, are essential parts of women's reproductive rights.
This _____ therefore opposes:
a) the attempts of the pro-Section 28 far right to whip up anti-lesbian prejudice around the issue of DI;
b) any attempt to restrict access to DI only to "stable heterosexual couples" or married women, i.e. to prevent lesbians or single heterosexual women having access to DI;
c) any attempt to reduce time limits on abortion.
This _____ resolves to:
a) actively support local and national campaigns for equal access to DI for all women, and against any further restrictions on abortion rights by time limit reduction; including producing publicity material, and supporting meetings, lobbies, demonstrations, etc.;
b) affiliate to the Stop the Amendment Campaign and the Campaign for Access to DI nationally;
c) send copies of this motion and any available briefing material to our affiliates requesting their support, and to Jo Richardson MP and Lord Ennalls.
d) send a copy to the TUC Women's Committee requesting them to organise a demonstration.

For further details, and copies of model resolutions contact Sarah Roelofs, 22b Pemberton Terrace, London N5 5RY or telephone 01-281 4834.

Childbirth and the NHS:

Birth *control* !

On November 16th, a new comrade, Rosa Ellen Sara Harvest, was welcomed in to the world.

It was a happy event — but my joy in the pregnancy had been constantly eroded by the concerted attacks of a male hospital establishment.

From the first, I was treated as a "problem". The constantly repeated phrase "39 para 0" — i.e a woman having her first child when she was nearly 40 — began to haunt me.

I was given additional tests, additional appointments. "Why?" I'd ask "Is there a problem?". "No," they'd say, "I'd just like to see you again in two weeks."

The fact was that even when they could not find a medical problem, they saw *me* as the problem.

After one half-hour encounter, when I had been reduced to tears by this kind of treatment, a registrar turned to my partner and apologised to *him* for upsetting *me*, for all the world as if he'd scratched his car or trodden on his foot.

Diagnosed

While I was pregnant, dozens of us were diagnosed as having problems with blood sugar levels. The diabetic clinic was so crowded that fist fights broke out between pregnant women over alleged queue-jumping.

The clinic doctors said there was nothing wrong with us, and discharged us. But from then on, we were labelled as being ill.

The (largely male) doctors cannot acknowledge that pregnancy is a normal and on the whole happy state, rather than an illness.

The issue behind this is power. If you are working *with* a woman to achieve a positive end, you do not have her in your power. Many midwives and GPs are prepared to do this.

By Felicity Harvest
Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP

But hospital doctors — mostly male, mostly upper class, mostly white — belittle and control women by turning them into "problems".

Under-resourcing

Meanwhile, under-resourcing of the system is so apparent that complaining seems pointless.

When you have a major, uncomfortable test performed in a room designed as a cloakroom, and the test takes longer than planned because the needles are bent, it is hard to blame the doctors for their bad temper.

But when a young male doctor screams at a woman in early labour "Tired! I've been working 18 hours on this shift, you do that then come back and tell me you're tired!" it is hard to sympathise.

The doctor — young, male, white and well-educated — had no concept of the strains on a black, single parent with a toddler as she went into labour.

Despite the introduction of multi-cultural menus and maternity advocates, the medical establishment still does little to recognise the variety of the community it serves.

During my five days on the post-natal ward, the day staff were almost all white, the night staff almost all black, and there were no senior black nursing staff in evidence.

NHS under-resourcing pushes you towards the private sector.

We attended private antenatal training, because we wanted to learn not only about methods of natural childbirth, but also about how to assert ourselves to deal with the hospital bureaucracy.

So you have to pay to learn how to defend yourself against a service you campaign for!

A young black woman told me how she had had to hire a private midwife in order to get a home birth, even though she was completely healthy.

Women go to private acupuncture and massage to try and stimulate natural births before the doctors intervene and induce them.

So what can be done? In part, answers lie in the kind of better-resourced NHS we would all like to see. There are changes in attitude which we should be campaigning for right now.

This means more training, recruiting different kinds of people to train as doctors, training medical professionals in different attitudes to race and gender, and treating people as people rather than as problems.

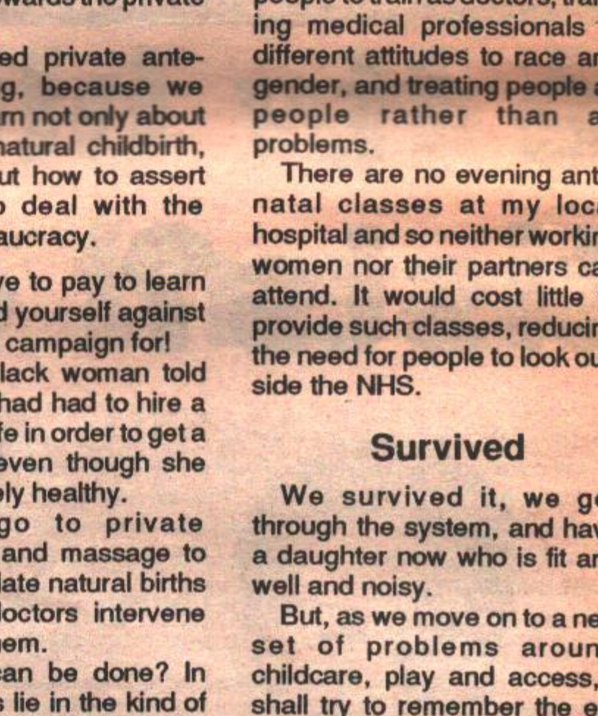
There are no evening antenatal classes at my local hospital and so neither working women nor their partners can attend. It would cost little to provide such classes, reducing the need for people to look outside the NHS.

Survived

We survived it, we got through the system, and have a daughter now who is fit and well and noisy.

But, as we move on to a new set of problems around childcare, play and access, I shall try to remember the experiences of the last year, and to remain involved in trying to improve things.

Maybe they might have changed by the time my daughter goes down the same road!



...I think the stairwell is not being used...

Interview: Susanna Hecht

As radical as reality

Since 1973, biologist SUSANNA HECHT has spent much of her time living and working in the Amazon. Below we print extracts of an interview with Susanna Hecht conducted by *Briefing* supporter WOODY HAUT shortly after the publication of *The Fate of the Forest* which she wrote jointly with ALEXANDER COCKBURN.

***WH:* Do you think the depoliticalisation of the rainforests by many environmentalists has had an adverse effect on solving the problems of the region?**

SH: In America, environmental politics is a more acceptable window for looking at questions of social justice. Also environmentalism has traditionally been concerned with unhumanised landscapes, so you get an environmentalism that is purely preservationist, or the more managerial environmentalism.

Between preservationism and managerialism not much attention is given to other dimensions of the problem.

Thus when you have toxic waste dumps on which suburbs are built and housewives discover they're aborting most of their babies and the kids who do get born are soon sick, they scream and yell and what you get is a clean-up fund, which is the managerial model.

But you rarely get a return to looking at the processes that produced the toxic wastes, or to what's happened to the people actually involved in the production of the toxic waste, or to the political economy of toxic waste.

The three issues invoked in terms of the forest are the greenhouse effect, deforestation, and the hamburger connection. But the US has an incredible problem with the devotion of extremely good agricultural land for the production of grains for animals.

