LABOUR
BRIEFING
No. 96 February 7th-21st 1990

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40p

Masses take to the streets in Moscow:

"ALL POWER TO THE PEOPLE!"



Sweeping away the Conservatives... who will fill the vacuum?

Hundreds of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets of Moscow on Sunday 4th February to demand further democratic reforms.

In one of the largest independent demonstrations the city has seen since the 1920s, workers cheered speakers who called for the resignation of the Politburo and the Central Committee, and chanted "All power to the people!"

Though Gorbachev will undoubtedly use the mobilisation to reinforce his case against the beleagured conservatives around Ligachev — now derided in Moscow News as a "fool" — he is playing with fire.

Placards and banners were to be seen on the demonstration calling for his resignation and asking "Which side are you on?"

After his use of troops to crush the mass movement for independence in Azerbaijan, Gorbachev is now attempting to walk a tightrope between the mass movements of the working class and the conservative wing of the bureaucracy. Whether he will be able to keep control must now be in question.



Soviet miners: will they take centre-stage?

Throughout the Soviet Union — from the Baltic states to Armenia and Azerbaijan — the working class is taking to the streets, placing ever more radical demands for the fulfilment of their national and democratic aspirations.

By PATRICK BAKER
Hackney South CLP

This movement clearly cannot be stopped by troops — to the contrary: any reversion to the methods of Stalinist repression will only further exacerbate tensions.

Can Gorbachev retain control at all? Socialists in the West should give him tactical support against the conservatives — the abolition of the "leading role of the Communist Party" is clearly an important democratic gain; the developing independent organisations of the working class, such as the Socialist Party, should use these reforms to win further support for a workers' alternative to either wing of the bureaucracy — liberal or conservative.

This requires a series of demands which include, but go beyond, Yeltsin's populist campaign against bureaucratic privilege or the formal legitimation of party pluralism, important though that is.

This must be centred around a system based on genuine soviet democracy — the control of the workplaces and society in general by a democratic system of workers' councils.

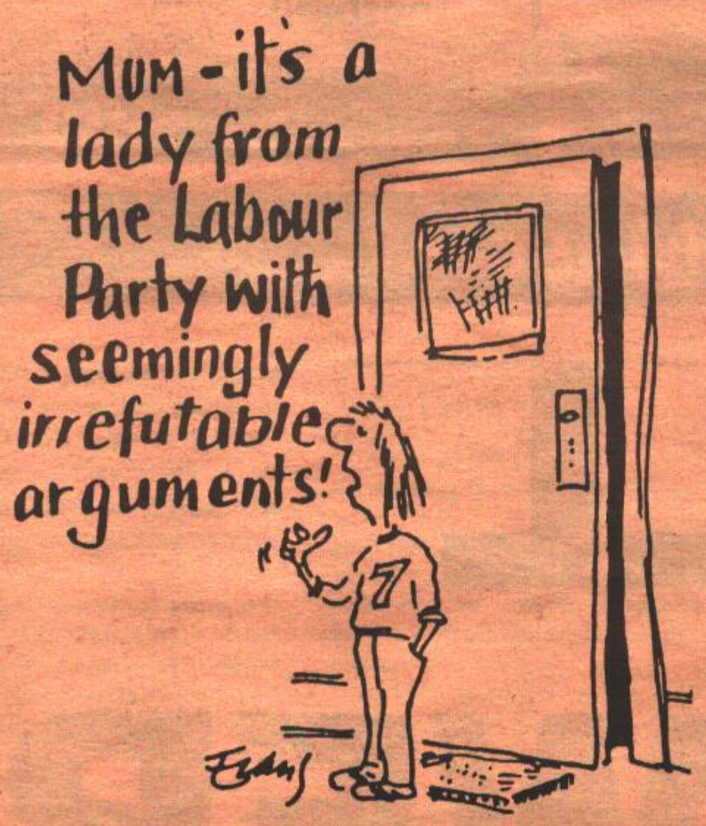
Though we cannot predict the outcome of events in the USSR, the mass mobilisation of the working class from one end of the Union to the other makes such a solution more of a possibility than ever before.

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, February 13 if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.



CLPD's positive proposals.

Dear *Briefing*

I was surprised that Bryn Grffiths considers CLPD/LLL's new pamphlet, *Has Conference A Future?* to lack new and positive proposals to improve Labour's policy-making.

On pp14-15 we put forward a democratic framework for a "Rolling Programme". This would continue from year to year subject to amendment. Most Conference resolutions could then be directed at it, rather than starting from scratch.

A Rolling Programme would have numerous advantages: it would put an end to the problem of whether NEC statements take precedence over resolutions; it would clarify what the Party stood for, thereby increasing accountability; and it would hopefully reduce the present unnecessary restatements of the Party's position on non-contentious matters. Above all it should finally allow affiliates to amend NEC statements.

But when this proposal is mooted in the NEC's consultative document, it states that a Rolling Programme approach should necessitate "*a two-yearly policy making conference*". There is no reason why this should be the case. This, together with a proposed "*sifting approach for amendments*" would successfully stifle minority views.

It is crucial therefore that party members fight for democratic conditions for the Rolling Programme, above all incorporation of the present right of CLPs and affiliated organisations to make two submissions directly onto the Conference Agenda, without restriction as to subject matter or prior "sifting" by other bodies.

We must also retain the two-stage process of policy making. Without this we will not be able to amend NEC proposals.

Unless we fight for these democratic safeguards, the Rolling Programme will end up a "Steamrollering Programme" for the party establishment.

Danny Nicol
Assistant Secretary CLPD

*"Has Conference a Future?" is available from CLPD/LLL, 10 Park Drive, London NW11 7SH price £2.50 including p&p. Bulk order: (3 or more) £2 —please add 10% for p&p.

Contact Briefing

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Please ring in offers and/or for more details.

Lambeth committed to legality

Dear *Briefing*

I was distressed by almost an entire page of articles on local government in your last issue. Not usually the case, I must say.

Peter Chowney's recipes need a fuller reply, but Greg Tucker's article cannot go through without a letter in response. He has a little go at "ultra-lefts", who according to him "believe the leadership is secretly already committed to cuts".

Who can he be talking about? He doesn't specify in his article, nor how these "secret beliefs" have been communicated to him. Can it be his fellow *Briefing* supporters in Lambeth? I really suspect it is!

Lambeth Council's leadership has made no firm commitment to anything other than a legal budget. Greg also voted for this at the last Council meeting.

They hope the County Hall crisis can be resolved without the Council going into a deficit and without making any cuts. I hope they are right.

However, the whole thing comes down, not to their political commitment to refusing cuts, but to how much money the Director of Finance says is in the coffers. If there is insufficient money then the group is overwhelmingly and publicly committed to legality, and will therefore make cuts.

What exact stance the leadership of the council will take should the balances be inadequate can only be guessed. It is more than obvious that they don't have the foggiest themselves! But will they resolutely resist cuts? I confess to a large degree of skepticism.

At the very best you couldn't say they were preparing the ground politically for any test, running round with the word "legality" tripping off their tongues a lot more rapidly than all these "ultra-left" words like "no cuts" we used to hear and love coming from them before they took the leadership of Lambeth!

Finally, it would be sad if it wasn't so tediously common to note Greg Tucker travelling that grey, barren road of attacking the "ultra-left". Too often this is a clear signal that what were once his closest comrades, are now his troubling conscience.

John Tuite
Norwood CLP

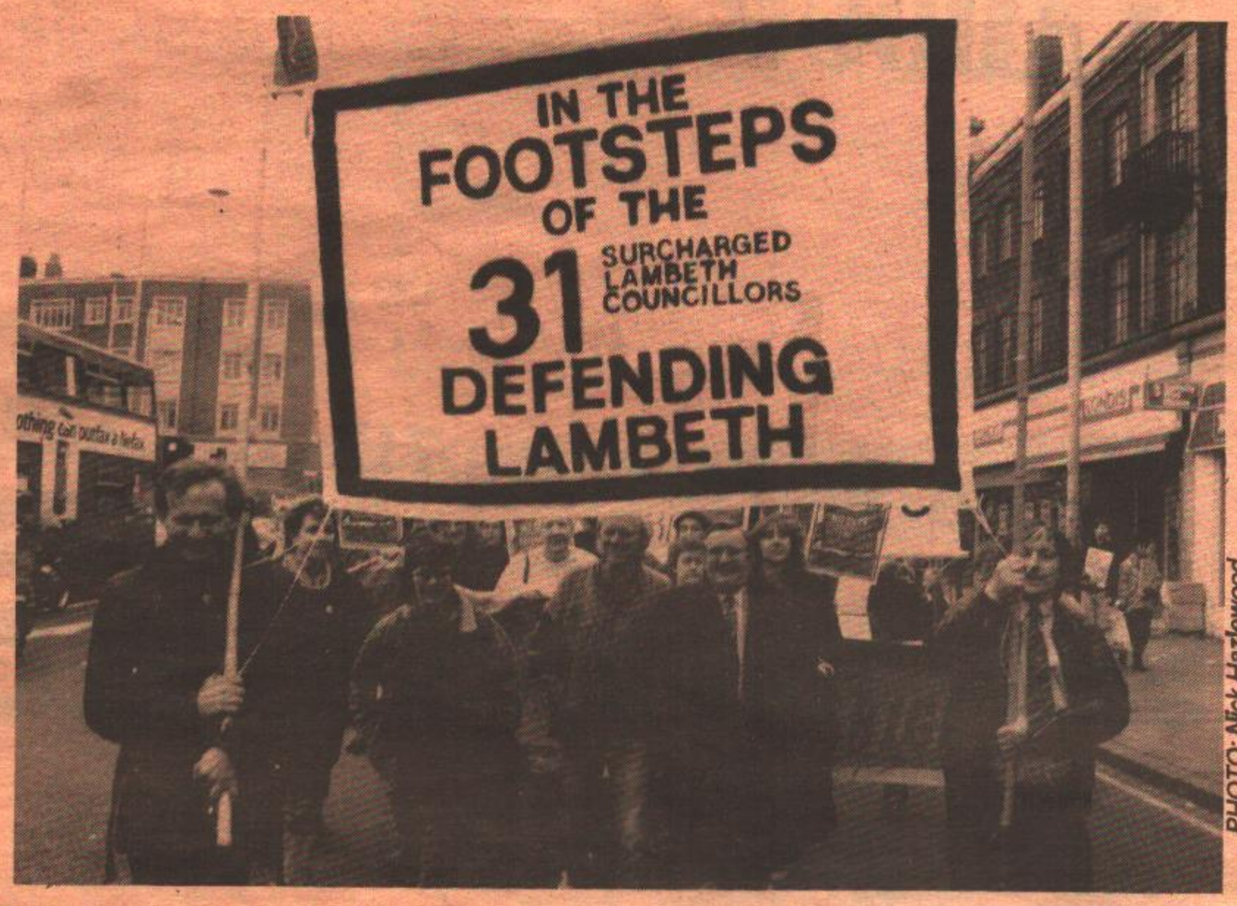


PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

Past scenes of organising anti-cuts opposition in Lambeth.

No capitulation in local government.

Dear *Briefing*

Peter Chowney's article on local government (*Briefing* No.95) made some useful points...

Two points do concern me, however. First, I think that it is dangerous to use hindsight to denigrate the record of the left in the 80s. The fact that the struggle against ratecapping was defeated does not — in itself — mean that this defeat was "almost inevitable".

Equally, it does not follow that since the left has not regained lost ground since 1986 this must be due to the policies being advocated. This faulty analysis tends to exaggerate the freedom of action of the left in the context of an unfavourable balance of forces (exemplified by the decline in industrial action in the mid and late 80s).

Secondly, to conclude that the enhanced autonomy of senior local government officers marks a qualitative shift in the usefulness of local government for the left is to share the error of those who Peter Chowney correctly criticises for forgetting that "they could *never* be more than custodians of a local executive of the central state".

The new powers of the Chief Executive and Director of Finance simply tighten the legal and financial constraints which have confronted socialists in local government since Poplar.

These constraints have always tended to ensure that principled socialist positions — of which the "simple refusal to make cuts" is only the most recent — could not be carried through in the long term.

But the "no cuts" position has only ceased to be workable for the left if our aim is the efficient administration of the local state within these tightening and hostile constraints.

If however, as Peter Chowney implies, the aim of the left should be to use positions in local government to advance particular struggles, then an overall "no cuts" position — with the opposition to unjustifiable rent increases and to Poll Tax implementation which this implies — is essential to provide political coherence and the basis for a unity of purpose to emerge from otherwise unconnected campaigns.

Standing by a principled position need not imply that left wingers should tempt right dominated leaderships to use the Labour Party's draconian disciplinary procedures — this is a tactical question. Nor does it follow that socialists should refuse to have anything to do with those who do not share this analysis...

As we "clear away the barbed wire and explore new territory" we need to make sure we have accurate maps — and that we have at least a general idea of the direction in which we should be heading.

If we can anticipate several more fairly bleak years for the left in the Labour Party — and we should not exaggerate our own ability to influence this — it is all the more important that necessary rethinking does not lead to an unconditional political capitulation to those in the Labour Party who have effectively abandoned a socialist perspective and those who are unable to contest the current hegemony.

Jon Rogers
East Lewisham CLP.

AA AGM round three

Dear *Briefing*

Colin Adkin's whingeings about inaccuracies in my report on the Anti Apartheid Movement AGM are pretty rich when you consider the smears and distortions in his letter (*Briefing* No.95).

Adkins' claims that none of Greenwich & Bexley AA's spokesperson at the AGM were Black or women. This is a lie.

Of nine delegates from the Greenwich area, four were women. Only one spoke from the rostrum — precisely because of the guillotining of one of our composites, the undemocratic nature of which I was complaining of in my original report!

I might add, at the previous AGM, Greenwich & Bexley's delegation included one of the few Black members to attend the conference.

Colin Adkins' arguments are reminiscent of the dismal quality of debate at the AGM. In arguing against one of our delegates who was a NUJ member, a supporter of the executive simply attacked journalists in general — because a few of them produce *The Sun*.

I suggest Colin Adkins rereads my original report. It is not compositing *per se* I object to, but *compulsory compositing* without *any* consultation with the original movers. Is there any other democratic or labour movement organisation that does this.

Mike Phipps
Greenwich & Bexley AA.

New man Terry Ashton strikes again

Dear *Briefing*

I am writing to you enclosing a letter that Walthamstow constituency party recently received from Terry Ashton.

"*...However there is more than one way to achieve this.* (the provision of childcare for GLLP training schools) *Methods might include: financial subsidy to the person concerned on notifying the office; and passing the 'caring role' to the other partner on such occasions.*

For we do not believe that (say) a mother is participating fully in such occasions — or having a proper break from caring responsibilities — if in fact, those responsibilities are but a child's shout away..."

As a single parent who has been an activist for some time I was astounded by the tone of the letter and the assumptions it makes.

I have been unable to go to this training school for two years now because I have nowhere to leave my children and no childcare is provided.

I would indeed like a "proper break" from childcare and I realise that it is extremely inefficient of me not to have a partner to "pass" childcare to.

Of course a properly run *creche* that the children enjoy would go a long way to remedying this. This is the case at the National Womens Conference but certainly not at GLLP AGM where I have been a delegate two years running.

As a matter of interest, I calculated the cost of using a child minder for a weekend conference....the cost would be £90.

Is Mr Ashton seriously suggesting that the Party can afford this amount for individual members?