As far as the greenhouse effect is concerned, Americans produce 5000 tonnes per person per year versus 0.7 tonnes in Brazil.

As far as deforestation goes, we've been chopping down redwoods just as fast as we can.

There's been a weird deflection of issues onto the Third World. Without a political analysis, no one can ask why these things are going on. It just becomes a question of what we can do to stop it.

The general solution is to set aside big areas and just make it into a national park and let hell break loose around it.

Cynicism

***WH:* Here, on the left, there's a certain cynicism regarding the rainforest. I think this is due to the fact that the issue has been depoliticised, and, as flavour of the month, seemingly diverts attention from more immediate concerns.**

SH: I think that people should be concerned about the rainforest. The disquiet is all to the good. But the question is how you think about that disquiet and what you think you're going to do about it.

The social justice aspect is very important. Rubber-tappers don't risk their lives to go back and be debt peons so that someone else can have their trees. They want improved health care, they want schools for their kids, they want to hold on to more of the money they generate from their work.

Rights

It's a question of labour rights. They also don't want to be debt peons, so that's a question of human rights. And they want to be assured that they maintain access to the land on which they and their families have always worked.

It's much easier for the business community to talk about it in terms of trees and bio-diversity and, in the future we'll get all these great things out of it, so let's keep it now and as soon as we figure out the marketing strategy it will all be taken care of.

Also, the people of the rainforest don't want to live in some "back to nature" fantasy, nor do they want to live in immense poverty.

There are ways of working, of diversifying their environment, using a fusion of several forms of knowledge and intellectual traditions, a sort of syncretic form of development that can give these peoples something that will increase the economic dynamism and maintain forest resources.

The view has always been that if you can just get rid of those forests then you'll have economic growth. But the fact is, a lot of wealth has been created from managing the forests, and a lot of people have lived there for a long time without destroying it.

But what you have now is a pitched battle between those who make their living from a forest in ashes and those who make their living from a standing forest.

There's a class dimension to that as well. It's not just a contradiction of economic styles—of suburban houses or factories. It's two radically different ways of making an income.

Radical

***WH:* Have your own politics changed after spending so much time in the rainforest?**

SH: Sure. I started off as a person wedded to technical solutions, that you could solve the problem by getting prices right, getting the technologies right, getting the management right.

The view I hold now is not a particularly radical view within the Amazon basin. What's the line from Lenin? — "be as radical as reality".



Where once there were trees — the fate of the rainforest?

Film Review

History for socialists

***The People's Flag*, Platform Films**

The re-run of *The People's Flag*, now showing at Cinema Action, organised by the St. Pancras Socialist Film Group is most welcome.

Made in 1987, this series of five documentaries offers an alternative, socialist history of Britain from the turn of the century to the present day.

By TOM LOUCAS

The current screenings are combined with an opportunity to discuss the films.

The first, *The First Betrayal*, was shown last November and was followed by a lively debate, involving socialists of different affiliations and ages, led off by Tom Durkin, a trade unionist who appeared in the film.

The next film, the third, is on January 25th. Entitled *Victory to Consensus*, it covers the period 1945 to 1964: the end of the empire, anti-communism, the increasing influence of the US over Britain, and Kruschev's speech. It ends with the Wilson government closing 13 years of Tory rule.

Each film is self-contained, and so missing one does not effect enjoying the others. It is definitely worth seizing the chance to see these films on the big screen, especially with the added incentive of a socialist discussion afterwards.

The films are on at: Cinema Action, 27/28 Winchester Road, London NW3. The programme is: Thursday January 25th *Victory to Consensus* 1945-1964; Thursday 22nd February *Who Runs the Country?* 1964-1979; Thursday 29th March *The Enemy Within* 1979-1987.

If you can't make it to the screenings, videos of the series are available for hire from Platform Films, 13 Tankerton House, Tankerton Street, London WC1H 8HP. Telephone: 01-278 8394.

Book Review

The hidden history of the Amazon

The Fate of the Forest* by Susanna Hecht and Alexander Cockburn, *Verso

At last someone has written a book about the Amazon which looks beyond the destruction of the forests to *why* it is happening.

At last we can read beyond the pious resolutions of international bodies to the real resistance being waged by the indigenous community.

The Fate of the Forest also refreshingly views the extermination of that community as part of the destruction of the forest, rather than an incidental footnote.

Only 200,000 Amazonian Indians survive today; where six to twelve million lived in 1492. More than one third of their tribes have been wiped out since 1900.

The colonisation of the Amazon has been lethal and wasteful. The recent gold-rush led to mercury poisoning being spread through the food chain.

Logging has done irreparable damage — to little benefit. For every three trees felled, 52 are killed or damaged in the process.

Most of the "clearances" of forest occur simply to occupy the land. Why, ask the authors, does this happen?

It is *not* to ranch cattle for beef production for US fast food firms — the Amazon is a net beef importer.

By Mike Phipps Woolwich CLP

Nor is it because small-scale land-hungry peasants are encroaching on the forest as a result of the pressure for land.

Land-grabbing is big business, conducted by large landowners. Occupation is as good as ownership.

Land is a better investment than the national currency. It is straightforward capitalist speculation.

The state is up to its armpits in this scam, with the Sarney government pursuing the same aims as the 20-year dictatorship.

Despite nearly 1,000 death threats and murders, the legal system is hardly a disincentive to crime — the state of Acre can run hearings for only 25 cases a year.

Add to this the murderous role of the cynically misnamed Indian Protection Service, which collaborated with ranches to infect Indians with smallpox and other diseases.

It was replaced in 1969 by a series of other agencies which have continued to work hand in glove with the speculators and big business.

Only direct action from below has prevented the destruction of the forest and its inhabitants. One tactic is the *empate*, or mass stand-off, where hundreds of people block the clearances.

"The whole community took part in the *empate*. The police knew that if they fired they would kill women and children.

"On at least four occasions we were arrested and forced to lie on the ground with them beating us. They threw our bodies, covered in blood, into a truck.

"We got to the police station and we were a hundred people. They didn't have enough room to keep us there so in the end they had to let us go."

The words belong to Chico Mendes, the Amazonian campaigner recently gunned down.

Mendes was one of the founders of the Workers' Party (PT) in the state of Acre, which has played, with the CUT union federation, a major role in organising the community against the terror.

Spanish laws in 1556 banned the publication of any books on its American colonies. This book, fluent in a range of disciplines from botany to politics, is a big achievement which settles accounts with the Amazon's hidden history.

Pergamon

Dispute goes international!

It is now over seven months since 23 journalists at Pergamon Press were sacked for staging an official 24 hours strike.

By a special correspondent

In that time they have received widespread support from throughout the labour movement, both in Britain and internationally.

Their campaign for reinstatement has brought them support from West European trade unions as well as representatives from *Solidarnosc* and the East German movement, *Neues Forum*.

The International Federation of Journalists is to announce an International Day of Action which will be supported by Maxwell workplaces the world over.

The journalists' unions involved in the dispute at Maxwell's Parisian press agency, the Agence Centrale de Presse are campaigning together with the Pergamon 23 in an effort to make their common employer see sense.