Walthamstow has a policy of providing *creches* so that carers can take part in campaigning. Obviously we will not get this service at a Regional level.

I suppose we should all quietly stay at home and make the tea!

Jacqueline Sheehy
Walthamstow CLP

Editorial

BRIEFING
LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

The rise of the new right

Now that even stockbrokers' agencies are predicting a Labour victory at the next General Election, many Tories are looking for a more radical platform to recover popular support built on privatisation and union bashing.

"Radical" to the Tory Party means a turn further to the right. Kenneth Baker has appointed Julian Lewis, founder of the anti-CND *Coalition for Peace Through Security*, as deputy director of the Conservative Party's research department.

Norman Tebbit has returned to crude, populist racism with his opposition to even the minimal Hong Kong immigration proposed by the Government.

Latest figures show that deportation figures were three times higher in 1989 than in the previous year.

In the run-up to the election, the Tories' turn to the New Right — a mixture of Adam Smith Institute theory and knee-jerk nationalism, as seen over the European Community, as well as Hong Kong — will become more and more desperate as the economic crisis worsens.

The question is, will Labour respond with equally radical measures from the Left, or will simply chase after a middle ground increasingly moving rightwards.

Sinking the Tory flagship

The Tories are in deep trouble over their "flagship" Poll Tax, unable to stem even their own backbenchers revolting — let alone the one million non-payers in Scotland.

But as the Poll Tax grows ever more unpopular, even amongst Tory supporters the labour movement leadership continues to put its energies into attacking non-payers, rather than the government.

As local authorities in England and Wales prepare to set their budgets the TUC has refused to call a national demonstration in April against the Tax.

Instead, the Labour Party will be organising a lobby of *Tory* MPs, despite growing support for non-payment at the base of the labour movement.

We are witnessing a growing working class revolt against the Tax. Almost daily new anti-poll tax groups are launched, not just in the inner cities but in rural areas, and even in the Tory heartlands of the stockbroker belt.

Of course it is not stockbrokers, but workers, students, the unwaged, and pensioners who are the backbone of the anti-Poll Tax movement.

But for the movement to defeat the tax community resistance based on mass non-payment is not enough in and of itself. Those workers charged with implementing the tax need to take decisive action.

And workers across all industries and services will be faced with the threat of Poll Tax being deducted directly from their wages if they refuse to pay.

But without a lead from their unions many workers will lack the confidence to take action. And without union opposition to the tax people will lack the confidence to refuse to pay.

Now is the time to put maximum pressure on the TUC and Labour Party to call a mass demonstration against the Tax. It can be done — the ambulance dispute has proved that.

This is one working class revolt that can win.

Behind the headlines

South Africa

Racists play for time with Mandela release

De Klerk's February 2nd announcement of a limited package of reforms is a major shift of tactics by the apartheid government.

He will soon arrive in London for a pat on the back from the world's most ardent apologist for profits from apartheid — Margeret Thatcher — and she has booked a safari to the land of gold.

"Jaw not war" with black leaders is their buzzword. But what is their real game?

De Klerk's latest gamble is to un-ban the ANC, PAC, South African Communist Party (SACP), UDF, AZAPO and 55 other opposition organisations, and to release ANC leader Nelson Mandela and some other political prisoners.

This is the result of three years of talks between Nelson Mandela and Pretoria's Justice Minister, Kobie Coetzee, and the Constitutional Development Minister, Gerrit Viljoen (former Administrator General of Namibia).

For the last six months, top Afrikaaner academics and business leaders have acted as go-betweens for De Klerk and ANC leaders in Lusaka.

By BEN CAMPBELL

With messages now flowing thick and fast between Mandela's prison home, Lusaka and De Klerk's office, some leaks suggest that a five-to-ten year schedule for negotiations is envisaged.

Mandela would act as "facilitator" for the ANC and other black leaders, including chiefs and Bantustan appointees.

Some believe the ANC's main pre-conditions for talks — such as its own unbanning, a ceasefire, release of all political prisoners and detainees, ending of the emergency and withdrawal of troops from the townships — could now be met in stages.

The emerging "Mandela Plan" gathered momentum after Pretoria realised that its 1987-8 crackdown would not adequately stem the tide of black resistance.

With the flight of capital increasing and its productive relations completely outmoded, Pretoria's rigidly racist economy is heading for ruin.

Business leaders estimate that by the year 2000 they will have a shortage of 200,000 skilled workers, but a "surplus" of nine million unskilled and semi-skilled black workers.

They now want, rather have, to compete with Taiwan, South Korea and Brazil for markets.

In an effort to please the world's top bankers before last October's rescheduling of South Africa's foreign debt, Pretoria and its allies in Washington, London, and Bonn stitched up the security deal for Namibian independence with Angola and Cuba.

They had forgotten how Angolan and Mozambiquan independence in 1975-6 spurred the Soweto Revolt, and Zimbabwe's independence helped boost the 1984-5 uprisings.

Following those examples, the UN-supervised independence for Namibia escalated black populist hopes of a negotiated transfer of power, via universal franchise to a constituent assembly.

The ANC has now realised that it could not count indefinitely on Eastern Bloc resources, or on the Front Line States for rear bases.

Umkonte we Sizwe, the ANC's military wing, was forced to remove its bases from Angola to faraway Ethiopia and Uganda as the Cuban troops began their phased withdrawal.

Gorbachev's aides riled the ANC nationalists, telling them to seek a compromise with the whites, and slowly the SACP tried to shed its Stalinist image.

ANC leaders admit that armed struggle cannot now be intensified, and they know that talks with Pretoria won't stop the regime's forces shooting and detaining black militants.

De Klerk's move may raise expectations beyond the regime's capacity for control, resulting in mass demonstrations by black workers and youth, and defiance by white workers and the Afrikaaner petty bourgeoisie.

Most of the regime's police support the extreme right Conservative Party and the AWB, who think they could win a white election. The imperialist states may decide to intervene directly if the situation gets out of control.

Many black militants, including the opportunist PAC leaders but also union and socialist activists, are denouncing or warning of the danger of negotiations from a position of weakness.

Although there is no clear alternative to the ANC leadership, socialists in South Africa will use the new openings to mobilise forces against the social structures of apartheid, not just its worst laws.

They are saying that only a revolutionary overthrow of the apartheid state will protect the masses from the escalating violence which co-opted black leaders, such as Buthulezi, will increasingly deploy.

Socialists in Britain must build support for comrades in South Africa and for independent workers' action to expose Thatcher's manoeuvres.

The apartheid economy needs a constant flow of high tech and oil imports and skilled migrants. After its Angola debacle, De Klerk's army and airforce want to re-equip. Real sanctions must be won to stop this.

On February 24th, there is an A-AM trade union conference in London, and on March 25th A-AM is organising its annual march in London.

Events in South Afria make it all the more important for socialists in Britain to attend these events and speak out in solidarity with African workers.

Socialist Movement

Socialist Movement Diary

February-March
Student meetings: Manchester, Huddersfield, Nottingham, Loughborough, London, Leeds, Coventry and many other places! call Geoff 01 250 0955.

Feb 12-16.
Preliminary SOTSPROF Tour. See p.4 for details: ring Alan Thornett on 01 800 7460.

Feb 11
Women for Socialism Steering Committee, London.

Feb 19-24
Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution) Tour. Suzanna Dabrowska will visit Leeds, Manchester, Liverpool and London. Ring Will on 01 281 6225.

March
SOTSPROF Public meeting tour.

March 17
Socialist Movement Organising Committee Meeting Manchester.

March 24/25
Second Green/Socialist Conference London. Call Barney on 802 2391.

March 31
Women for Socialism Steering Committee, London.

April
Preliminary Co-ordination of the European Socialist Left in Brussels. For details ring Davey on 01 607 9729.

April
Socialist Movement Student Fringe at NUS Blackpool.

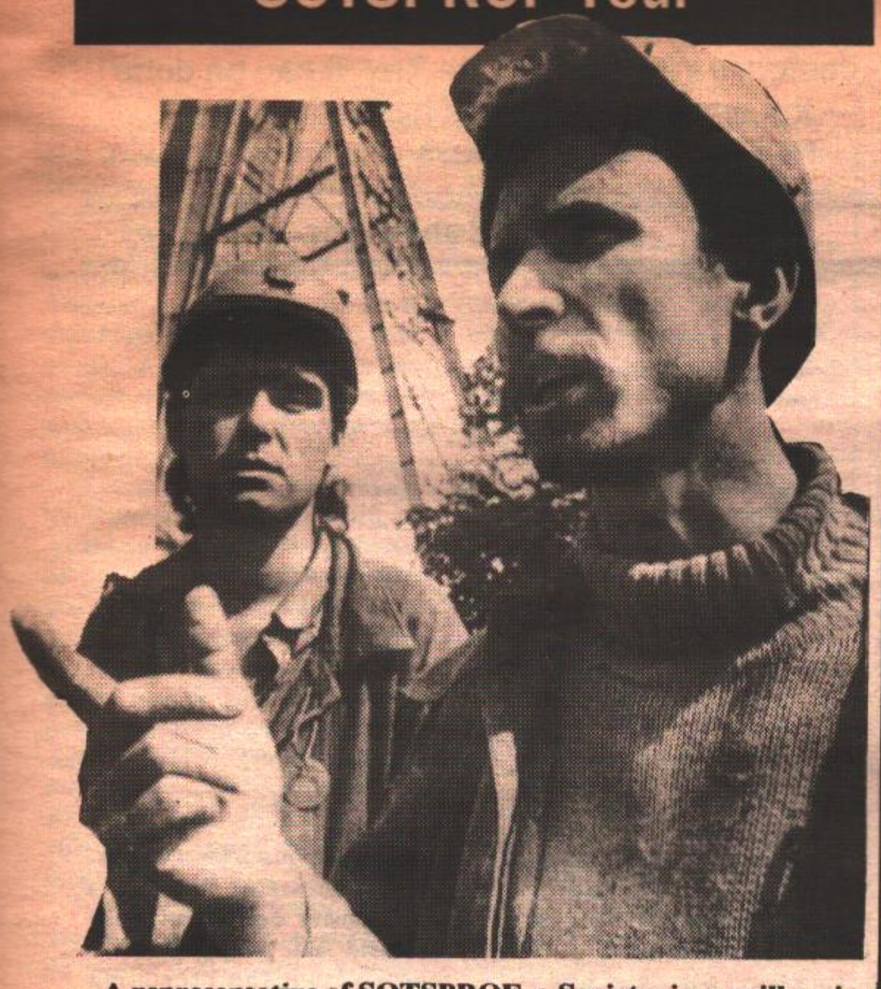
May 12
Campaign For Non-Alignment Conference Manchester. For details call Neil on 061 445 6681.

May91/20
Labour Party Socialists Conference Sheffield Polytechnic SU, Ruth 01 992 0945.

June
Women For Socialism annual conferences on the themes of anti-imperialism/anti-racism conference. For details call Ruth 01 992 0945.

Autumn
Democratic Rights Convention. Details: Ring Nadine on 01 254 1280.

SOTSPROF Tour



A representative of SOTSPROF, a Soviet miner, will arrive from the Soviet Union on February 12th for ten days.

This will not be a full public tour - which will be organised later, in March or April, when a full delegation from SOTSPROF will be in Britain for a longer period.

This will be an informal tour which will allow labour movement organisations, such as shop stewards committees and Trades Councils, to get to know SOTSPROF.

He will be in the following cities on these dates:
London: Monday February 12th
Manchester: Tuesday February 13th
Liverpool: Wednesday February 14th
Sheffield: Thursday February 15th
Birmingham: Friday February 16th

For further information contact:
John Rose on 01 538 5821 or Alan Thornett on 01 800 7460

Contributions to the SOTSPROF financial appeal should be sent to:

Alice Mahon MP, Treasurer, PO Box 2988, London WC1 N3XX. Cheques and p/o's payable to Alice Mahon, SOTSPROF.

Economic Notebook:

Why Kinnock has no options

Thatcher's strategy has been riddled with contradictions. Given Kinnock's obvious wish to give British capital a helping hand, Thatcher's demise might seem to open up a space for a full-blooded social democratic alternative — Labour to the rescue!

Yet Labour's economic policy is now so vague that it is impossible to know what it really amounts to. In spite of Thatcher's crisis, and the economic crisis, the policy is even weaker than Harold Wilson's 'modernising' strategy in 1964.

From one point of view, social democratic policies look very plausible in Britain today. The contradictions of Thatcherism have been very much about the government's neglect of the inevitably *social* nature of capitalist production.

It is these social aspects which social democracy has traditionally latched onto. A bold social democratic programme for Britain would propose strong state direction and support for restructuring of sectors, as in Japan, rather than the current anarchy of individual firm decisions. It would support firm's long term investments in fixed capital and research and development.

The state would play a larger regulating role, and supply more finance for infrastructure and training that British capital has underinvested in. It would encourage the active collaboration of workers with employers, as in West Germany, rather than simple managerial dictatorship.

None of these policies is particularly wild. They are widely practised in other advanced capitalist countries. Yet the policy Kinnock puts forward is a very pale version.

Jamie Gough
Holborn and St Pancras CLP

A key problem for bold social democracy is that British capital is habitually free-wheeling and international. It has not *ignored* the domestic economy — 50% of British assets are still in Britain. But it does not want to be *pinned down* to particular industries or places.

In Kinnock's wilder dreams, he would like to say to British capital: "Look, we can collaborate to make the domestic British economy much more profitable. This is in your interest because you can't exist without a base — a collapsing domestic economy means a collapsing pound and sterling assets.

"And anyway, there are potentially good investment prospects here on your door step. But to realise them we need strong social measures — look at West Germany, France, and Japan."

British capital has heard this one before. People have been making the proposition for the last hundred years.

One reason it has not responded is that it needs a leap of faith. A big wrench from an international to a domestic stance is enormously risky.

The risks are particularly great at the moment. In times of chronic economic crisis, capital becomes more cautious.

A switch to a domestic focus also goes against the grain of world capital at the moment, which is towards *increased* internationalisation.

1992 — which Kinnock does not oppose — will increase international trade and mobility of labour. If Britain joins the EMS — which Kinnock supports, and even more if the pound is replaced by a Eurocurrency, the British government will lose important levers by which it could support domestic "modernisation".

This is part of the reason that Kinnock is more feeble than Wilson. The relentless international drive of *world* capital has destroyed many "Keynesian" instruments for British "modernisation".



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

A worried Kinnock.

1990 is therefore a particularly bad moment to change British capital's habits of a lifetime.

The economic crisis creates problems not only for an overall modernisation programme but also for particular parts of it. A wider role for the state is needed in infrastucture and training.

But capital does not want to see its profits eroded by greater taxation. And privatisation of infrastructures has provided a nice bolt hole for idle capital.

Everybody wants more training. But no-one knows how it should be organised, what type of training is needed, what level of skills, how specific or general. World restructuring is so chaotic at the moment that it's impossible to read the runes on this.

Some British firms benefit from "participatory" relations with their workforce. But Kinnock is afraid to propose any strong and *general* system of "industrial democracy". Many British firms depend on unfettered dictatorship.

Managements which have benefited from intensifying work rates under Thatcher are reluctant to jeopodise them, all the more so because of the great uncertainties over current internationally successful industrial strategies.

These contradictions are why Kinnock's "productivist" programme is so feeble. And they also show that, *to the extent that* Kinnock implemented a modernisation programme it would run into big difficulties.

The contradictions have a lot to do with the particular structure of British capital. But they are embedded in the current state of the *international* capitalist economy — stagnation and crisis and further internationalisation.

The tensions within British capital, which neither Thatcher nor Kinnock have an answer to, are rooted in the contradictions of capital itself.



PHOTO: Jim Thain and Martine Stead

"world capital at the moment [tends to] increased internationalisation": striking Ford workers take up the point.

Football

Stand up for your right to stand up

What do Eric Heffer, Colin Moynihan, Roy Hattersley and Margaret Thatcher all have in common? They all support the call for legislation banning standing areas at Football League grounds.

If they have their way half a million people will find that their regular Saturday afternoon leisure pursuit will soon be illegal.

Lord Justice Taylors report on the Hillsborough disaster has much to commend it.

His criticism of the football authorities who have allowed football grounds to degenerate into unsafe slums, and of the police who appeared incapable of distinguishing a public order problem from a serious emergency where people were dying, struck a chord with thousands of supporters.

By Craig Brewin
Football Supporters Association
(Personal Capacity)

But why can we not stand up?

There seem to be two arguments put forward. Firstly, there will be less violence within grounds if everyone is sitting down.

Secondly, grounds will be safer places to be with less possibility of crushing. Both of these assertions are untrue.

Most of the arguments about violence inside grounds were well rehearsed during the anti-ID card campaign. It is not a major problem.





Above: the view of the future?
Left: some dangers on the terraces avoid government clampdowns. Where do the threats of violence really come from?

The main hooligan problems take place outside the ground and sitting people down when inside will not change this.

But is it safer? The assumption of those people who argue for banning standing is that terracing can never be safe.

But there are circumstances where sitting at a football match can be more dangerous than standing, both in terms of safety from risk of accident and safety from hooliganism.

If a person is sitting down they have restrictions placed on their movement. Evacuating a stand in the event of an emergency, or even running away from an outbreak of violence is very difficult in an all seated area. It is also far more difficult to segregate rival supporters in seated areas.

If terrace capacities are set at a reasonable level, and if entry to terrace areas is properly controlled and monitored, then there is no reason why it should be unsafe.

Even at Hillsborough the crush occurred due to crowds that built up outside the ground. Had this not occurred then the deaths would not have happened, and even if the turnstiles had led to a seating area they might still have,

In any case, evidence suggests that just because the authorities have put seats on the terraces it does not mean that the fans will sit in them.

The majority of supporters choose to stand, even if there is little price differential between standing and sitting, and even though the toilet and catering facilities are often worse.

Finally, to reduce stadium capacities by half at a time when crowds are increasing is shortsighted.

It's all right calling for more families to attend matches, but if a ground like Highbury is only going to hold 27,000, how are they all going to get in?

Ambulance Dispute Benefit
Saturday 17th February
9.30pm-2.00am
Social Club, Lambeth Town Hall
Acre Lane, SW2
"Those Rhumba Nites"
Latin/African/Jazz
Entrance £3.00/£2.00

FIGHTING FOR CHOICE
A benefit for the National Abortion Campaign
HACKNEY EMPIRE
SUNDAY
25TH FEB
Doors open 7.30 for 8.00 performance
Ticket £8/£6 concs
(Price includes £3 donation)
Box Office Telephone: 01-985 2424
A *City Limits* Audience with
Ben Elton, Linda Smith, Donna McPhail, Jenny Eclair, Carol Grimes and more...

Embryo Bill.

Debate hots up!

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill will be discussed in Committee in the House of Lords on the 6th, 8th and 13th February. Soon after that it will move into the House of Commons.

Various amendments to the Bill have been tabled already and will, therefore, be debated in the next few weeks.

Many of these deal with trivial points, but three sets of amendments raise more important concerns.

Lady Saltoun of Abernethy proposes to make providing infertility treatment or donor insemination to unmarried women a criminal offence, while such provision to married couples is to be completely unregulated.

She is also, along with Lord Teviot, seeking to force any clinic which applies for a licence under the Bill to reveal detailed information about their service provision prior to the law changing and to publish retrospectively the names of any child by DI and their biological parents!

In addition, this dynamic duo wants to have the fact that a child was produced as a result of DI recorded on her/his birth certificate.

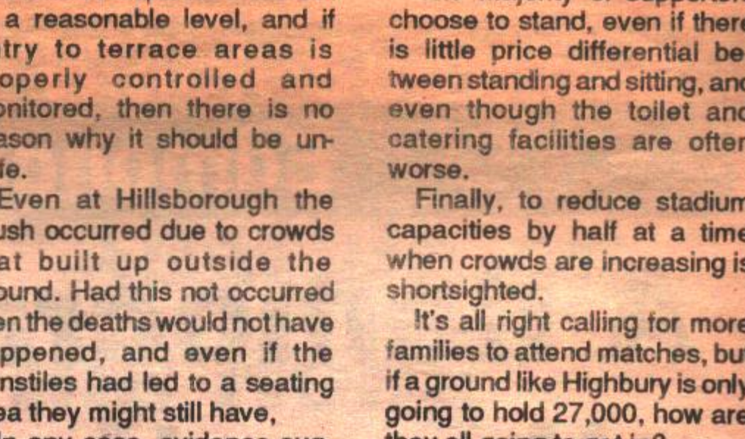
All of these measures seek to make more explicit the largely hidden agenda of social control contained in the Bill, putting clearly discriminatory flesh on the bones of state regulation established in the text of the proposed legislation.

No amendments on abortion have been tabled so far. Parliamentary protocol prevents amendments being put on an issue which is already the subject of a Bill.

By Rebecca Fleming
Women for Socialism

So the discussion on time limits on abortion will happen around the Houghton Bill in the House of Lords.

This does not mean that the question should be ignored. The anti-abortionists are already up and running.



Their arguments must be confronted head on, and that means going further than simply demanding that amendments to reduce time limits on abortion are not put to the Embryo Bill.

A woman's right to choose must be defended against any attacks on our abortion rights — whether they are contained in the Embryo Bill, the Houghton Bill, or anywhere else!

Campaigning activity must be stepped up to prevent the Lords from passing these amendments and to begin to shift the political ground in favour of the pro-choice forces.

It is not just the concrete effects of the legislative proposals that is at stake, but also the wider ideological impact of reinforcing in law the superiority of the traditional nuclear family.

Labour Party

Wirral witch-hunt

Birkenhead selection should stand

Frank Field's last ditch attempt to hang onto his job will wreck the Party's electoral chances.

The 20 to 3 vote at January's NEC supporting Field's demands for an inquiry extending beyond the Birkenhead selection to Wallasey CLP, Wirral DLP, and the Labour Group suggests that they may be preparing to launch an unprecedented witch-hunt against Wirral socialists.

When first selected in 1979, Frank Field was seen as radical. His activity in the Child Poverty Action Group promised to end representation by right wingers.

But Field rapidly moved to the right, showing contempt for his local Party, national policies and the struggles of Birkenhead's workers. By 1984 he was publicly attacking the fight of Liverpool's City Councillors.

In the 1985 round of reselections there was significant opposition to Field but the left could not agree on a candidate and he retained the loyalty of most of the soft left to defeat *Militant* supporter Kathy Wilson (also a candidate in 1989).

It was then that Field first made threats to force a by-election if he lost and to expose "Militant infiltration" of the CLP.

Between 1985 and 1989 Field's politics became increasingly bizarre. He advocated a "rainbow alliance" with the SDP and he opposed the sit-in and strike at Camel Lairds shipyard, preferring to work closely with Wirral's Tory MPs.

By Stuart Marshall-Clarke
Wirral Councillor

In the 1986 local elections he called on voters in Tranmere not to support Labour candidate Geoff Barker, thereby playing to a Tory smear campaign.

However, Labour made two gains (the first for years) and the Tories lost control of the council after 10 years. More gains in 1987 and 1988 enabled Labour to steer two budgets through the hung council, creating 2000 jobs with rate rises in line with inflation.

Field stood aloof, having no contact with the Group. The highlight of the 1987 election campaign was the assistance he gave to Wallasey's Tory MP, Lynda Chalker, by attacking Labour's candidate, Lol Duffy.

Duffy lost by only 279 votes and many in the Party blamed Field. The Tories duly rewarded Field by allowing him to take the Chair of the Common's Select Committee on Health and Social Security.

His antics increasingly alienated the soft left and by late 1988 Field could see the writing on the wall. In a desperate attempt to split the Labour Group, one of his prominent supporters, Alec Dunn, who had left the council in 1986, was brought back into the Group.

When this proved impossible he courted expulsion, eventually taking two other right wingers with him to form an "Independent Labour Group".

Supported by Tories and Liberals, these renegades have used the Council as a platform to denounce the local Party and the Group. They, with a few other political bankrupts, have used gossip and innuendo to produce the allegations in the Field dossier.

Their actions served only to lose Field yet more support. Even those in the centre of the Party and the unions were outraged. They opposed this MP, who supported anti-trade union laws, the opting out of schools and hospitals, who was opposed to the rights of single mothers and called for the school leaving age to be dropped to 14.

This is why Paul Davies' selection challenge gained support. Field resorted to his usual tactics. Davies was smeared in the local and national press and Field threatened to call a by-election.

Unlike 1985, this time it failed. Field was defeated when, despite a majority of individual votes, the trade unions decisively rejected him.

The moment the result was announced, Field cried foul. He threatened to force a by-election, claiming the system was unfair because the unions had too big a say (although the union vote was cut from 50% to 40% between 1985 and 1989) and that he was the victim of a *Militant* plot.

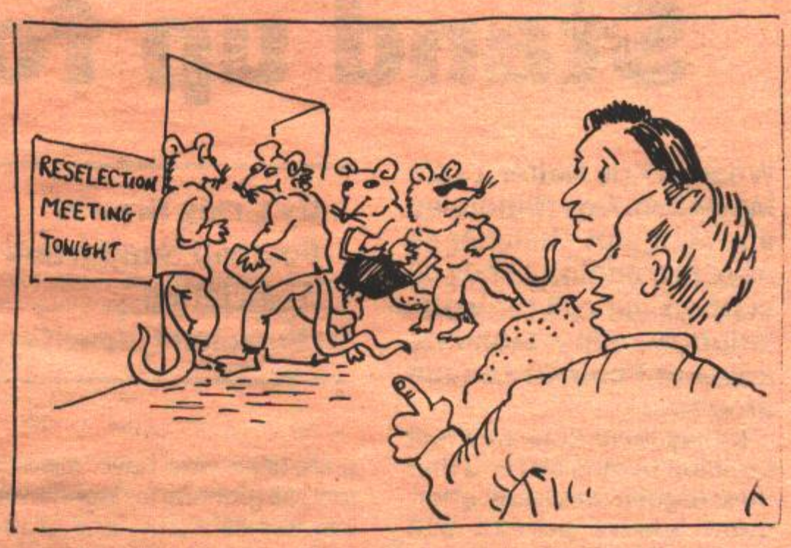
Now, in a final effort to save his job, Field has presented his "evidence" to the NEC. His dossier represents nothing more than the splenetic outpourings of disgruntled has-beens with personal axes to ground.

Field and his acolytes want the document used to witch-hunt socialists in the local Parties. But the NEC should pause to consider the consequences. Field was not deposed by some tiny conspiratorial minority. He was kicked out because he had alienated large sections of the movement.

If the NEC allows a witch-hunt the Wirral Party will be smashed and our electoral prospects with it.

That, of course, is precisely Field's aim. Paul Davies was democratically selected under Kinnock's own rules. Local regional organiser, Peter Kilfoyle, has staked his job on the propriety of the process.

The selection should be upheld and Field's attacks seen for what they are — the desperate lungings of a drowning man.



"I see Frank's mobilised his supporters for this one..."

Edmonds' Proposals

A democratic alternative

A radical transformation of the Labour Party is the real aim behind the Edmonds' Proposals and the NEC consultation paper on "The Future of Conference", as Bryn Griffiths illustrates (*Briefing* No.95).

By forcing through a series of constitutional measures, the proposals are designed to further centralise decision-making power in the hands of the leadership.

By Richard Heffernan
Hornsey & Wood Green CLP

The NEC is determined to abolish the role of Conference as a policy forming body and this leadership, not content with its present vast array of powers, is seeking to institute a system that can only be described as "one member, no vote".

The rights of the membership will be increasingly marginalised and the CLPs and affiliated organisations will be effectively disenfranchised.

Clearly, that the NEC proposals should be raised at this time in the wake of the far reaching Policy Review demonstrates that the leadership is determined to control the political direction of the Party. To achieve this it will shut down Party democracy and gag its critics.

Despite the scale of these proposals, the left should take this opportunity to re-open the debate on the future structure of the Party.

The experience of the 1979-81 period proved that constitutional questions concerning the nature of the authority and relations of power within an organisation have a direct bearing on the future of any political party.

While the existing constitutional structures of the Labour Party remain infinitely preferable to those proposed by the leadership and should be defended as such, they remain at best imperfect, and for the most part inadequate, for the tasks which face Labour in the coming period.

The left cannot afford a merely reactive response to Edmonds and the NEC. In addition to our opposition we must map out alternative proposals to establish truly democratic Party structures.

Fully

The Party must be fully democratised to ensure that the membership — both individual and affiliated — is empowered to determine Labour's political direction.

Decision making must rest with the rank and file and accordingly Annual Conference must be the Party's sovereign body whose decisions are binding upon all Labour representatives, including the PLP, who cannot have any right of veto.

Conference

The role of Conference as the sovereign power within the Party must be defended and the power of the Party membership greatly extended. The left must counter the Edmonds' proposals with a renewed challenge against the assumed autonomy of the Parliamentary leadership and demand that it is the Party which is to control its elected representatives and not the other way round.

This means defending mandatory reselection and establishing the concept of MP's accountability to their CLP. The leadership's power of patronage must be abolished and the Party given the right at Conference to elect the Party leadership and the Shadow Cabinet or the Cabinet and to allocate Parliamentary responsibilities.

In addition, the entire apparatus of the Party must be reformed and, when necessary, democratised:

•power must be devolved to Regional Parties;

•the Scottish and Welsh Parties should have the right to operate autonomously and elect their own leadership or Parliamentary spokespersons;

•full-timers should be elected and thus held accountable;

•the NEC must be fully accountable to the Party and no longer able to overturn the previously agreed policy, as it did over the Policy Review.

We need to establish a fairer relationship between the individual and affiliated membership through a reduction in the bloc vote — for example 60% affiliated organisations and 40% CLPS.

Both CLPs and trade unions should have a much greater opportunity to decide policy.

Members must have the right to campaign inside and outside the Party for policies in which they believe and must be allowed to express their views without fear of investigation or expulsion.

We must defend the trade union link and seek, not only to maintain the existing relationship, but to transform the active Party/Union relationship.

We need to create links existing not merely within the bureaucracy but that represent the real and active involvement of rank and file trade unionists at every level.

We must, in short, in our response to Edmonds raise the demand for a fully democratic Party. One which is controlled by its membership and not one that is run by its Parliamentary representatives.

Bristol

Bureaucracy in command

Over the last two years the bureaucracy has taken hold of the Bristol Labour Party.

The left has lost control of the District Labour Party after ten years.

By Will Brown
Bristol South CLP

The minority of left Councillors on the City Council have been forced off committees and humiliated.

Attendance at and activity by left branches is at an all time low.

Local bureaucrats have now sufficient control to select "acceptable" candidates in all parliamentary seats, including the remains of Tony Benn's old constituency which has been controlled by the left for decades.