The focal point of the strikers' campaign at the moment is the consumer and worker boycott. The Pergamon 23 launched a boycott campaign in December intending to hit Maxwell as hard as possible. With support from the relevant trade unions — NALGO, NUT, AUT, NATFHE, NUS and the TGWU — it is hoped that a successful campaign can be effected.

In order to win their dispute and an important victory for trade unionists it is vital that other trade unions do not fight shy of implementing the boycott.

Meanwhile smaller victories have already been achieved. Peter Jay, former US Ambassador and TVAM entrepreneur, who has been opening Maxwell's strike correspondence over the last few months in his capacity as Maxwell's Chief-of-Staff, has been found alternative employment at the BBC.

Speculation as to Maxwell's personnel changes has been added to by the sudden departure of his top PR and Press person, Ted Grahams, and the man that signed the original 23 dismissal letters — John Cushing.

Maxwell has also resorted to taking out writs against five national daily newspapers who covered the strikers' successful lobby of Maxwell last October during Labour Party Conference.



Les "Pergamon Vingt-trois"

The Pergamon 23 are optimistic that 1990 will give them the victory the labour movement deserves and look forward to continued support.

Please send messages of support, donations or requests for speakers to: Pergamon Press NUJ Chapel, 60 Cricket Road, Oxford OX4 3DQ or contact them at their strike HQ on 0865 60762.

35 hour week



PHOTO: Jim Thain and Martine Stead

Rank and file engineering workers need to put pressure on their leaderships to extend the action

Union leaders fudge

Engineering workers striking for the 35 hour week have entered the New Year with all the problems they encountered in the last year.

They are still beset by the refusal of the Confed leaders to extend the strike, and their determination to accept any deal which involves reduced hours irrespective of the strings which may be attached to it.

Two thousand workers at Rolls Royce in Glasgow returned to work before Christmas after several appeals by AEU leaders

By ALAN THORNETT

and payments from their hardship fund had been cut off.

In BAe Preston, however, the strike has been strengthening. A picket of over 1,000 workers stopped the drift back to work which had started before the holiday, after strike pay had been cut.

Also workers at nearby BAe plants who had been bussed in for weeks to do strikers jobs held mass meetings and refused to board the buses in the future. After these decisions, the scabbing was reduced to a trickle despite threats from management.

There have been limited breakthroughs with some employers. Negotiations at NEI Peebles of Edinburgh and Edbro of Bolton have secured a reduction in hours eventually to 37.

The strike will not hold out indefinitely on the present basis, and it must be extended or it will not achieve a decisive breakthrough.

Victimised miners

Jailed miners freed!

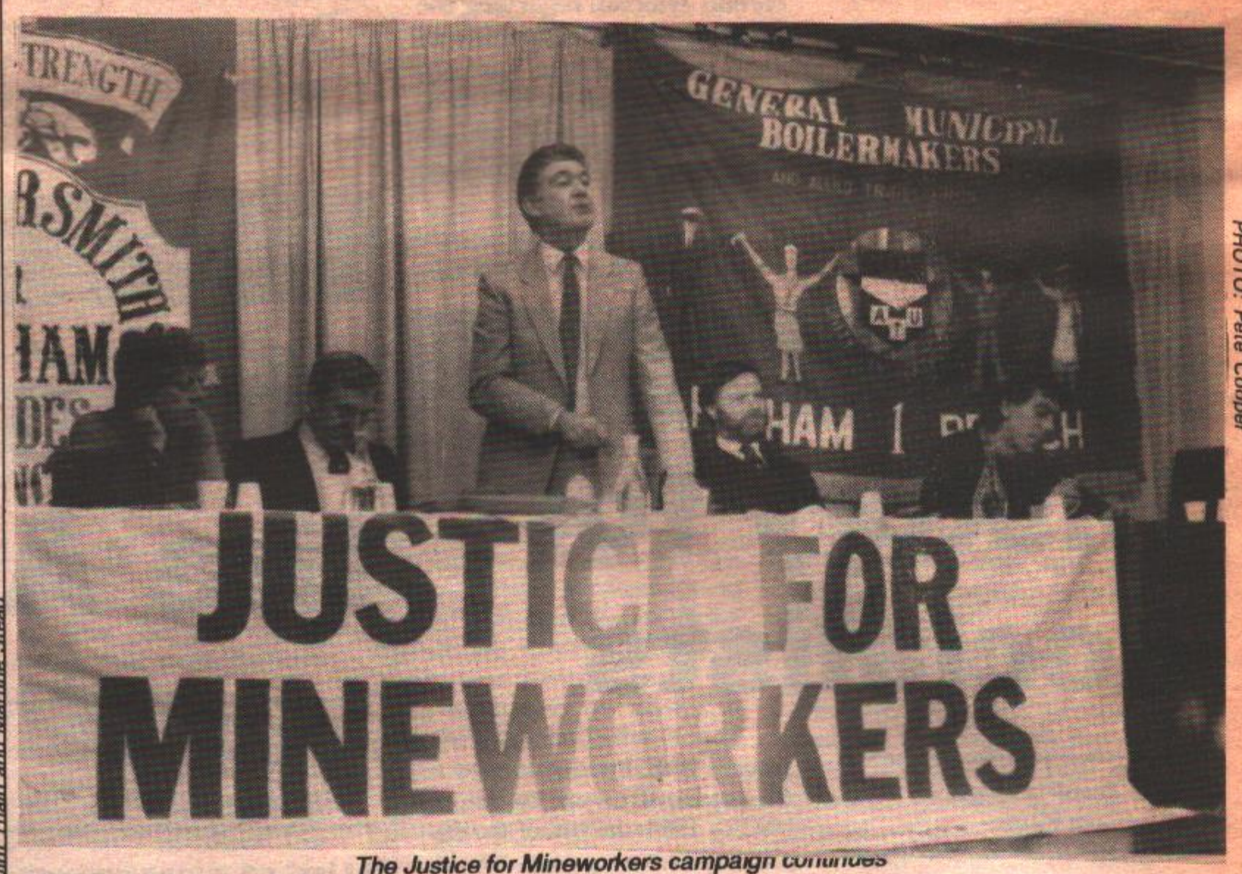


PHOTO: Pete Cooper

The Justice for Mineworkers campaign continues

Two jailed miners, Dean Hancock and Russell Shankland have been released without any explanation or warning after serving nearly five years in jail.

The heroic miners' strike saw 11 miners die, several on the picket line, and many more were jailed.

The life sentences meted out to the two young lads for their role in trying to stop scabs in the Rhymny Valley provoked a strike by the local NUM lodges.

After much effort by the South Wales NUM and local MPs an appeal was successfully lodged. Though the offence was reduced to manslaughter, they still got the maximum sentence — eight years.

These harsh sentences were designed to punish the

John Calderon Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP

NUM and teach a lesson they would not quickly forget.

The rank and file of the labour movement here and abroad has not forgotten them. Material and moral support has been on offer from many quarters. Recently the Socialist Movement Trade Union Conference pledged full support to the two miners.

The majority of the South Wales NUM stood by them as did local MP Ted Rowlands. Thousands of cards and letters have been sent to them and their families — moving evidence of the respect felt for them from trade unionists.

In prison they were treated with dignity by the other inmates.

No one expected their release in November, although release for good conduct was due in April. Parole had been consistently denied them, while others on harsher sentences were released.