This victory has been accomplished by an alliance of bureaucratic forces that has brought together soft left Councillors, Communists controlling the Trades Council and their old allies in the Labour Party, a network of dangerous union full-timers, and of course the rump of the "old right".

This coalition has used the usual combination of leaks to the press smearing left wingers, bureaucratic manoeuvre, and the energetic activity of the LCC.

The Thatcher government has energetically and shrewdly propelled these developments during the last ten years.

The Tories identified the swathes of middle layer bureaucrats in the labour movement as the correct target for pressure — a group of 10,000 local Councillors and 2,000 union officials.

The Councillors have a decisive weight in the Party. There are a couple in every ward in every Labour area and most branches are effectively led by and organised around them.

Union officials have key role in industrial disputes. They cannot create strikes that don't exist, but they can use their resources and authority to build action or to control and dissipate it.

The Tories' law counterposed the self-interest of these two key groups to the interests of the rank and file.

Union officials and Councillors joined forces to attack those "irresponsible elements bent on self-destruction for the Party" — the left.

The shift to the right in the movement and the victory of the bureaucrats is not just Kinnock's triumph.

It is an object lesson in shrewd ruling class pressure on the political organisations of the working class.

Education policy

Develop a socialist alternative

The government's radical changes to education are being felt in every sphere of education.

The left's response has been predictable: protect and defend the existing system against socially regressive reform.

By Mark Cole
Ravensbourne CLP

In defending the post-1945 social welfare gains the left, especially the Labour Left, seems to accept tacitly many of its assumptions and so loses sight of the need to develop socialist alternatives.

Specifically, whilst we protest about the funding, the structures and the pay and conditions in state education, we rarely look to discuss the issues of "content, context and control".

We need to bear in mind that education has certain covert functions in an advanced capitalist country. It fulfils the economic role of grading potential workers and being part of an allocative system of labour.

Education serves to determine the eventual position of a young person within the economy. Furthermore, the class character of the school system means that middle-class children are better equipped, in terms of cultural capital, to "do well" in that system.

Also, it serves a social control function. Compulsory attendance at school, coupled with an overbearingly disciplined and unifom structure to the school or college day, serves to "imprison" young people and and prevents them from expressing their legitimate discontent.

Finally, the education system is central to ruling class hegemony. Notions of authority and hierarchy are introduced from primary school upwards, and individualism is fostered in the classroom (through the concentration on individual pieces of work) and on the sports field (where, despite paying lip-service to "teamwork", schools ensure that competition is the order of the day).

The rise of mass formal education in Britain corresponds with two social trends: the broadening of the franchise and the development of a factory method of manufacture.

There was nothing philanthropic in the provision of mass elementary schooling by the English ruling class. It had more to do with the need for a *literate* working class, suited to the needs of industry and incorporated into the bourgeois political structure.

Equally, the tri-partism of the post-1945 educational system was a transparent attempt to mould the workforce to the needs of British capitalism.

Coupled with the infamously inacurate and socially divisive 11-plus examination, tri-partism effectively allocated a future role in the economy for every child leaving primary school: grammar schools provided a conduit into higher education whilst the Techs. and Secondary Moderns supplied the skilled, semi-skilled and unskilled labour.

That the Labour Government of '45 not only introduced this system, but also enthused over its efficacy is a stunning indictment of Labourism and exposes even its limited reformist pretensions.

Wilsonism's meritocracy often confused at the time with socialism used education as an overt method of social engineering through comprehensivisation. It was a response to the erosion of traditional skills by an expanding economy and a definite process of deskilling.

The comprehensives' break with formal tri-partism actually only served to mask the same selection process that continued through streaming. It demonstrates the structural limitations experienced by reformism.

Furthermore, as unemployment (especially youth unemployment) began to grow in the mid-sixties, the number of educational qualifications also increased: qualifications like the CSE (introduced in 1965) became the chief means by which young workers were streamed into occupational position.

It was youth unemployment and their consequent political disaffection that led James Callaghan to launch the "Great Debate" on education in 1976.

Responding to criticism from the right and to the bosses demands for a more compliant and adaptable young workforce, Callaghan effectively stole the clothes of the reactionary critics of comprehensive education by explicitly insisting that education was not satisfying the new needs of a changing British economy.

Callaghan accepted that education is actually little more than vocational preparation in advanced capitalist societies. The "New Vocationalism" (NV) that Callaghan pre-figured is today widespread throughout education.

NV has successfully fragmented the education system into a "neo-tripartism". Within schools and colleges some pupils and students are streamed into the traditional academic channel of "A" Levels; others are beginning to be accommodated in an expanding Training and Vocational Education Initiative or in the governments City Technology Colleges; while for the bulk of young people the core curriculum of school is seen to lead directly into the compulsory YTS or some other equally vocational course (for example, the Certificate in Pre-Vocational Education).

NV reflects the decline of the British economy. It is a recognition of structural youth unemployment and that, therefore, the state must assume the responsibility for work socialisation of young workers through its education system.

NV makes the economic, control and hegemonic functions of education become crystal clear. It serves to construct an infinitely adaptable workforce, with its concentration on so-called "transferable skills" and fragmented "competence objectives".

Furthermore, many employers use schemes such as YTS to "screen" young workers and it has been shown that trainees are actually used as cheap substitutes for fully employed young workers.

The scheme, used to massage the jobless statistics has been crucial in terms of controlling youth discontent. And the compulsory YTS leaves radical teachers questioning their role now that many Further Education Colleges act as little more than "daytime detention centres".

Appearance

Additionally, the appearance of "Social and Life Skills" (SLS) on all the NV curricula gives cause for great concern. SLS teaches the young worker the virtues of passivity and seeks to transfer responsibility for joblessness away from the economy and onto the unemployed individual.

In many cases, SLS resources seek to deny the authenticity of the working class experience by presenting middle-class language, dress and conduct codes as the "correct" ones.



SLS does not encourage a critical faculty amongst trainees/students and the government has censored all political content: unemployment becomes something to understand and accept but not to challenge.

From this analysis it is clear that schools and colleges are, in effect, microcosms of the broader, class-structured society. The logical conclusion is that reform of education, in whatever way will not address those more fundamental issues.

Education is intrinsically linked to the capitalist mode of production and without fundamental change in the latter little can be genuinely achieved.

So the key question for socialist teachers is whether education can be viewed as a terrain of class struggle.

The issue is whether the use of so-called alternative teaching methods, within the constraints of the education system can prefigure socialist education in a post-revolutionary society and whether teachers can make a serious contribution to the construction of working class consciousness.

The prevalent classroom methods are not neutral: they are steeped in particular attitudes and ideas. Consequently, the job of socialist teachers is to think about alternative types and methods of education and to decide whether they are genuinely progressive and liberating and whether they can truly contribute to socialist political education.

We need to respond to the government's critical analysis and programme of reform not simply in terms of defending the existing education: we do this, but also develop and popularise our own critique and think seriously about education under socialism.

Despite the appaling character of the government's reforms, we need to seize the opportunity that this attack provides for the left to re-evaluate its own ideas and attitudes towards the whole issue of education.

Labour Party Socialists

Labour Party Socialists will be holding its first conference on the weekend of 19/20 May in Sheffield.

***Labour Briefing* supporters should be raising the conference in their local *Briefing* groups, left caucuses and Campaign Groups to gain support for this initiative.**

Supporters should also gain sponsors for the statement published in the last issue of *Labour Briefing* (No.95) from MPs, Councillors, Labour Party wards, CLPs and sections, and affiliated trade unions.

The next Labour Party Socialists steering committee will be in Sheffield on Saturday February 10. Phone Bryn Griffiths on 01-801 6041 for details.

Write to Labour Party Socialists at PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire for fuller details of the conference and copies of the Labour Party Socialists statement.

Labour Party Socialists

Conference

Saturday 19 May — Sunday 20 May 1990

Sheffield Polytechnic

Black Sections

"Abstain on the Hong Kong debate"

The Labour Party Black Sections deplores the racist and xenophobic hysteria surrounding the debate on Hong Kong residents holding British passports.

By Labour Party
Black Sections

These passports give them a principle right of abode in the UK.

This debate will be further muddled by MPs who will vote against the Tory "bank balance" immigration policy. These include Norman Tebbit and some members of the opposition parties, who might be voting against for other reasons.

Abstain

The Labour Party Black Sections therefore calls on all MPs to abstain from the vote on the Hong Kong debate.

Immigration laws have been used by successive governments, Labour and Tory, to bolster their popularity within the white communities.

Every immigration law passed in the last forty years has been aimed at restricting the numbers of African, Asian and Caribbean people in this country.

Councillor Kanta Patel, the Black Section Immigration Affairs Co-ordinator said: "The economic system of capitalism is based on the labour of people, which can be exploited by and for the controllers of the means of production.

"As such immigration laws are a means to control the labour market, just as the Tory government's policy of high unemployment is a means of controlling the cost of labour by dampening down the wage demands."

The British Nationality Act recognised this when it established a common citizenship called "Citizen of UK and Colonies". Each person had the freedom to enter and settle when capital needed labour for some of the undesired dirty jobs.

But the introduction of the "1981 British Nationality Act" removed that right, and created high unemployment as a domestic "spare labour pool".

Cllr. Patel concluded "Peoples right of abode should not have anything to do with their bank balance".

Eastern Europe

What kind of Europe

The challenge for socialism

The collapse of stalinist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe marks the end of an era. Any pretence that these regimes had anything to do with socialism has been swept aside.

Once it became clear that the Soviet Union was not prepared to uphold these regimes by force, then the popular hatred which has existed for decades gave rise to an unstoppable movement for change.

By GUS FAGAN

The view of socialists who regarded these communist regimes as reactionary and corrupt dictatorships has been historically vindicated.

But were these popular victories over Stalinism also victories for socialism? Not if by this we mean that the revolutions were carried out in the name of socialism, or for "genuine socialism".

Undoubtedly, there are many workers, intellectuals and ordinary members of the discredited communist parties who support such a goal. There are probably quite a few in East Germnay, fewer in Romania. But, throughout Eastern Europe, they are a minority.

Revolutions

What united these revolutions was the goal of political democracy; democratic freedoms of speech, assembly, press, religion, free elections, a multi-party system and parliamentary institutions.

This is why socialists support these revolutions; without the fullest democracy, any talk of constructing socialism is meaningless.

These new freedoms, won by the East European workers, combined with the end of the political "camps" of East and West, means that the socialist projects in Europe has to be fought for on a new and, in the long run, more promising terrain.

There is a lot of talk about the return to capitalism in Eastern Europe. A kind of right-wing triumphalism exists with the Adam Smith Institute lecturing to the Poles and Douglas Hurd offering money for capitalist management training.

Mistaking words for deeds, many on the left think the battle is already lost.

But even the liberal economist, Kenneth Galbraith, has described this as "simplistic ideology". In truth, the battle has only begun.

The collapse of the command economy was inevitable. In 1936 Leon Trotsky pointed out that, although command planning can build gigantic factories, "the further you go, the more the economy runs into the problem of quality, which slips out of the hands of the bureaucracy like a shadow.

"Under a nationalised economy, quality demands a democracy of producers and consumers, freedom of criticism and initiative — conditions incompatible with a totalitarian regime..."

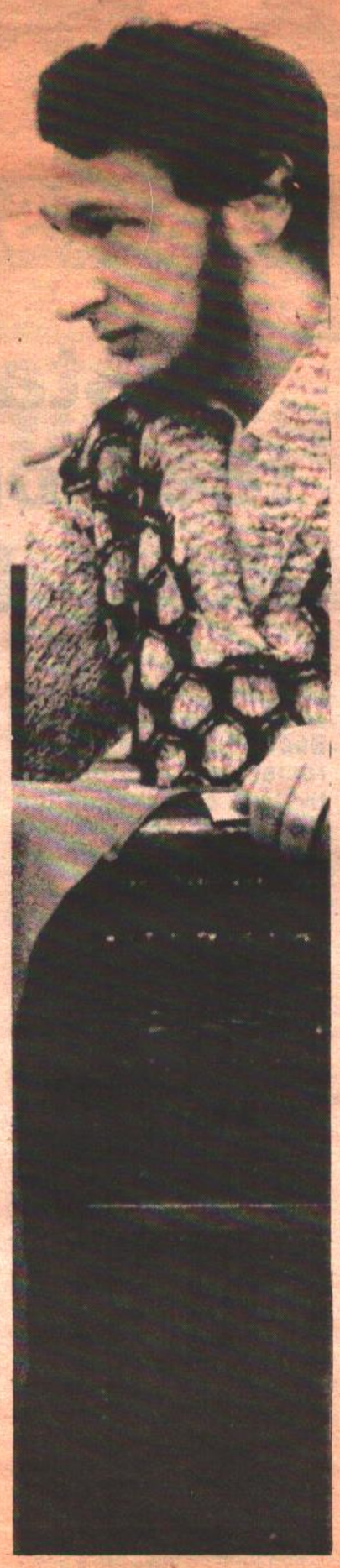
The battle for political democracy in Eastern Europe has, to some extent, been won. But as the partial privatisation gets under way, with increasing reliance on the market and expanding investment with Western capitalism, restorationism will meet stiff resistance from workers.

Is this wishful thinking? Economic pessimism is probably stronger in Poland than anywhere else in Eastern Europe. Intellectuals, political, and even trade union leaders promote the market as the only solution. A kind of "market myth" exists.

There have been many polls of workers' attitudes in recent years. In general, between 63% and 82% express their support for the "market and free competition". But 57% were opposed to "unemployment".

In 1988, 73% favoured an expansion of the private sector but only 12% thought that large state enterprises should be fully privatised.

The collapse of the command economy has created an ideological vacuum in which the market seems to be the only solution. But the polls suggest that marketisation might have a rough ride as it confronts the self-interest of the working class.



Boris Kagarlitsky: one of the founders of the Moscow Committee for a new Socialist Party.

SOTSPROF

The events are a challenge for European socialism. There is a need for practical class solidarity — assistance to socialist parties (like the PPS in Poland), to free trade unions (like the new Hungarian unions and *SOTSPROF* in the Soviet Union), united action against multi-national employers (for instance, Maxwell).

At a more general level, the opportunity now exists to overcome the post-war division of the European socialist movement at the level of ideas and institutions.

Socialist property and economic planning are the cornerstones of the socialist project. The question of a socialist economic model has often been purely theoretical; today it is very real.

The experience of Soviet-style planning and the Yugoslav system of self-management confront socialists with the need to think about how a socialist economy should be organised.

Finally, the question of what kind of Europe is posed as an immediate problem. Thatcher, Mitterand, and Kohl have no agreed strategy.

Democratise

Do we "expand and democratise" the European Community? Or do we fight for a totally new pan-European strategy which envisages a united Europe that includes the Soviet Union, which is democratic and which eliminates all barriers to economic co-operation.

Economic cha

Defending and de workers' econom

Many socialists are worried by the trends towards marketisation, and even the outright restoration of capitalism, in Eastern Europe. At the same time, political liberalisation is allowing workers to organise and fight in unprecedented ways.

What does this combination of rightward economic drift and political openings mean for the struggle for *socialism* in Eastern Europe?

By Jamie Gough
Holborn and St Pancras CLP

Firstly, why should we care about the economic changes? What is there to defend in the existing economies?

The economic gains for workers have two aspects. The first, and most obvious, is the "*welfare states*". The provision of health care, education and child care is greatly superior to what it is in capitalist countries *of comparable development*. Moreover, the Eastern European countries have been able to fix low prices for food, housing and other basic consumer goods in a way unknown in capitalist countries.

Public

These gains concern the *distribution* of the economy's output. They rest on the second aspect, which is the *public ownership of the major means of production.*

The lack of democracy in Eastern Europe has meant that the use of these assets has been planned by the bureaucracy according to its own interests. But even in this warped form, central planning has met some working class interests. It has enabled the long term investment which is implied in having a strong welfare state.

It has enabled the *overall rate of investment*, and therefore the rate of overall economic growth, to be higher than it would have been under *comparable* capitalist conditions (the current crisis of the Eastern European economies should not obscure this fact). Weakening of central planning mechanisms, as over a long period in Hungary and Yugoslavia, led to lower investment and growth.

Planning

Central planning has meant less duplicate and excess investment than in capitalist countries. It has enabled sectoral and regional investment rates to be planned. Having a common state employer has meant that the wages and conditions of workers in different enterprises and sectors have tended to be more equal than in capitalist economies.

Gains

These gains from public ownership have of course been greatly weakened by the bureaucracy's interest in division and control of the working class. They could flower if the public economy was *democratically* planned - though capitalist encirclement would still distort the possibilities.

Cuts in price subsidies and state spending are eroding the welfare states. But the gains of public ownership and central planning are also under threat.



Striking miner from Vorkuta, USSR

This is most obviously the case with outright privatisations and incoming capitalist investment. But it is also true of *peristroika* in the USSR and similar programmes in other countries.

Autonomy

Peristroika gives much greater autonomy to enterprises, most crucially in their retention of profits and their dependence on their own profits, or loans from profit-oriented banks, to finance investment. This radically undermines the central planning of investment funds.

Enterprises

Although the enterprises remain *nominally* in public ownership, their *actual dynamics* become more and more similar to private enterprises operating in a capitalist economy. China shows where this can lead. A quarter of Chinese industry is now run in reality as capitalist enterprise, even though still nominally in state hands.

Peristroika thereby undermines the gains of the publicly owned economy. It increases the economic differences and divisions between workers in different enterprises, different industries and different regions.

These divisions weaken the ability of workers to fight. Indeed, the bureaucracy is counting on divisons created by *peristroika* to weaken workers' ability to take advantage of *glasnost*.

Socialists

How can socialists respond to this? In the last few years, struggles by workers in Eastern Europe have opposed many different effects of restructuring.

The most unified and explosive struggles have been against the raising of consumer goods prices, because this directly and immediately affects the whole population. This has been particularly central in Poland.

Defence of public ownership as such has been more difficult. Struggles in particular workplaces, as well as taking up immediate issues of wages and conditions, have often demanded self-management by the workers within the enterprise, against both central planners and enterprise management.

The enterprise is the natural



Czech workers on general strike

anges

mocratising ic gains



SOTSPROF are a force against capitalist resoration in the USSR. They deserve our support.

starting place for fighting for workers' control. But if the fight remains at the enterprise level, there is a danger that it can be used by the supporters of *peristroika*, especially enterprise managements, to increase *their* autonomy from the central plan.

Industries

In subsidised industries, workers will generally support retaining links to the central plan. But in basically profitable industries, workers' hatred of the central state apparatus, and immediate economic interests, can lead to demands for radical enterprise autonomy.

For example, one demand of the Soviet coal miners (though not a central one) was for the right of the mines to sell their product freely on the world market and keep the profits.

Peristroika increases differences between workers in strong and weak sectors of the economy. A socialist strategy has to combat this tendency and not reinforce it.

Demands

This can happen through making *demands on* the existing district, regional and national planning bodies, particularly regarding investments and subsidies. Here, workers in Eastern Europe are in a stronger position than those in capitalist countries because these planning bodies already exist.

These demands can grow into *worker's plans* for *the direction of investment* at each level. And the process of fighting for these these plans can build economic planning bodies *elected by workers' organisations* - a soviet economy!



Restorationism

Will capitalism be restored?

The Nineties opens with the outcome in Eastern Europe still in the balance. Every socialist must be overjoyed at the workers revolution in Romania, and the mass mobilisations beginning to sweep away Stalinist tyranny in East Germany, Czechoslavakia and Bulgaria.

But our enthusiasm for this revolution has to be tempered. The outcome *could* be a victory for capitalism of truly historic proportions.

By PHIL HEARSE

If capitalism were to be re-established in Eastern Europe, and especially in the Soviet Union as well, the political repercussions would be catastrophic.

Eastern Europe would become a source of cheap labour for the multinationals, which would be an important step towards resolving the capitalist crisis which has lasted since the late 1960s. The way would be cleared for huge new assaults on the third world.

Clearly, Western socialists cannot be indifferent to the restoration of capitalism in Eastern Europe.

How could capitalism be reintroduced in Eastern Europe? Of course, a change in political regime does not in itself mean a restoration of capitalism. There are powerful obstacles to privatisation. In strict profit-and-loss terms many of the enterprises in East Germany and Czechoslavakia — let alone Romania and Poland — are bankrupt. Why should capitalists in the West want to buy them therefore?

However, this line of argument only holds true in the short term. The Western bourgeoisie is not going to *start* by buying bankrupt industry, but by investing in modern and profitable ventures. This is already happening. For example, in Hungary the US giant General Electric has spent $150 million in taking over the famous Tungsram electric enterprise and Robert Maxwell is investing in publishing.

Capitalism

But even in the short-term Western capitalism can start taking over less profitable, or even bankrupt, enterprises. The objective will be to asset-strip them. But the key asset which imperialist capital wants to get its hands on is cheap labour.

This is indeed what the Polish government, in the shape of Lech Walesa, has been openly offering


PHOTO: Jacek Waisko

Polish workers: will they resist "market reforms"?

the West. The cheapest labour in any advanced country — a mere £20 a month! — in exchange for Western investment.

Any move towards capitalism will bring untold misery. The IMF's aid package to Poland will cost wages increases being held to only 50 per cent of the rate of inflation. This means absolute impoverishment and misery for the masses.

The prospect of Eastern Europe being used as a pool of ultra-cheap labour is a dagger pointed at the heart of Western Europe's trade unions and those of other advanced capitalist countries. The threat of relocation to Eastern Europe would be used to wage an all-out assault on wages and conditions.

Austerity

Of course, for capitalism to triumph in the East, a political battle has to be won against the working class. Violent austerity measures have to be imposed on the debt-laden East. It seems unlikely that in a period of mass mobilisation, when the workers have won huge victories, they will easily accept such measures. New independent trade unions, and the militant left of Solidarnosc in Poland, will surely fight back against austerity.

The workers reaction to privatisation is less certain. In Poland there have already been struggles against it. But the fight against privatisation, like the fight against austerity, depends on the outcome of a political battle.

Apparatus

While a section of the bureaucratic apparatus will champion capitalist restoration, seeing its only future within a new capitalist class, others will fight against it. But the key to the struggle lies in the ideology of opposition leaders and their working class base. The prospects here are very uncertain.

Economic

Almost everywhere one or other form of "marketisation" is seen as the only solution to the economic crisis. Even in East Germany, where adherence to socialism predominates, there is little opposition to "marketisation" as the economic solution.

If the workers of Eastern Europe can spontaneously fight austerity, they cannot spontaneously create a democratic socialist society. It needs a conscious political fight, and explicitly socialist democratic current in the working class to fight for it. Socialists in Britain have to do everything possible to aid socialists in Eastern Europe in this fight.

Women in Poland

Caught between the Stalinists and the Church?

What will the recent changes in Poland mean for women? *Briefing* tried to find out from MILKA TYSEKIEWICZ, a trade union activist and member of the Polish Socialist Party — Democratic Revolution (PSS-DR), recently on a visit to Britain.

***LB*: What is the political situation like for women in Poland at the moment?**

MT: As a political activist I got involved in the problems of the liberation of women. I have had some trouble myself. Polish society is very patriarchal and people are not used to women playing roles other than cooking, looking after babies and so on.

Probably the first woman who started serious political activity was Anna Walentynowicz. She and Walesa started the Gdansk shipyard strike in August 1980. She became a leader of that strike but because she was a woman she had less chance than Walesa to maintain her political activity.

Women belong to the rank and file of *Solidarnosc*, of course, but when you look at the top level you see only men.

The *Solidarnosc* Public Transport Commission in Wroclaw has a woman leader — Krystyna Politacha. She organised a strike only two days after starting to work in the factory. She was elected leader, but she was afraid because she was alone and she resigned.

Now she is Secretary of the Commission, but she still has the support of the workers.

There are also some groups in Poland which are specifically interested in Women's Liberation. Groups which are coming from, for example, student unions, anarchists, and the PPS-DR (of course).

But the problem up till now has been that they organised themselves around specific problems. There is no national co-ordination and no permanent co-operation.

Medicine

Krystyna has also prepared a report on women's labour in her factory. It reveals that the average wage for a man is 600,000 Zlotys while for a woman it is only 400,000 Zlotys.

There is a law which says you should get paid the same regardless of sex. The problem is that there are some kinds of jobs which it is very difficult for women to get — the well paid ones!

Curiously, medicine is a female job — 60-70% of doctors are women. However, doctors are paid less than workers — about 3-400,000 Zl.

***LB*: The issue of abortion in Poland has been covered by the Western media. What is happening around this at the present time?**

MT: Eighty to ninety per cent of Polish society is Catholic. So the Church plays a special role in Poland. They have been fighting for many years for the so-called "rights of the unborn" which means, for example, only so-called "natural" methods of birth control on the one hand and on the other against abortion.

Many women in Poland have abortions. This because there is no sex education at all and also because you can't get contraception in shops. So many women get pregnant.

There is a very bad atmosphere around a single girl with a baby because the system is so catholic, traditional and patriarchal.

Single mothers are left alone, without help or special care. There are few places in Poland where a single mother can stay. But it is only for a three weeks and there are only 200 places in these hostels.

Isolated

This is not enough because the number of girls thrown out by their families and left isolated.

Many women who want children have to go to the doctor for an abortion. They have no choice.

There is also the problem of government assistance to single mothers. In general there is a shortage of housing and nurseries, with only very small benefits for single mothers. It might be enough if you had a husband, but otherwise you would starve.

So — no money, no housing and then there are difficulties with work. Single mothers are seen as troublemakers and it is always more difficult for them to get jobs.

Because of this there are too many girls who decide to have an abortion. But in the Church campaign I have not heard anything about the rights of babies who are born — for nurseries, health care, etc.

There were demonstrations against the Church campaign in the Spring of 1989. In the end Parliament did not make a decision to ban abortion, but the situation of single mothers did not change either.

***LB*: What position did *Solidarnosc* take on the anti-abortion campaign?**

MT: It depends which part of *Solidarnosc* you are talking about. There is the rank and file of *Solidarnosc* who are connected to reality. Many of these people joined the demonstrations against the Church campaign.

But there is also the majority of the leadership who supported the Church campaign.

When the election campaign finished, because there is no permanent women's movement, the issue of abortion rights, birth control and rights for single mothers dropped off the political agenda. There has been a big media silence.

But the situation is getting worse. The economic crisis is deepening so the position of single mothers is desperate.

***LB*: What about the attitude of the Communist Party?**

MT: They did not join any campaign. They were silent.

***LB*: So no organised women's movement has developed from the campaign around abortion?**

MT: The movement has disappeared because it was not organised. It was completely spontaneous. Even now there are some groups — but they have no resources, no money to make calls from one town to another...

The women who are interested in such issues are single mothers, young women and students — the poorest layers of society. They cannot support themselves on the level of political activity.

The *Solidarnosc* leadership is masculine, they don't see the need to campaign on these issues. So it must come from the middle and rank and file women activists who will be able to turn *Solidarnosc* in the direction of supporting and building this movement.

***LB*: How do you see the situation in Poland developing for women?**

MT: A genuine women's liberation movement will start from the rank and file of *Solidarnosc* or from activists at the factory level.

It is only beginning now but there is a big change in the treatment of women at this level of *Solidarnosc*. There is a different behaviour, no-one is surprised that women are leading strikes and so on.

Also only *Solidarnosc* has the organisational ability to support this movement, because there are enough women to fight for special rights for that movement.

In one to two years we will see a completely independent women's liberation movement — independent of the bureaucracy and built from below.

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

Embryology Bill

All women have a right to choose

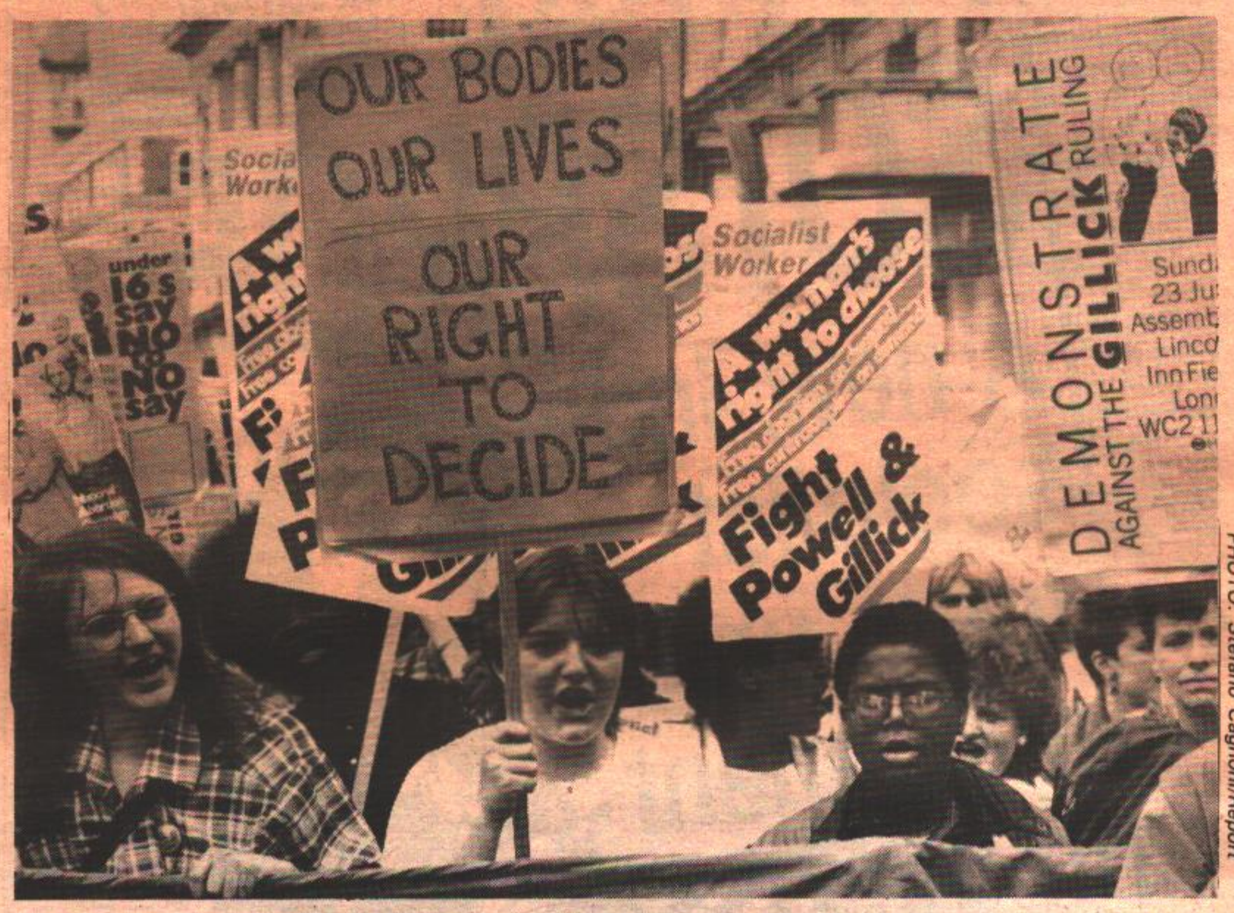


PHOTO: Stefano Cagnoni/Report

Young women demonstrating for their right to choose

In the article below JANE KELLY begins the debate around the Human Fertilisation and Embryo Bill currently going through parliament.