It is plain now that British justice is today on the defensive. This about face can only be due to fear of the fact that this particular trial and sentence will not stand up to public and judicial scrutiny.

This is the best news the two families and their supporters could have had. It is good news too for those still in prison on political charges: the Birmingham 6 and the Broadwater 3.

These prisoners and their families should take heart from what has happened to Dean and Russell.

Ambulance dispute

Solidarity is the key!

Solidarity action is the key to breaking the deadlock in the long-running ambulance dispute.

Ambulance workers are clearly determined to hold out for improvements on the Tories' derisory 6.5% offer despite increasing hardship and intimidation by management.

Union leaders and the TUC, however, have demonstrated their unwillingness to match the workers' will to fight and appear unable to capitalise on the massive public support for our struggle.

In a pathetic attempt by ambulance union leaders to side-step rank and file pressure to escalate the action they have called for a 15 minute national stoppage at midday on January 30th.

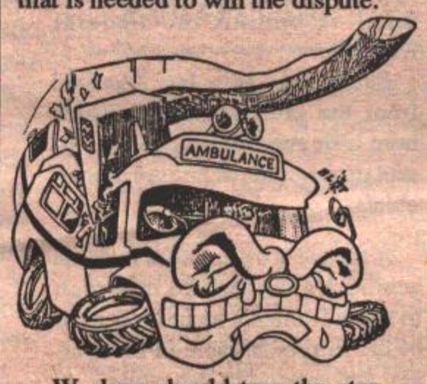
By Diane Seddon

In the same breath as calling for the stoppage, union leaders were falling over themselves to insist that this was not "illegal", secondary action.

Workers are being asked to gain their employers' "permission" before walking out! And with the stoppage carefully timed for lunchtime, many workers are effectively being asked to take no action at all!

No marches, rallies, or other forms of effective action have been called. You are simply asked to spend the quarter of an hour "thinking about the plight of the ambulance workers". Meditation has replaced confrontation as the union leadership's key tactic against the Tories.

The situation would be laughable if it were not so serious. It demonstrates the refusal of union leaders to take on the anti- trade union laws which have effectively outlawed the solidarity action that is needed to win the dispute.



Workers should turn the stoppage on January 30th into a day of action in solidarity with ambulance crews. Strike action, marches, and rallies across the country will demonstrate the real strength of feeling in support of ambulance workers.

There is more at stake than simply pay. Health Secretary Kenneth Clarke's well publicised remarks that most ambulance workers are just "professional drivers" and his insistence on a separate pay deal for paramedically trained staff expose Tory plans for the future of the ambulance service in a post-White Paper NHS.

They aim to create a two-tier service with paramedic crews operating accident and emergency services as opted-out self- governing trusts and a de-skilled, privatised, non-emergency service contracted out to taxi fleets and private bus operators.

This process has already begun in some areas of the country. Around 43% of Northumbria's non-emergency services are contracted out to a private bus company. Non-emergency work has already been privatised in Hampshire, Wiltshire, and Avon ambulance services, and Lincolnshire, the North West Regional Health Authority and Lanarkshire and Forth Valley Health Boards will shortly follow suit.

Defence of ambulance services, like the NHS as a whole, is the responsibility of *all* workers. A victory in our current pay dispute will raise the morale of ambulance crews and give us added confidence to fight privatisation.

Solidarity action by other workers is vital to ensure victory. All out on January 30th!



On the march for the full claim

PHOTO: Tim Nolan

Army driver wreaks havoc

By our Police Affairs correspondent

A woman was killed and her husband seriously injured when an army ambulance crashed into their car at Clapham Junction in Wandsworth, in early December. The driver is likely to face prosecution.

On the first day of the Christmas holiday a 22-year old police constable was killed when another army ambulance was involved in a collision at Camberwell in South London.

It is clear from this and other reports that strike-breaking army personnel are driving their vehicles at reckless speeds.

Moreover, army drivers do not have dispensation to cross red traffic lights as do the NHS ambulance crews. So the police should be arresting these soldiers.

Police Federation national chair Alan Eastwood took the unprecedented step of supporting the ambulance workers by sharing a platform with NUPE spokesperson Roger Poole and FBU General Secretary Ken Cameron.

Eastwood came under fire in a letter from a Stockport officer in *Police Review*. The letter warned against loss of police neutrality as a result of the Federation leadership's stand.

But this was balanced by another letter from an anonymous sergeant who supported the ambulance workers. Elsewhere police officers have been signing petitions in support of ambulance staff.

The Home Office has so far failed to make any moves against these actions which are illegal under the 1964 Police Act.

Hull

Building wider support

Local ambulance workers and Hull Trades Council held a successful public meeting with a platform of full-timers from NUPE and COHSE with Tony Topham, labour movement activist and author.

Topham took on and demolished all the Tory arguments: with a £15 billion budget surplus, the government had more than enough money to meet the claim.

By Hull *Briefing* supporters

He pointed out that the way the dispute had developed led to ambulance workers taking control of their own service.

Although the full-timers defended the conduct of the dispute, both agreed with the mood of the meeting that the "public support" needed to be mobilised, and escalated within the NHS and the movement as a whole.

They pointed out that much past trade union action has been "unlawful" and recalled the success of the TUC's demonstration of March 1988 (and it should be remembered that this was called at short notice and only one union — the Taylors and Garment Workers — appeared to have mobilised for it!)

The Trades Council's Disputes Committee is a *de facto* ambulance workers' support group and is planning for a local march and rally on the 27th January and is also discussing ways of making the 30th something more than a token event.

Solidarity in action

How we stopped the East End

When the ambulance dispute began, we confidently expected a call from NUPE nationally to mobilise Council workers in support of the local ambulance members.

But branch stewards who phoned NUPE were told to await "circulars on the matter"!

We therefore contacted the local NUPE ambulance stewards ourselves.

Close links between both NUPE branches and the other Council unions were quickly forged.

By Keith Veness Secretary, NUPE Hackney Officers Branch and Tony Cordell Secretary, Hackney Joint Shop Stewards Committee

Following the inactivity of the national leadership after a rather tame Saturday morning demonstration in early November, Hackney District Committee of NUPE resolved to call a one day strike and demonstration in support of the ambulance staff and to obtain the backing of other local unions.

Hackney Joint Shop Stewards Committee quickly swung behind the action and it was agreed to organise a mass meeting at the Town Hall inviting other Boroughs and workforces to send union reps.

The rally on November 18th was attended by over 500 workers — with particularly good turnouts by the builders' unions UCATT and the TGWU.

Over £8,000 was collected for the ambulance staff. It was agreed, on a unanimous show of hands, to call a one-day strike for December 6th.

Bombarded

The NUPE and Joint Shop Stewards' offices were then bombarded with phone calls, requests for speakers and interviews.

We spoke to meetings in neighbouring Islington as support started to build up.

Every union in Hackney Council passed resolutions pledging support.

At the request of the NUPE ambulance workers, the march was to go to Kings Cross station to pay respects to those who died in the fire, and to the ambulance and other emergency service workers who risked their lives.

The police proved remarkably helpful on this point, in stark contrast to the usual view they have of such events.

On December 6th an estimated 6,000 workers out of a possible 7,500 were on strike.