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill, and possible amendments on time limits for abortion and access to donor insemination (DI) for lesbians and single women, now going through Parliament, represent a fundamental attack on women's reproductive rights.

Only one clause (Clause 32), is progressive. It states that surrogacy contracts are legally unenforceable — that the woman who carries the baby cannot be forced to give it up after birth.

The rest of the Bill, is thoroughly reactionary. Parts of it are ambiguous and vague like the section on the Statutory Licensing Authority (SLA) and its Code of Practice to oversee clinics. Other parts, including the amendments outlawing access to DI and In Vitro Fertilisation to *all* unmarried women proposed by Lady Salton, are precise and very specific.

The Bill also gives a choice between embryo research up to 14 days or none at all. Obviously the former is preferable to the latter. Valuable research is being conducted on embryo tissue.

But we should be wary of any proposed time limit — the right wing's attack on abortion is based on a belief in the inviobility of the embryo/foetus *from the moment of conception*. Any proposal giving rights to the embryo/foetus is a dangerous step which could be used in future attacks on abortion.

The threatened amendments reducing time limits on abortion have yet to materialise. But a Private Member's Bill introduced by Lord Houghton is being discussed in the Lords. This rewrites parts of the '67 Abortion Act tightening up the social criteria for the abortion and reducing the limit to 24 weeks. At the same time it removes the time limit all together for other criteria — foetal abnormality etc.

This must also be opposed. But not on the basis of defence of the '67 Act which has been taken over by developments in medical technology.

Rather we should unite around the demand of "A Woman's Right to Choose".

We should oppose any attempt to further restrict access to abortion. No woman willingly seeks a late abortion, but often circumstances mean she has no option.

Society has no right to force a woman to carry and keep an unwanted child.

At the same time a woman's marital status or sexuality, should not disqualify her from having a child if she wishes. A woman's right to choose covers not just the right to abortion but also demands around all our reproductive rights, including access to DI for *all* women.

Currently there are two campaigns. Stop the Amendment Campaign (STAC), organising against any possible amendment on abortion time limits, and the Campaign for Access to Donor Insemination (CADI), which is organising for the rights of all women to donor insemination.

One campaign would have been preferable. Human resources are over stretched by two campaigns on the similar issues raised by the Embryology and the Houghton Bills and any amendments to them. A single campaign could have united women within the framework of the slogan "A Woman's Right to Choose".

A Liaison Committee between the two campaigns has now been set up. We should be arguing for as much joint activity as possible both locally and nationally.

The attacks being made are against a number of different reproductive rights. We have a responsibility to take up the fight on all fronts. The unity will have to be fought for. But if it is achieved it will be a real victory in difficult circumstances.

Fight for choice!

Contact STAC, c/o NAC, Wesley House, Wild Court, Holborn WC1.

Contact CADI, c/o ROW, 52-54 Featherstone St. London EC1.

Book Review

Irish republicanism — reactionary or revolutionary?

The Politics of Illusion — Republicanism and Socialism in Modern Ireland
by Henry Patterson
Hutchinson Radius **(1989)**

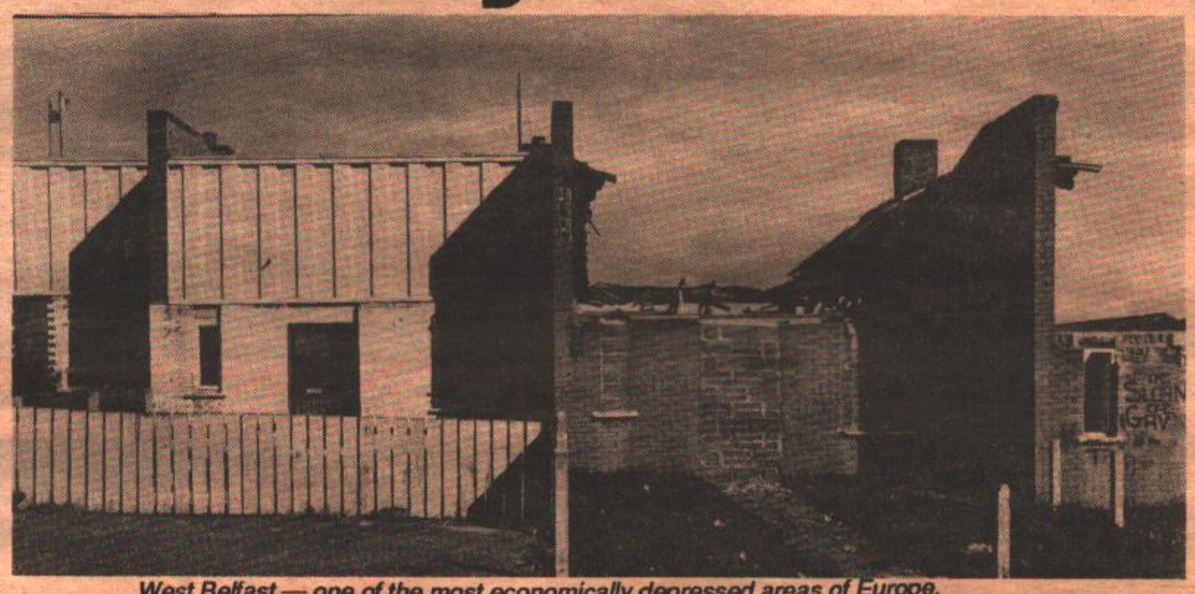
Patterson argues that Irish Republicanism would have long ago been consigned to the history books if it was not for Thatcherism's blend of neo-liberalism and authoritarianism.

The movement's essential flaw is not its methods, its alliances — but its *objective*. The national struggle *per se* is inherently bourgeois and therefore reactionary.

Outflanked by bourgeois nationalist parties, like Fianna Fail or the SDLP, republicanism's logic seeks to transform them or align with them. At the same time, appeals to Protestant workers are doomed to failure because the objective alienates them.

The solution, therefore, is to drop the national question altogether and organise North and South around social and economic issues. The war will end with a combination of reflationary measures and action to tackle the economic inequalities faced by the Catholic working class.

Underpinning this approach is a concise but meaty history of 20th century republicanism, taking as its focus a critique of the limits of "social republicanism" and the continuity of left currents that are now in the leadership.



West Belfast — one of the most economically depressed areas of Europe.

By PIERS MOSTYN

But the book never actually substantiates the view that Irish Unity and self-determination are inherently reactionary goals — other than to assert their association with the "rural Catholic bourgeoisie".

Despite placing social republicanism under a withering spotlight (generally correctly) for its cross-class alliances, confused programme, lack of strategy and reliance on militarism — there is no explanation of why an alternative socialist tradition of any size and credibility has been absent.

Patterson lets the Irish Labour Party and trade unions completely off the hook for their compromise with the ugliest manifestations of imperialism and yet discusses one of the healthiest tendencies of the past century — Paedar O'Donnell and the Republican Congress — with all other republicans.

Nonetheless, this important and provocative work is undoubtedly astute in much of its critical analysis even if it draws the wrong conclusions.

Thus he makes sympathetic usage of some of the arguments associated with revolutionary Marxists in the anti-imperialist movement — People's Democracy, Michael Farrell and newly radicalised Marxist republican prisoners — whilst ignoring their potential to develop the Connolly and Congress traditions in class-rooted directions.

But he gives a useful analysis of the rightward shift of Sinn Fein's leadership since 1985 — away from social radicalism and towards an orientation to Fianna Fail and the SDLP.

The material on the 60s and 70s is the best, particularly in outlining the origins, trajectory and internal debates of the "official" wing of republicanism. However Patterson never clarifies what separates him from its revisionist modern day equivalents in the Workers Party.



PHOTOS: Frankie Quinn

Troops Out delegation

Book Review

Tom Paine — a revolutionary abroad

Tom Paine **By David Powell, Hutchinson, £7.95.**

To have participated in two revolutions on different continents — especially in the 18th century — is extraordinary.

To have written a political treatise drawing on the experiences which sold to one in fifty people in the country which drove you into exile is unique.

Thomas Paine's achievement was remarkable. His *Rights of Man* (*sic*) sold 200,000 copies in England within a year of publication in a period notorious for the grimmest political reaction since the Civil War.

He was hung in effigy in several towns by people who had never read his work. He managed to escape England across the Channel just 20 minutes before the warrant for his arrest for sedition reached Dover.

What had he done?

By Mike Phipps

Paine was born in 1737 in an England dominated by corrupt and repressive politics. Between 1688 and 1760 over 120 new capital offences had been put on the statute book.

He spent 37 years of his life in England. But his political involvement really began only after sailing to the American colonies.

Paine was involved in the war of independence, he served as a Secretary to the Congress Foreign Affairs Committee, but grew disillusioned due to his unflinching opposition to corruption.

Then opened a second remarkable chapter in Paine's life. He sailed for France, took part in the Revolution and was elected to the national convention as deputy for Calais.

Outlawed in Britain, he was thrown in jail for 10 months under the Jacobin Terror and narrowly cheated the guillotine. Earlier he had refused to vote for the execution of Louis XVI.

Revolutionary

Paine was a revolutionary in outlook with complex beliefs. Ironically, he was effectively disowned by the two revolutions he helped to make. Only five people attended his funeral in 1809.

A new book about Paine is always welcome. Sadly, this one is confused, speculative and totally unreferenced.

The writer fails to appreciate politically the momentous process which formed the living framework for Paine's activities and writing. But he at least recognises that Paine remains one of the most maligned of all revolutionaries.

A *Daily Telegraph* editorial in 1982 wrote that "among decent Englishmen (*sic*) his name was a synonym for treachery, blasphemy and debauchery."

Paine has not been forgiven for his words which inspired a generation to revolt.

"Tyranny, like hell, is not easily conquered, yet we leave this condition with us, that the harder the conflict, the more glorious the triumph. What we obtain too cheap, we esteem too lightly... It would be strange indeed if so celestial an article as FREEDOM should not be lightly rated."

Fiction Briefs

Black writers

No Black Sparrows
by Namba Ray
Navigation of a Rainmaker
by Jamel Mahjoub
The Gunny Sack
by M.G. Vassanji, all published by *Heineman International* at £4.95



***Hieneman International* have just produced three new works by black authors in paperback.**

Namba Roy's *No Black Sparrows* is not in fact new, being written in 1956-7, but is now available to a new readership. It is a symbolic tale set in the 1930s of four orphans in Jamaica, who struggle to survive on the city streets in the face of dire poverty and police persecution.

I found it a warm and compassionate antidote to Jamel Mahjoub's *Navigation of a Rainmaker*, a chilling first novel about a Black Briton in search of his Sudanese roots who leaves an aimless existence in Khartoum to face the civil war in the south of the country. Mahjoub's writing is engaging if uneven, and not shy of tackling critical themes of alienation and identity.

Best of the bunch, however, is *The Gunny Sack* by M.G. Vassanji. Somewhat reminiscent of Midnight's Children without Rushdie's brilliant changes in mood, Vassanji's history of four generations of Tanzanian Asians is a nicely observed and rewarding read.

By Mike Phipps

Trade Union Briefing

Mexico

Ford workers killed by company union thugs

Ford workers in the Mexico City plant at Cautitulan have been fighting a long struggle for the right to democratically elect their union representatives.

On January 10th a leading trade union activist, Cleto Benigno Urbino, lost his life in that struggle.

Two days earlier some 100 armed thugs from the official state-sponsored union brutally attacked workers in the plant. Eight workers, including Urbina, were hospitalised with gunshot wounds. The thugs managed to infiltrate the plant by wearing Ford company overalls.

The President of Ford Mexico, Nicolas Schelle, has denied any responsibility for the violence. Ford has closed the plant "for reasons of security" but has also legally sacked all the workers.

It is quite likely that Ford will take advantage of the situation to rehire those workers it selects with worsened conditions and pay rates at a later date. Our latest information is that the plant is still occupied by 200 workers and surrounded by police.

By DAVE KELLOWAY

In September last year, *Briefing* reported an earlier stage in this struggle when comrades of Urbina were on hunger strike in front of the Ford headquarters in Mexico City.

Then they were protesting about the way Ford had accepted the union bosses' demand for the sacking of shop stewards from the democratic opposition inside the union.

Mexican trade unions are tightly controlled by the PRI (Partido Revolucionario Institucional), a bourgeois populist party, which also runs the state and most institutions in the style of a stalinist one-party system.

Trade unionists or revolutionaries who try to organise democratic trade unions suffer continual intimidation and sometime violent repression.

Opposition

Workers at the plant have supported an anti-PRI opposition called the Workers Democratic Executive Committee at the plant for several years now. These car workers were angry at the way Uriate, the national leader of their trade union sector, was bureaucratically imposed on them. There is clear evidence linking Uriate to the thugs' attack.

The price paid by the workers for these undemocratic methods was Uriate's acceptance of all the company's cuts in their living standards.

In response to the violence the workers organised a mass demonstration on January 18th. They are demanding:

- Punishment for the thugs;
- Removal of Uriate;
- Free elections of union representatives;
- Reinstatement of sacked workers;
- Better wages and conditions.

Ford is going to take advantage of the plant closure to push through yet more restructuring. It is urgent that trade union branches and labour movement bodies send messages of solidarity to the workers and messages of protest to Fords.

Practically nothing has appeared in the British press about these events. It seems you need to be East of the Brandenburg Gate before the organising of democratic trade unions becomes newsworthy.

Protests are also being organised at Ford plants and offices in various countries. Here are the addresses for solidarity protest messages;

Solidarity: Dr. Lucio No. 103, Edificio Orion A-4 Despacho 103, Mexico DF; or faxed to 286 89 26 or 2 86 89 76 to Sr. Raul Escobar, telephone no. 578 15 56.

Protest: Ford Motor Company, Paseo de la Reforma no. 333, Mexico DF.



PHOTO: Dave Holloway

Marco Antonio Jiménez: on vigil after victimisation by Fords

NUT Pay Conference

The Left organises

Despite resolutions from many local branches the leadership of the NUT has refused to call a special conference to discuss the union's pay campaign.

Because of this, activists in the NUT organised a one-day conference in Coventry attended by about 150 members from some 50 local Associations.

There was widespread condemnation of the union's refusal to launch a campaign of industrial action in pursuit of this year's pay award.

A settlement is likely to end up being imposed by the government, resulting in a pay cut for many teachers and encouragement to employers to increase differentials between classroom teachers and heads, or to make special allowances to teachers in "shortage" subject areas.

By Martin Allen Socialist Teachers Alliance

The conference resolved to call for a flat-rate pay increase of £3,000 for all teachers and a campaign of industrial action, beginning with a one-day strike and followed by selective, extended action financed by a national levy.

Speakers also emphasised the need to link the campaign on pay to issues of conditions of service, in particular, the question of "cover" for absent teachers and the massive increase in work-load as a result of the national curriculum.