The march set off from Hackney Town Hall, supported by NUPE and NUT members from ILEA, CPSA members from social security offices in Hackney and Tower Hamlets and many other local workplaces.

At the Balls Pond Road, the Union of Turkish Workers and the TGWU clothing branch added a large contingent of Kurdish and Turkish socialists and trade unionists, who were loudly cheered.

As the march moved through Islington, NALGO members walked out of the Council Municipal Offices to join in.

Another 500 workers, mainly from Islington DLO, met us at Islington Town Hall to loud applause.

Finally, 50 pensioners from Hackney marched the last mile from the Angel to Kings Cross with us — a magnificent effort.

At Kings Cross station the march halted and observed a minute's silence while a wreath was laid. The march then dispersed to meet the ambulance workers' demo coming up from Waterloo.

Nurseries

December 6th saw around 30,000 workers on strike — including parts of the transport system, local Councils, ILEA, the Civil Service, and dozens of local workplaces including parts of the NHS, sweatshop garment factories, and various community groups and nurseries.

Hackney and Islington came to a standstill for three hours and £2,800 was collected on the march by ambulance workers and other NUPE members.

The media played down such "illegal" secondary action and the NUPE national leadership was noticeable by both its inaction and complete silence.

However, the Hackney unions remain convinced that only by such actions can the ambulance drivers force the government to back down.

The London Division of NUPE, until recently firmly in the camp of the New Realists, held its annual conference the day before the strike.

Hackney was loudly praised for its efforts and three of the four places to this year's Divisional Council were won by left critics of the leadership.

It seems action really does speak louder than words!

*Phone Hackney JSSC for details of planned action on January 30th: 01-985 9104/986 3123 ext. 3609.

International Briefing

Romania

"Ceausescu is no more!"

"Olé, olé, olé, olé, Ceausescu nu mai e!" — "Ceausescu is no more!"

The crowds thronging central Bucharest in the final week of 1989 exploded with joy and hope that the end of the 24 year dictatorship would at last open the way to a better life for all.

Ironically the early Ceausescu years, from 1965 until 1971, had also been a period of hope — and indeed of small but real material gains, a new dynamism in cultural and intellectual life, public solidarity with the Prague Spring, and so on.

For the first and only time in its history the Romanian Communist Party seemed to be acquiring a real if precarious popular base.

Just a few years later, however, a visitor to Bucharest could be in no doubt about the main lines of the "Golden Age" that was taking shape under the "Genius of the Carpathians".

No doubt some layers of the population enjoyed a certain upward mobility in the 80s, albeit at the price of regular collaboration with the Securitate secret police.

But the country has virtually nothing to show for it, except the bombastic palaces and boulevards which increasingly became a substitute for social development.

For the mass of Romanians — above all in the harsh Balkan winter — it was a decade of struggle for everyday existence, with chronic food shortages, unheated and dimly lit flats, run- down medical and social services.

Like in Stalin's Russia in the 30s, relations between colleagues, neighbours and even relatives included an element of suspicion about police spies and informers.

By Patrick Camiller
Labour Focus on Eastern Europe

Ever more punitive measures against abortion and contraception ensured that the spontaneity of sexual relations among young people was clouded by fear, frustration and, for thousands of women, actual mutilation in unsafe abortion attempts.

Furthermore the Ceausescu years, more than any East European country, have sullied the name of socialism in the eyes of the population.

It is possible to liberalise abortion laws overnight, or to improve significantly the supply of food and energy, and the ruling National Salvation Front has already taken some important steps in this direction.

But is will take much longer to overcome the legacy of Ceausescu's identification of socialism with an economically incoherent and politically tyrannical regime.

Question

This is not, of course, just a question of the Communist Party — an institution with the highest per capita membership in the world which, as might have been predicted, vanished into thin air within the space of 24 hours.

The reform Communists and other socialists in Romania, will have to fight hard for every element of socialism to salvage it from the ruins left behind by Ceausescu.

Anyway the only prospect for socialism in Eastern Europe is on the basis of a multi-party representative democracy.

A great deal has been written in the last few weeks about whether a military-bureaucratic putsch had already been planned against Ceausescu.

But however interesting this question may be, what actually took place in December went far beyond a putsch.

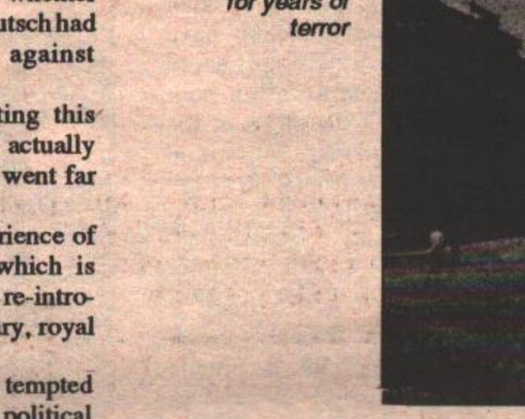
It is this popular experience of revolutionary struggle which is the main obstacle to the re-introduction of pre-war military, royal or elite rule in Romania.

Some will no doubt be tempted to keep an iron grip on political developments, for fear of what might happen if they spin out of control.

Yet the modern history of Romania — including, most recently, the "Ceausescu epoch" — demonstrates that any progressive social project is built on sand unless it can stand the test of political democracy.

The elections currently scheduled for April will be an invaluable starting point for a new political tradition.

No one should underestimate the present difficulties facing Romania, a country as far behind the GDR economically as Portugal is behind the Federal Republic.



Barley — how long before Romanian workers see more of it?

Partly this is a lag inherited from the pre-war period, which bore little resemblance to the current propaganda of emigré monarchists.

A glance at a League of Nations yearbook from the 30s is enough to show Romania near the bottom of the European table in most social and economic indicators.

But it is also true that post-war social advances abruptly came to an end in the 70s, and were actually reversed during Ceausescu's final dementia.



Ceausescu's bombastic palaces and boulevards — all the workers have to show for years of terror

Life expectancy, for example, is today reported to be ten years below the European average, while there must be serious doubt about the balance and viability of much of the industrial structure.

It is not surprising that, after the suppression of debate and democratic political life for so long, the first parties to emerge alongside the National Salvation Front have been resuscitations of pre-war parties — above all, the National Peasant Party that once dominated the countryside.

The programme of peasant nationalism, often tinged with religious revival, tends to see a decollectivised, smallholder agrarian life as the panacea for all ills.

Example

Yet the example of Poland today, or of pre-war Romania itself (where agrarian reform went much further than elsewhere in the Balkans), suggests that small farms can neither spur general advances in agricultural productivity nor provide the basis for dynamic growth of the economy as a whole.

Although forced collectivisation has certainly been no solution and has made necessary a degree of reprivatisation, voluntary forms of agrarian co-operation may well prove to be the only long-term alternative to capitalist concentration.

More generally, a balanced revival of the Romanian economy — which will be the number one problem facing any government in the coming period — is even less likely to occur in Romania through wholesale marketisation than it is in other countries of Eastern Europe.

However discredited by Ceausescu caricatures, rational methods of socialist planning will become more crucial to the development of infrastructure and new industries, as well as to the consolidation of foreign trade.

Obituary

Sam Bornstein 1920-90

Sam Bornstein died at midnight between 7th and 8th January this year after a long heart illness complicated by diabetes.

He was one of the few surviving links between the revolutionary working class movement of previous generations and the movement that exists now.

His roots went deep into the old Jewish revolutionary movement in the East End.

His great uncle Heinrich was treasurer of the First International when Marx was its Secretary.

One of his relations, Shirley Lerner, was one of the first British Shactmanites and the author of a book on red trade unionism. Another was Mick Costello, who was Industrial Organiser of the Communist Party.

Another relative is referred to in Trotsky's *In Defence of Marxism*; and yet a fifth, Bannerjee, was one of the first Indian delegates to the Comintern.

Sam Bornstein joined the working class movement in his teens and was Secretary of the ILP Guild of Youth in London in 1938

By AL RICHARDSON

where he proposed a successful resolution to its national conference for affiliation to the Fourth International.

During the War he was a member of the Workers International League and an AEU Shop Steward at Napiers in Action, where he wrote a pamphlet called *Napiers' Profits Scandal* to show the class nature of the War.

Attempts by the Communist Party to have him sacked and arrested were stopped when the workers threatened to throw the Stalinist convenor into one of the machines during one dark night — and, due to the blackout, "all the nights were dark."

He was briefly arrested and fined for selling a folder outside a Marble Arch cinema that was showing a film glorifying the Moscow trials, since Britain and America were allied with the USSR in war against Hitler.

When the Revolutionary Communist Party began to fall apart in 1949, Sam argued for the "open party" and against entry into the Labour Party — a view he later abandoned.

When he went to Yugoslavia in a Work Brigade he was shocked to see the adulation and personality cult of Tito that was shared by the Trotskyists.

For his critical remarks he was expelled from the movement by Gerry Healy on his way back through Paris.

When the International Secretariat reconstructed its Section in Britain in 1957 Sam worked with a group of Greek Cypriots and West Indians to bring out a duplicated magazine "Fourth International" and to unite these groups with others in Liverpool, London, and Nottingham. The group's propaganda was put out over his name.

He broke with the group some years later, when he discovered that Pablo had an inner, secret Central Committee inside the group's Central Committee.

For most of the rest of his life he worked on the history of the movement, rescuing its past from obscurity and Stalinist slander.

The results were his books, written along with Al Richardson, *Two Steps Back* (1982), *Against the Stream* and *War and the International* (1986).

In spite of this the Stalinists continued to misrepresent him.

When a TV series on British Labour history was being screened two years ago, the staff put pressure on the producer to interview Sam on his experiences during the War.

The interview was at least a quarter of an hour long, but when the producer saw what Sam had said he cut out all critical remarks about the Communist Party. All the viewers were able to see was two minutes of anodyne comment.

At his funeral were represented seven revolutionary organisations — two of them by their leaders, Ted Grant and Tony Cliff; three Labour MPs; one national trade union leader, and many notables in the movement, including George Orwell's staff sergeant when he was with the POUM militia in Spain.

This gives an indication of the deep respect in which he is held in wide sections of the labour movement.

Robin Jamieson adds:

Sam Bornstein married my mother in 1956 and although their marriage was not a success my sister and I chose from that time to regard him as a father.

As a teenager I thought there was nothing special about our house in Hackney... except for the Greek typewriter in the bathroom, used by Cypriot comrades in their struggle for independence and then taken away in a police raid... except for trade union leaders from Sri Lanka sleeping on the floor... except for the times when people we hardly knew climbed in the front room window at 3am and started a serious political discussion.

I came to regard Sam as a reincarnation in caricature of Karl Marx, Leon Trotsky, and god. He became over the years an old man with white hair and a beard who sat in judgement on the ruling class, on the Stalinist bureaucracies in Eastern Europe, on the Labour and trade union leaders, and on the Trotskyist movement which he had helped to create.

He did not, of course, believe in god, and was unrelated to Trotsky...

By the 1950s [...] the ideal of building a new movement based on the ideas of Marx and Trotsky seemed bizarre and irrelevant — except to a tiny handful of ageing revolutionaries. [...]

No one but a Marxist could believe that there would be a return to economic decline, mass unemployment, Stock Market crashes, poverty, hunger, and homelessness...

The Trotskyists were more ridiculed than the Flat Earth Society and it took an immense courage and an incredibly clear understanding of the economic and social splitting which were accumulating deep below the surface of society to embark on the setting up of a new revolutionary movement. [...]

Sam's last comment to me before he became too ill to speak was that at least he had lived long enough to see the early beginnings of political revolution in Russia and Eastern Europe, events which vindicated the position of the Trotskyist movement over the last 60 years.

Panama

US forces out!

After ten days in the Vatican Embassy, Manuel Noriega has been taken to the US for "trial".

US troops, however, are likely to stay far longer on the streets of Panama.

US casualties in the invasion were light, in comparison with the numbers of Panamanians killed: 314 soldiers and at least 1,000 civilians.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

While the middle classes celebrate in Panama City, reports indicate that the civilian death toll was greatest in the poorer barrios. Panama's dispossessed have nothing to gain from US imperialism's "Operation Just Cause".

Media attention has focused on the fate of Noriega, but the American action has broader implications. The *Guardian* pointed out:

"The question now is whether Mr Bush will be tempted to repeat this raw exercise of power in Nicaragua if next month's elections are declared to be 'stolen' by the Nicaraguan government."

The US confirmed this attitude when its soldiers ransacked Nicaraguan premises in Panama.

Socialists may criticise the decision of Nicaragua and Cuba to offer Noriega asylum. But they should not use the barbarity of Noriega's regime as a pretext to stay silent on the invasion.

The raid has nothing to do with defending the interests of the Panamanian people but everything to do with safeguarding the military and commercial interests of the US — particularly the Canal Zone — in the country.

It also aims to test public opinion at home to discover the viability of more direct US involvement in the Nicaraguan and El Salvadorean conflicts.

This shift in US policy takes place not in spite of but because of its improved relations with the USSR. Gorbachev clearly signalled at the Malta summit that US activity in Central America would not be opposed in anything more than words.

The US invasion of Panama threatens the people of all Central America. It must be unconditionally opposed.

Brazil

Big gains for PT!

Last month's second round presidential election campaign in Brazil saw Workers' Party candidate Lula narrowly beaten by right winger Collor.

But just three months previously, suggestions that Lula had the remotest chance of reaching the second round would have been laughed at.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

Not even the PT expected such a close result — which forced Collor — who began as a critic of the corrupt Sarney regime — to reveal himself as the right wing capitalist politician he is.

Collor faces major problems in power. Most pressing will be:

- four figure inflation;
- a massive foreign debt ($115 billion);
- and an increasingly confident working class that will reject attempts to make further cuts in its living standards to finance interest payments to imperialist banks.

Combative

It is this combative working class that makes up the constituency of the Workers Party.

It explains how the PT, and the 15-million strong trade union federation CUT (now the largest federation in the country) have moved from nowhere to high office in just four years.

Working class self-organisation has grown stronger as the economic and institutional crisis deepened.

The economy is stagnant, the minimum wage has slumped to US$35 a month and the nervousness of the capitalist class is indicated by the flight of an estimated $31 billion out of the country in recent years.