The conference, which involved delegates from across the country and from outside of the major left groupings agreed to reconvene at the NUT Conference this Easter.

The union to date has spent about £1 million on a publicity campaign in the national press. The final stage of this fiasco could be the national lobby of MPs in the middle of February by two members of the NUT, from each parliamentary constituency.

The conference heard contributions from a Pergamon striker and an ambulance worker.

Successful

Everybody present clearly understood the links between the need for a successful outcome to the ambulance dispute and the future for public sector pay awards generally.

The conference called for maximum support for the action on January 30th with some of the stronger NUT branches trying to organise half-day stoppages.



PHOTO: Richard Hawkins

Parents opposing abolition of ILEA: now teachers must resume former militancy.

SOTSPROF TOUR

"We are very pleased that socialists in Britain are going to campaign for us. The development of international socialist links could not have come at a better time."

Boris Kagarlitsky

London

Monday February 12th

Manchester

Tuesday February 13th

Liverpool

Wednesday February 14th

Sheffield

Thursday February 15th

Birmingham

Friday February 16th

For further information and to arrange for labour movement delegations to meet the SOTSPROF representative contact John Rose on 01-539 5821 or Alan Thornett on 01-800 7460.

Ambulance dispute

Nation-wide solidarity action



Ambulance workers at Hackney Town Hall, January 30th — how much longer must they wait?

Over a million people took part in the TUC demonstration of support for the ambulance workers on January 30th.

They all took some form of action — strikes, demonstrations or rallies. It was a massive demonstration of solidarity, giving a huge boost to the ambulance workers and another vote of no confidence in government.

In virtually every city and town there was activity of some kind. Many of those not directly involved showed their support by sounding car horns, clapping or shouting their support.

Liverpool saw the biggest single action, 30,000 local authority workers struck from 11am onwards. A 20,000 strong march was joined by engineers, postal workers and taxi drivers who followed in their vehicles.

There were strikes at Plesseys and at Littlewood's pools and the buses stopped at noon with the drivers taking collections from the passengers. 1500 workers struck at AC Delco.

NALGO estimate that 60,000 of their members took part in some form of action during the day. Other unions must have similar figures.

Support came from workers right across the spectrum. Dockers, transport workers, construction workers, NHS workers, local government workers, teachers, lecturers, shipyard workers, engineering workers, postal and communication workers, gas and electricity workers, steel workers and firefighters.

There were protests at hundreds of hospitals. 14,000 shipyard workers walked out at Barrow-in-Furness; 10,000 people demonstrated in Birmingham (where the Symphony Orchestra took action to play at the rally); 5,000 in Coventry, 3,000 in Cardiff; 4,000 in Newcastle (including striking workers from the Swan Hunter shipyard).

By Alan Thornett Trade Union *Briefing*

In Sheffield a demonstration of 2,000 was joined by a delegation from a dozen factories where action was taking place.

There were rallies and demonstrations up and down the country: of 2,000 in Salford, 4,000 in Sheffield, 5,000 in Leeds, 300 in Brighton, 3,000 in Nottingham, 1,000 in Chesterfield, 1,000 in Oxford, 200 in Leicester, 1,000 in Sandwell, 300 in Torquay, 300 in Torbay, 400 in Matlock and 8,000 in Bristol including 1,000 dockers, 2,000 in Manchester, 2,000 in St. Helens, 200 in Chester, 500 in Carlisle, 400 in Reading, 1,000 in Southampton and 200 in Taunton.

There were also rallies in; Bradford, Rotherham, Hull, York, South Shields, Northampton, Southend, Bath, Swindon, Cheltenham, Blackburn, Preston, Thirsk, Bridlington and Barnsley. There was even a demonstration of 200 in the Tory heartland of Bishop's Stortford.

More than 5,000 people formed a human chain between the ambulance stations in Hackney. Over a dozen rallies totalling more than 20,000 people were held in London. Many schools had extended lunch breaks as teachers joined the protest.

Despite the disgraceful TUC instruction that no one should strike without the agreement of the employers, many workers took a half or full day action.

At Sellafield construction workers struck for a day. Durham pits stopped work for half-a-day. There were half-day strikes in several London boroughs, including Camden and Haringey.

Hundreds of local government workers struck in Hackney. Beechams and Pilkington workers struck in St. Helens. Workers at Smiths in Cheltenham and Doughty's in Gloucester walked out. As did 4,000 off-shore workers on Teeside and 4,000 Durham local authority workers.

Gwent County Council workers struck for half-a-day. 1,500 stopped work at Delco Engineering at Kirkby. In Coventry there were strikes at Massey Ferguson and Alvis and the main Post Office sorting office.

Hundreds of workplaces held meetings. Large ones include Rolls Royce in Coventry and Bristol, DSS in Newcastle, Austin Rover in Longbridge and Cowley, Jaguar Cars in Coventry, BAe in Bristol and several major London bus garages.

The protests were big in Scotland as well. More than 10,000 people took part in a rally in Edinburgh and 10,000 in Glasgow. There were demonstrations in Dundee, Aberdeen and Dumfries.

At least 50,000 Scottish workers joined walkouts or factory-gate meetings. In Edinburgh 500 Post Office workers stopped work. On Clydeside workplaces stoppages and meetings included Govan and Yarrow shipyards.

GEC Kelvin Diesel workers took action with direct-works workers in several authorities and workers in several hospitals.

Unfortunately, massive though Tuesday's protest was, it is not enough to win the day for the Ambulance workers.

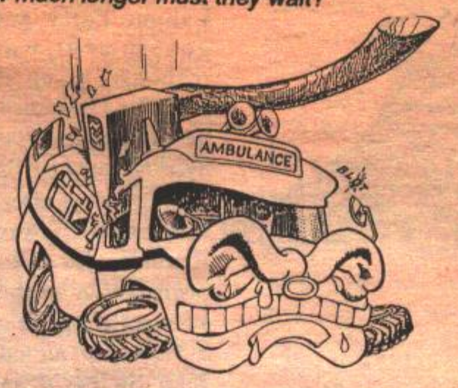
Popular feeling has been mounting against the government for months over the dispute, but they have not given in yet and they are not about to give in now. There are two years to the next election and they have little regard for public opinion.

Substantial

But the Ambulance workers can win, and last Tuesday points the way to do it. More substantial action would clearly again get massive support if it was called and would hit directly at the principle Tory backers and at an economy already in crisis. This would need an extension of the ambulance dispute, most importantly a national ballot for all out action.

If the TUC is to call further action, it will have to be forced to do so. They fear more substantial strike action and even more they fear the anti-union laws.

Everywhere where the action was strong on the 30th should go back to their union branches and demand that the TUC name the day for another action.



There is another important dimension as well. The vote of the Ford production workers went narrowly against strike action, and even if the continuing action by skilled grades does not force the offer any higher the double figure settlement will set the marker for this year's wage round which is just getting off the ground.

One way to break the deadlock in the ambulance dispute is for other unions to pursue their claims and make sure the ambulance workers are not forced to battle on alone any longer.

Woolwich

Boost to dispute

2,500 people rallied in Woolwich on the Ambulance workers' "Day of Action". Health workers' marched to the centre of Woolwich, joined by Town Hall workers' on half-day strike.

Workers' poured out of offices and shops to join the demo. As Ambulance workers' turned into the main square for the rally, they were stunned to see it already filled with people!

Joan Ruddock MP and NUPE's Tom Sawyer addressed the rally but the livliest speeches came from the rank and file.

The rally was a confidence booster to Ambulance workers', many of whom now feel they have public support for stepping up the action.

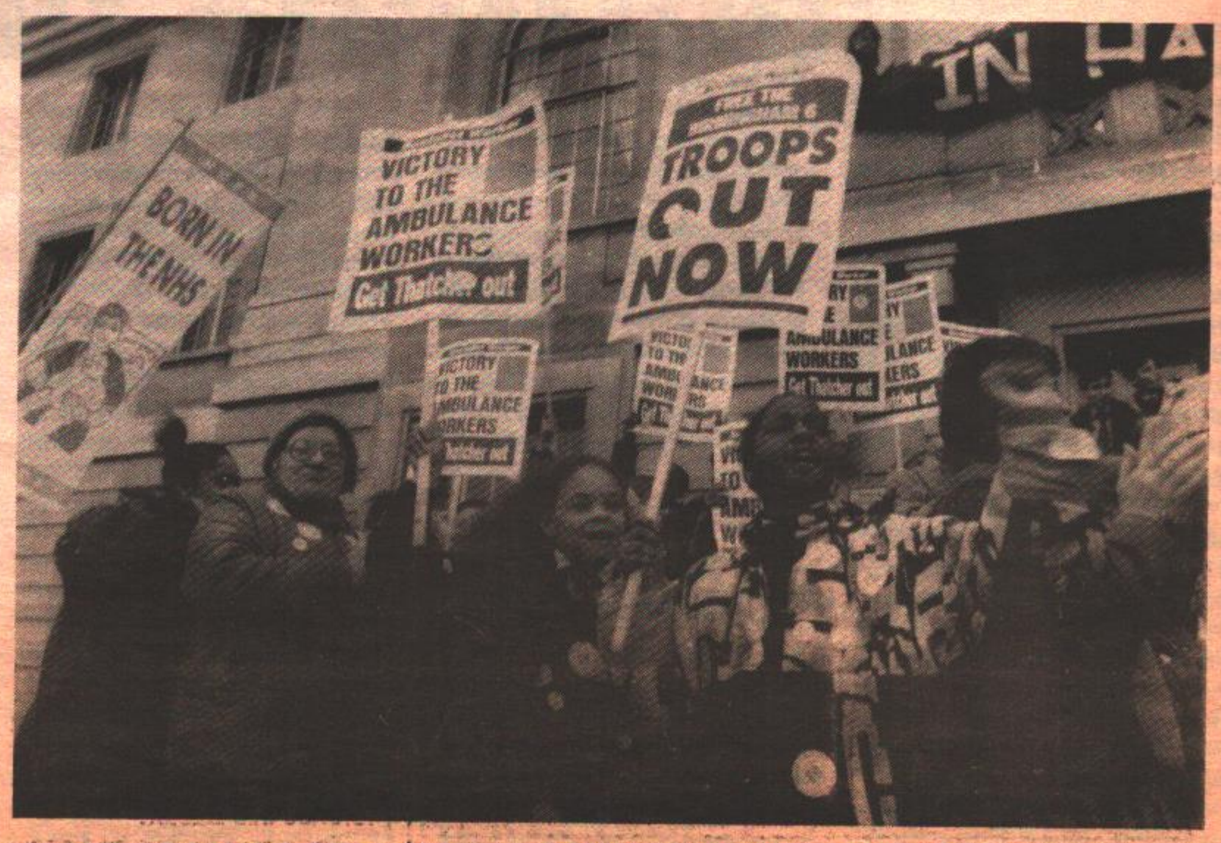
Extra-Parliamentary Action

By Dan Carter

Around 300 Houses of Parliament staff demonstrated in Parliament Square during the 15 minutes of action in support of the ambulance workers.

The action, organised by the TWGU 1/427 branch, was much more effective than the PLP meeting inside the House, and was joined by a number of MPs including Jeff Rooker, Alice Mahon, Dennis Skinner and Bill Michie.

The Parliament Square protest, illegal under restrictions covering the mile around the Parliament, was made more effective by the Despatch workers circling the Square on motorbikes and cycles, hooting horns along with many other drivers.



School students and pensioners united in their support for the ambulance workers.

Britain in Ireland

Dirty tricks exposed



"Shoot to kill" — part of official policy in Northern Ireland since the early 70s?

"The rule of law and equality before the law is the hallmark of a civilised society. It is the very cornerstone of ours".

So Margaret Thatcher responded to Tory MP Cecil Franks' anxious call for reassurance on the Stalker affair, "that no matter what happens in the rest of the world, in this country justice and freedom from fear prevail."

But a week earlier plainclothes soldiers on the Falls Road in Belfast killed three betting-shop raiders in an incident bearing all the hallmarks of previous shoot-to-kill operations such as that in Gibraltar.

The shooting of a passer-by, as with the civilian killed in 1987 Loughgall massacre, was seen only as "regrettable". These soldiers' activities also shed light on the presence of the two armed soldiers killed by mourners at a mass republican funeral in the same area in March 1988.

The call for an enquiry by the Labour Party and the Dublin government was a pathetic response given dissatisfaction with the Guildford Four inquiry, but more particularly the re-awakening of the Stalker affair.

A few days after the Falls Road killings, the 16 week, £1m trial of Kevin Taylor collapsed when the prosecution withdrew its case, substantiating the view that it was a frame-up aimed at justifying John Stalker's removal from a shoot-to-kill inquiry.

Stalker has also produced a document suggesting that his removal was a top-level political decision and not one made by the "appropriate police authorities".

Proof of a formally organised conspiracy is unlikely. Secrecy and monolithic centralisation ensure that such conspiracies are either not necessary or are so interwoven into institutional structures as to be invisible.

By Piers Mostyn
Holborn & St. Pancras CLP

The fuss about Stalker's removal is really about whether the process of criminal justice, upon which so much of British policy on Ireland is based, rests on the "rule of law" or not.

That it is not is obvious in view of:

- The repeated use of summary executions as a means of dealing with Irish republicanism.
- A criminal investigation into several of these which is prevented from reaching the "wrong" conclusions by senior politicians and civil servants — subordinating even the vaguest notions of justice to the policy interests of the executive.
- The fact that seven years after the killings under investigation, Law Lords are still agonizing over whether those responsible can be compelled to give evidence at the inquests into the deaths.

And that's without considering the implications of the Guildford Four and Birmingham Six cases or RUC/UDR collaboration with loyalist terror gangs.

In fact the use of "law enforcement", the courts and the prisons as instruments of the state's political and military strategy to crush nationalist resistance has been official policy in the North of Ireland since the early 70s.

The subversion of judicial processes and criminal inquiries are as much a part of this as the shoot-to-kill policies they are supposed to be investigating.

All that has changed is the *exposure* of the political expediency, corruption and double standards at the hear of this system.

One consequence is that self-investigation and self-reform are becoming a bad joke, even for those who ardently believe in them. Hence the anxious questions in the House from Cecil Franks.

The government is unlikely to lose much sleep over this. It has succeeded in switching the focus from the substantial issues of British policy in Ireland and scandals in the institutions of law enforcement, to an endless maze of inquiries and innuendos.

An even bigger scandal, though, is that the bulk of the Labour Party and trade unions are letting the Tories get away with it. The overdue public exposure of Colin Wallace's allegations of similar dirty tricks in the North of Ireland in the 70s, provides yet another opportunity to rectify this.

Cricket

Quiet on the pitch, shotguns in the townships

"If you want to ask me about cricket OK; if you want to talk about politics, ask a politician."

So said Mike Gatting last week, continuing his feigned ignorance about apartheid, as protesters were being fired on by riot police.

Really there is no great secret why the "rebel" English tourists are there. Mike Gatting is getting £200,000 for a two-year contract; the others are getting £100,000 plus.

Gatting's friend and co-tourist, off-spinner John Emburey went on the 1980 rebel tour. He and official English skipper Graham Gooch have been spied at Tory party conference. Mike Gatting himself puts the decline of English cricket down to poor teaching in schools — in particular "teachers' strikes". He cries when "Land of Hope and Glory" is played, and had crates of "English" food taken on the last tour of India.