In this context the PT called for a "democratic, popular, anti-imperialist government against the monopolies and large landowners [which] will enable the working class and its allies to advance towards socialism."

Capture

The PT never viewed the capture of the presidency as an end in itself, but a means to step up the fight against the military bureaucracy and create the space for the people's self-organisation.

Its programme called for a redistribution of income, an end to regional discrimination, suspension of foreign debt payments, and agrarian reform.

It is undeniable that Lula's campaign, far from being an electoral diversion, has galvanised the support of millions of workers and the poor.

It has helped mobilise an alliance of all Brazil's oppressed against the might of imperialism and their domestic servants.

Birmingham Six

Don't ease up!

The Home Secretary's decision to consider "new evidence" in the Birmingham Six case has given rise to optimism among campaigners for the Six.

Last year support for their case mushroomed after the Guildford Four victory, but the government refused to budge — dreading to be seen to make further concessions under pressure.

By Piers Mostyn
Holborn & St Pancras CLP

There is little "new" evidence that didn't exist in November. The Home Secretary has simply found a hook on which to hang a reference to the Court of Appeal that won't look like the political decision it is.

The 80s opened with a mass struggle in support of a hunger strike by Irish Republican prisoners against their criminalisation and closed with the release of the Guildford Four, triggering a crisis in the criminal justice system.

Over that period the discrediting of Britain's "law and order" approach on Ireland has been slow but inevitable.

Every show trial, every frame up, every assertion of the collective "guilt" of the nationalist Irish community has become that much more difficult to justify.

With the focus now on the Birmingham Six there is nothing the state can do, other than attempting to limit the damage, to avoid the development of a further crisis.

Streets

In December, 15,000 marched through the streets of Dublin in an unprecedented show of protest against the frame up of Irish prisoners.



Martin McGuiness — who hasn't been arrested!

PHOTO: Frankie Quinn

The Birmingham Six were transfered to Category B status — without any attempt at justification — in an open acknowledgement by the government that they are not and never have been "dangerous".

The Dublin government, virtually immobile on the issue over the years, has been forced into action.

The case against Dan McBrearty was dropped because supposed evidence of traces of a component of semtex on him was regarded as insufficient — an unprecedented move.

He was nonetheless excluded from Britain under the Prevention of Terrorism Act without explanation.

However, the arrest of Sinn Fein leader Danny Morrison,



British justice...

the raiding of the Party's offices, and the killing of three robbers by undercover soldiers in West Belfast since the New Year demonstrate that the Tories have no intention of easing up on the nationalist community.

Socialists must ensure that there is no easing up on the government and make the campaign to release the Birmingham Six and other victims of British misrule in Ireland a major priority for 1990.

Czechoslovakia

Expressing the people's will

The election of Vaclav Havel as President of Czechoslovakia on the 29th December — with the unanimous support of the mainly communist deputies — marks the complete collapse of the Stalinist project in that country.

By COLIN MEADE

Despite electing an entirely new leadership at its December congress, the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia is losing members by the tens of thousands. The party faces the likelihood of fragmentation as in Hungary and Poland.

The old system has not, of course, been replaced; but without any centralised direction it will grind to a halt. Although Havel has insisted that he only wants to be President until free election can be held in June, this does not mean that the new government can afford to be inactive or indecisive.

It has made clear its basic concept — shared by the reformists in the Czech CP — which is that of a sovereign Czechoslovakia should be part of the world economy and share in Western European prosperity.

This means an end to the privileged (and enforced) alliances with the Soviet Union. Thus on January 6th, Finance Minister Vaclav Klaus called for the dissolution of the Soviet dominated Comecon trading bloc, while the new government has demanded the rapid removal of Soviet troops from Czechoslovak soil.

Diplomatic

On the diplomatic front, Foreign Minister Jiri Dienstbier a past contributor to the debates inspired by the Europe for Nuclear Disarmament movement (END), has stated that "our objective is the dissolution of the two blocs" ... "We want to change the structures of the Warsaw Pact, but above all the whole structure of international relations."

The government supports a united Germany linked to the reunification of Europe, and has insisted that Germany must present a democratic face that will inspire confidence in its Eastern neighbours.

Excuses

Havel has also stated that Czechoslovakia "must present its excuses to the Germans expelled from Czechoslovakia at the end of the war" a remark that has been criticised by CP leader Ladislav Adamec, and, reportedly, by the Catholic Cardinal Tomasek.

The new government's orientation may seem to many in the West to be based on a rather naive idea of the nature and intentions of the European imperialist powers, above all West Germany.

On the other hand, by implementing democratic reforms, including the opening of the country's borders to the West, has provided a necessary condition for any alternative emerging to the plans of Kohl and Mitterand.

And on one thing there can be no question: the Havel government and its initial efforts express the will of the majority of Czechs and Slovaks.

To re-establish itself as a political force in Czechoslovakia, the left must address the question how can Czechs and Slovaks consolidate democracy and national independence and achieve prosperity?

Political

Already new political groups and parties are forming in Czechoslovakia, including a Green Party, a Czechoslovak Social Democratic Party, a Democratic Socialist Party in Slovakia, and the Left Alternative who will be ready to discuss this question with us.

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Azerbaijan-Armenia

Gorbachev's crisis

By Tom Loucas
Islington North CLP

After the dramatic collapse of Stalinist rule across Eastern Europe, the epicentre of the process has has shifted back into the Soviet Union itself.

The national question has now become Gorbachev's gravest, possibly terminal, problem: civil war is now raging in Azerbaijan.

The pouring of over 11,000 Russian troops into the area shows no sign of stabilising the crisis but rather exacerbating it. We are left wondering at the horrifying scale of the violence and the lack of an obvious solution.

At a rally in the Azerbaijani capital, Baku, on January 13th, an announcement that an Armenian had murdered two Azeris with an axe triggered the latest explosion of violence.

The ensuing pogrom may have been a spontaneous reaction, but some accounts tell of anti-Armenian leaflets being distributed at the rally.

During the next two days in Baku 34 Armenians were thrown out of windows, burned alive, or beaten to death with iron bars. Two hundred and fifty thousand Armenians have now fled the capital.

The violence has spread to other Armenian communities in Azerbaijan, in particular to the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh, where full-scale guerilla war is raging in the northern hills.

The violence has continued to escalate, as both Azeris and Armenians become increasingly well armed. There are stories of tanks being seized by Azeris and one report of Armenians using helicopters to attack Azeri villages.

Troops sent by Moscow — 17,000 in all — have been unable to bring the situation under control.

Azerbaijanis have set up road blocks on routes into Baku to stop troops getting in, government buildings have been besieged, and strike action has paralysed the republic.

The Azeri Popular Front is calling for the compete withdrawal of troops and the resignation of the republic's Party leaders. It will not allow Nagorno-Karabakh to secede and seem determined to drive all Armenians from Azeri soil.

This violent and complex situation has deep historical roots: immediately in the effects of Gorbachevism on the oppressed nationalities of the Soviet Union; more deeply, in Stalin's denial of the right of national self-determination.

Territory

The present Armenian SSR is only a tiny part of the territory historically inhabited by Armenians. Nakbuchevan, on the Soviet-Iranian border, was ceded to Azerbaijan in 1921 after pressure from Turkey which was acting for the Western powers.

The decision to give Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijan was taken directly by Stalin. He did not refer the decision to Moscow, which conflicted both with earlier decisions of the Soviet government and Lenin's policy.

For the Armenians of Nagorno-Karabakh, there is a burning national question to be answered, stemming not only from the present suppression of Armenian language and culture, but also from the historic sense of injustice shared by all Armenians.

It is not surprising, therefore, that Armenians seized with both hands the political opportunities for political activity ushered in by glasnost.

Mobilisations

Throughout 1988 mobilisations of hundred thousands and general strikes swept across the Armenian SSR and Nagorno-Karabakh.

The Armenian Party was forced to support calls for a return of Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia, as long moribund organisations — unions, the local party, local Soviets — began to respond to the masses.

In July 1988 the Karabakh Soviet voted to leave Azerbaijan and join Armenia.

Initially the national movement had great hopes of perestroika. In early demonstrations pictures of Gorbachev were carried.

But the bureaucracy had no intention of acceding to the nationalists' demands, forcing the movement to go beyond perestroika and making it more of a threat to the bureaucracy.

The Soviet bureaucracy claimed that the protests were encouraged by corrupt officials, afraid of perestroika, who were using nationalism to cover their activities.



In Nagorno-Karabakh this allowed the Azeri police to investigate the supposed economic corruption, sparking off further protests from the Armenians.

Typically, both the Gorbachev and the conservative wing of the bureaucracy united against the Armenian national movement, recognising the threat posed by this revival of independent mass activity.

Evidence

There is evidence that the bureaucracy may have used Azeri chauvinism against the Armenian national movement through equating the gangs of Azeris who staged the pogroms with the Armenian movement, and encouraging Azeri mobilisations.

In fact the Armenian movement is qualitatively different. It grew out of genuine independent activity of the masses and its leaders have made clear statements opposed to anti-Azeri sentiments.

The cynical role of the bureaucracy was exposed during the Armenian earthquake at the end of 1988, when it used the disaster to crush the Armenian movement.

Earthquake

Just before the earthquake tanks had been sent in to Yerevan and a curfew and a ban on meetings imposed. At the same time, in Baku, rallies and anti-Armenian demands continued.

After the disaster more swingeing measures were possible under the pretext of maintaining order.

Throughout 1989 the conflict between the Armenian nationalists and the Azeris deepened. An Azeri Popular Front arose out of the demonstrations at the end of 1988 encouraged by the Azeri authorities and probably the Soviet authorities.



Ligachev, for one, offered unconditional support for the Azerbaijani government position on Nagorno-Karabakh.

Front

However, the Front soon spun out of the bureaucracy's control, developing anti-Soviet, nationalist, pan-Turkish, and pan-Islamic demands. It blockaded Armenia to force the nationalists to give up territorial claims on Nagorno-Karabakh.

This raised the temperature of the conflict to such a degree that as far back as September 1989 Arkadi Volsky, Chair of the special committee set up to run Nagorno-Karabakh, reported to the Soviet Communist Party plenum that Armenia and Azerbaijan were on the verge of war.

By their own actions, the Soviet bureaucracy, have created another national movement — the Azerbaijani Popular Front — to challenge their authority and to force a violent response from the Armenians.

The bureaucracy must take full responsibility for the bloodbath. They have blocked a peaceful resolution to the problem which required clear sighted leadership from the outset.

Gorbachev has not understood, as Lenin did, the importance of national self-determination and is unable to fight the chauvinist currents within Azeri nationalism.

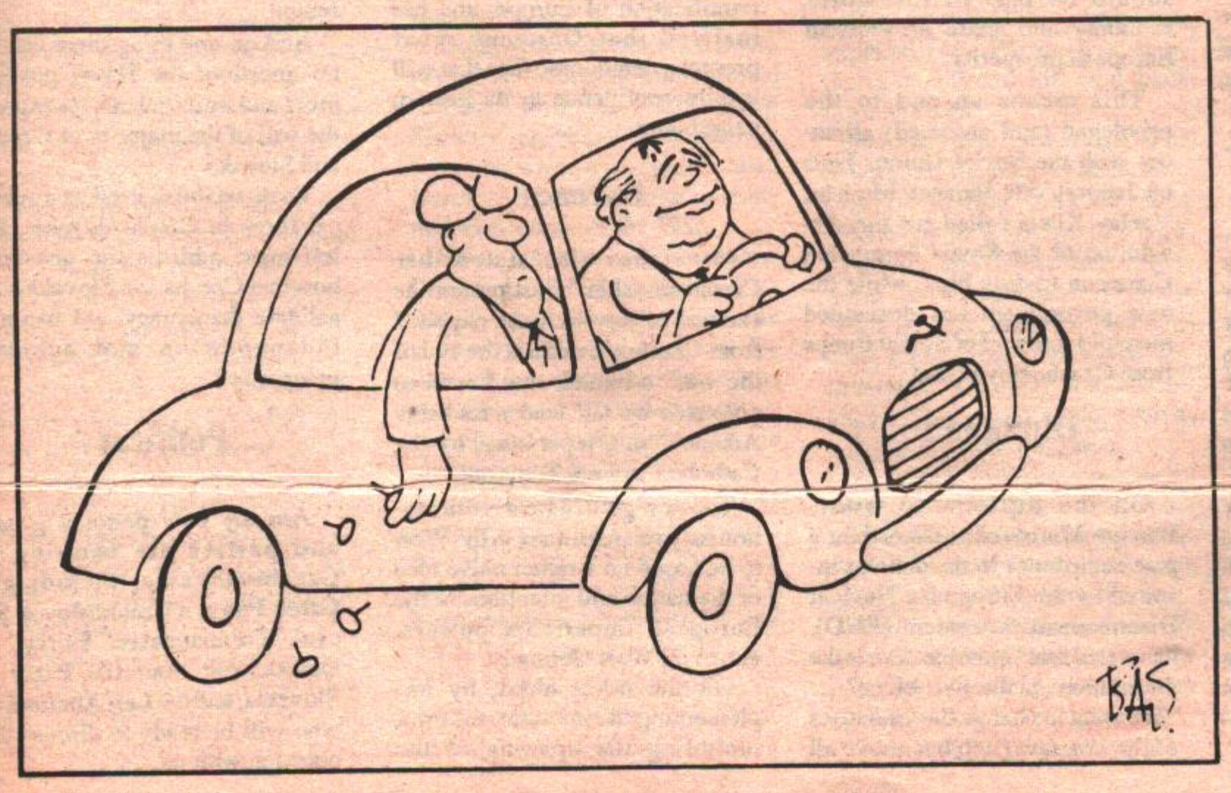
Conflict

Ironically, the Armenian-Azeri conflict could prove the opportunity that the Conservatives have been waiting for to oust Gorbachev and the reformers.

The only hope for the people of Armenia and Azerbaijan — and for the whole restructuring of the Soviet Union — is the fullest participation of the masses in politics independently of the bankrupt bureaucracy.

This wholesale democratisation of society, which would include the right of national self-determination, is the only way of resolving the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict.

Gorbachev's use of troops cannot provide either a short or long term solution.





It could be a long vigil