England cricketers nowadays can get seriously rich — the likes of Botham, Gooch, Lamb and Gower are millionaires. Many of them are, like those who run the game seriously right-wing.

The tour is rapidly becoming the tour that nobody wants. Most South African blacks are not interested in cricket, and the organisers calculated that, like 1981, they would ignore it. No such luck.

The sight of demonstrators clashing with police is the last thing which de Klerk wants right now. With Western leaders praising the moves towards dialogue with the ANC, the South African government does not need cricket to show that it is not isolated. Gatting's tour is becoming more trouble than it is worth. But to call it off would be a humiliation.

For the Nationalist Party government the tour could not have started at a worse time. Nelson Mandela's statement re-affirming the ANC's socialist goals has — whatever its real intention — embarrassed the white power structure. Meanwhile the black opposition has been handed a protest focal-point on a plate. Gatting and friends can only expect things to get worse.

Nearly all the English tourists had contracts to play for England — lucrative ones at that. The cricket establishment was outraged that they broke their contracts to join the tour, but dragging Gatting, Broad, Dilley et al through the courts was too much to contemplate.

But most of the grandees who run the game would love to re-establish links with South Africa. If the black teams had not been the best in the world and insisted on a ban, "official" England would still be playing in Cape Town and Durban, instead of being thrashed in the West Indies.

However, principle turns up in the most unexpected places. White South Africans would love to see Ian Botham; he could have got £500,000 for going. He has always refused, on the grounds that he would never be able to look his black friends, like Viv Richards, in the face again. Seriously rich does not have to mean seriously racist; but in cricket it often does.

By PHIL HEARSE

Hong Hong

Democratic rights?

The Labour Party's so-called opposition to Thatcher's proposal to grant passports to 55,000 of Hong Kong's 6 million people on the basis of its "divisiveness" is clearly untenable.

They are so weak on this issue that they are prepared to align themselves with the modern-day Powellites and pander to racist prejudice. A move described, quite rightly, by Paddy Ashdown as "morally bankrupt and opportunist".

Nor should the Tory cabinet position be supported in any way. The major financiers and industrialists alike, though shaken by the recent events in Tiananmen Square, have been courted consistently by both the Chinese and British governments and remain confident of Hong Kong's prospects.

The majority of the working masses in Hong Kong have nowhere to go. The British government's offer of passports to the few appears to be primarily a propaganda exercise and an attempt to import technical skills and expertise at a much reduced rate.

This approach has been vehemently denounced by the Chinese authorities, despite the commonality of both countries' agenda for Hong Kong. The Chinese Communist Party is willing to swap places with Britain as defenders of private property relations and big business interests in Hong Kong.

By Ai Meun Lim
Chinese Solidarity Campaign

Its policy of "one country, two systems" following the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty reflects the intention to use the island as a bridge to the further integration of foreign capital and the development of domestic private capital.

Such aspirations are not, however, without their risks, particularly in light of the prevailing climate of disillusionment and rebellion amongst the Chinese masses, not to mention the Eastern European revolutions.

The Chinese regime must rely on the British State's ability to keep the Hong Kong people docile and downtrodden. Already there is a clampdown on demonstrations, press freedoms and political organisations by the Hong Kong authorities.

These repressive measures are unlikely to satisfy the Chinese leadership. The British government cannot have their cake and eat it. They cannot expect to retain their privileged trading status in Hong Kong if they are not prepared to abandon their pretence to be defenders of democracy. Especially since democratic rights like full, direct elections never existed under British rule.

The right of abode for Hong Kong residents should be made available to all, while those who leave do so reluctantly and many more will stay and fight given half the chance. Particularly since the Hong Kong people have always acknowledged their political, cultural and material ties with China.

So the policy to grant a Right of Abode does not stand alone. It must be considered within the context of a commitment to enable the Hong Kong people maximum say in the government of Hong Kong.

This needs to be in place well before 1997, allowing Hong Kong the possibility of negotiating, not "50 more years of the same" as in the Chinese brochures for prospective entrepreneurs, but a basis for reunification which the Hong Kong masses can live with.

Chinese Solidarity Campaign

Model Resolution

British colonial rule in Hong Kong has left the Hong Kong people with few civil and democratic rights, including no rights to full and direct elections, very limited rights to demonstrate and organise, and no right to form political parties.

It is clear that Britain is willing, in collaboration with the Chinese authorities, to see a further erosion of the Hong Kong people's ability to exercise control over their own political and economic affairs. In exchange, the Chinese authorities' promise of "one country, two systems" seeks to guarantee the protection and extension of Britain's imperialist interest in the region.

This (branch) believes that prospects for the masses in Hong Kong is inextricably linked to the democratic movement and struggles in China. Nevertheless, only by securing immediate and genuine autonomy in Hong Kong and the guarantee of refugee status for all those wishing to leave Hong Kong will confidence be restored in Hong Kong's future.

This (branch) therefore condemns Britain's continued failure to recognise Hong Kong's right to universal suffrage and self-rule, and to implement even its own propaganda on democracy and human rights.

This (branch) calls on the wider Labour Movement to support the Hong Kong people's demands for full say in the running of Hong Kong through direct elections of all members on Hong Kong's Legislative Council, democratically contested by political parties, and the replacement of all colonial personnel and structures with locally accountable ones.

German reunification

Moscow plays the German card

First there were Gorbachev's guarded words on the inevitability of German reunification when welcoming East German premier Hans Modrow to Moscow.

Then, returning from his Soviet visit, Modrow announced his own plan for a united, neutral Germany.

Finally Gorbachev's spokesman, Gerasimov, denounced President Bush's troops cut proposals as insufficient and revived the theme of a Europe free from foreign troops. After months of hesitation, Moscow has clearly decided to go on the offensive over the German Question.

High time, too. As Modrow himself knows only too well, the situation in the GDR had become increasingly untenable. Despite the widespread unease over a sell-out to the Federal Republic, the absence of any real perspective on offer other than gradual absorption by West Germany has demoralised political life in the GDR to the point where most people just want to get the whole thing over and done with.

Even the first free elections in the history of the GDR, originally scheduled for May 6th but now hastily brought forward to March 18th, were increasingly becoming an irrelevance when it appeared as if the new government would do little more than arrange for the orderly transfer of East Germany's resources.

The PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism, formerly the ruling Socialist Unity Party SED) may have talked of a "third road" between capitalism and Stalinism, but in practice its Economics Minister, Luft, made one concession after the other to the rapacious demands of Western capital.

Above all, it appeared incapable of giving a convincing answer to the German Question — if the GDR could not remain socialist, why remain a separate state at all? And if there was no long-term perspective of separate statehood, why delay the inevitable?

By Gunter Minnerup
Labour Focus on Eastern Europe

The PDS, however, was not alone in its paralysis. The New Forum and the other, smaller opposition groups which had been in the vanguard of the "October revolution" last year, found themselves increasingly marginalised by their inability to provide a lead into the future of the GDR.

Some, such as the "Demokratischer Aufbruch" around Pastor Rainer Eppelmann and the civil rights lawyer Wolfgang Schnur, veered sharply to the right and snuggled up to the West German CDU. Others, like the United Left, openly opposed reunification and capitalist restoration but struggled to distance themselves from the legacy of the old Honecker regime.

The Right did not fare much better: while it could gain some instant popularity with nationalist and anti-communist rhetoric, its roots in East German society are extremely weak. It remains hamstrung by vicious internal factionalism, with different groups competing for the CDU and CSU franchises. The only party to flourish in this climate has been the social-democratic SPD.

Initially committed to maintaining a democratic-socialist GDR, it has become a clone of West German social democracy adopting the banners of German unity and the "social market economy". Yet, given the paralysis of the SED/PDS, the confusion in the New Forum, and the weakness of the Right, the SPD — bolstered by defectors from the SED — has increasingly



The Berlin Wall, November 1989.

emerged as the only force capable of giving the new government a degree of legitimacy and stability.

Meanwhile the economic situation worsens and tens of thousands leave the GDR every week, which in turn destabilises the economy. Western economic aid cannot provide an immediate escape from this vicious circle because it is simply not possible to equalise living standards in the two German states in the short term.

Already West German SPD leader Oskar Lafontaine has scored a landslide victory in the Saarland regional elections by demanding restrictions on the influx from the GDR through cuts in the social welfare available to East German migrants — a call echoed by a number of politicians on the Right.

There was only one conclusion that Moscow could draw from all this: the imminent East German elections would bring an overwhelming SPD victory and a GDR government committed to negotiate reunification, with the growing possibility of an SPD-led government being installed in Bonn after the West German elections in December.

If that happened, the pressure for German reunification would become irresistible. The only question remaining would be whether a united Germany would remain a member of NATO and whether the Soviet troops would be able to stay in the GDR.

A defensive stance committed to the status quo would run the risk of being overwhelmed by the dynamic of political destabilisation in Germany and Central Europe, probably resulting in a hurried and undignified retreat of the Red Army from Germany.

By reviving the old 50s line of a united, but neutral Germany free of foreign troops, Moscow has obviously concluded that attack is the best defence. At a stroke, the agenda has shifted from a preoccupation with the lost cause of shoring up the old structures in the GDR to the issue of the American presence in the FRG and the nature of a future united Germany.

When this question was first put in the early 1950s, the SPD favoured talks with Moscow while the CDU beat a hasty retreat from its verbal commitment to national reunification in favour of strengthening its ties with the West.

A similar division is likely to appear in the next few weeks and months, but this time in an entirely different political and economic climate: the 1950s were an era of Cold War hysteria, whereas today the enormous popularity of Gorbachev and the demise of Stalinism in Eastern Europe have created the conditions for the Atlanticist Right rather than the neutralist Left being isolated.

If the Left is to regain the initiative in Germany — East and West — it must seize the opportunity offered by Moscow's new stance and place itself in the vanguard of the struggle for a new Germany in a new Europe, rather than remaining paralysed by the defence of the status quo.

The necessary defence of what remains of the non-capitalist property relations in the GDR must not be confused with the defence of a separate East German statehood come what may, even in the face of the insistent demands of the East German working class for national unity.

Azerbaijan — Armenia

Soviet troops no solution!

Events in Azerbaijan have borne a superficial resemblance to the introduction of British troops into the north of Ireland in 1969.

Soviet soldiers have been welcomed by Armenians as protectors against the Azeri pogroms.

Sending Soviet troops into Azerbaijan has, however, a rather more profound aim: to crush the burgeoning Azeri Popular Front or come to a modus vivendi with more moderate elements within it by ceding a degree of autonomy while preserving existing Soviet frontiers and allowing a reorganised Azerbaijani Communist Party once again to play a significant role.

By Rick Simon

There is a long and historic record of conflict between the Azeri and Armenian nations. The Armenian nation has been subjected to appaling massacres, most notably and infamously in 1915 at the hands of the Turks. Stalin, as Commissar of Nationalities, contrived to keep Armenia small and hemmed in so that it would pose no threat to Moscow.

Since the 1920s, the Armenians have steadily left Nakhichevan (part of the Azerbaijan republic within the territory of Armenia) for Armenia itself and in Nagorno-Karabakh they have been deprived of basic cultural rights.

Glasnost provided the opportunity for long pent-up resentment at national oppression to be openly expressed.

The Soviet leadership has been slow to respond to the rising nationalist feelings in Transcaucasia and the Baltic states. It was clear that there was no common line on how to tackle these problems. A coherent policy was replaced by responding to events, most bloodily in Tbilisi where shovels and poison gas were employed to break up demonstrations leaving many dead.

The Central Committee Plenum on the Nationalities Question was finally held in September 1989 and the bones of a new confederalist policy began to emerge.

The problem for the Moscow leadership was that the Azeri Popular Front had completely eclipsed the Communist Party, which was notoriously corrupt and bureaucratic. There is evidence that it was discredited Party functionaries who incited pogroms against Armenians in Baku in an attempt to recoup some popular sentiment, but the collapse of the Party is obvious.

Moscow has shown that it can accommodate the growth of popular national movements if the indigenous republican Communist Party can keep pace with, if not actually lead, these movements.

The Azeri Popular Front was formed along analogous lines to the Baltic Fronts but the inability of the Azerbaijani CP to cohabit with the growing popular movements has led to its discrediting and disintegration. The Moscow bureaucracy could not tolerate this, as ultimately it posed a threat to the integrity of the Soviet Union itself.

The development of the popular movements has given increased ammunition to the more conservative forces in the Party leadership but Gorbachev's position is not immediately in danger. He has shown an ability to manoeuvre and compromise with his more reactionary colleagues over the national question.

But Gorbachev's actions can be no solution to the national problems of Armenia and Azerbaijan. Such solutions can only serve to increase Muslim fundamentalist, secessionist and anti-Armenian tendencies within the Azerbaijani Popular Front. A political solution is required and the Armenian National Movement and the Azerbaijani Popular Front have shown a willingness to diffuse tension along the borders of their republics.

Soviet troops should be withdrawn, both Armenia and Azerbaijan should be able to negotiate through freely-chosen representatives and any future relationship to the Soviet Union should be decided by the will of the majority in those republics.

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NALGO

Leadership must act!

Seventy delegates representing 33 Nalgo branches, reaching from Strathclyde to Devon, gathered in Birmingham on January 20TH to discuss the campaign in NALGO against the poll Tax.

In the opening plenary Tommy Sheridan, Chair of the All-Britain Federation, called on NALGO members to build the national demonstration in London on March 31st.

He also commended the policy of some Scottish branches to take strike action over the first warrant sale but stressed the need to build solidarity and to confront the lack of leadership from the Scottish TUC.

The next two speakers (from the CPSA and Sheffield Housing Benefits) demonstrated from experience that we will not always be able to wait until solidarity and NEC support have been gained before workers will have to take action.

By Doug Thorpe
Islington Nalgo

Rather, the strike action that had taken place over parts of the poll tax legislation, particularly DSS snooping, can be used to build support and put pressure on union leaderships.

The lack of a campaign from the NALGO NEC was the main theme of a workshop on conference and national strategy.

While many branches have done useful work building links with local community campaigns, the absence of a national lead had made it difficult to fight for industrial action.

To begin to overcome this over the next few months branches should build for March 31st, putting resolutions through districts calling on the NEC and TUC to support the demonstration. Bulletins such as *NALGO Action* can be used to spread information.

There was unanimity about submitting a resolution to conference calling on the National leadership to mount a national campaign for industrial action to prevent fining, deductions from wages or benefits, and warrant sales as a result of non-payment.

There is a need to point out the link between the poll tax and cuts in jobs and services and to resolve the contradiction in our national policy of supporting non-payment but not campaigning to stop our members from penalising those who carry this out and do not pay.

It was worrying that few branches had submitted conference resolutions on the poll tax and it is strongly urged that those who have not, to put in short amendments around themes such as opposition to cuts, firming up the commitment to non-payment and affiliation to the National Federation.

It was decided to organise a fringe meeting at National Conference and to contact local groups and branches to lobby on the day of the debate.

Other workshops discussed work with community campaigns, building for action in poll tax sections and trade union solidarity. A model leaflet on non-compliance is being prepared for use in branches.

The closing plenary took report backs from workshops but eventually succumbed to the common fate of such final sessions and degenerated into a debate over the fine points of the SWP and other groups' position resolutions.

This will not, in the end, detract from the useful work done in the workshops.

Anyone who has submitted conference resolutions or wants more information about the initiatives above should contact Doug Thorpe c/o Islington NALGO, 2 Orleston Road, London, N7 8LH.

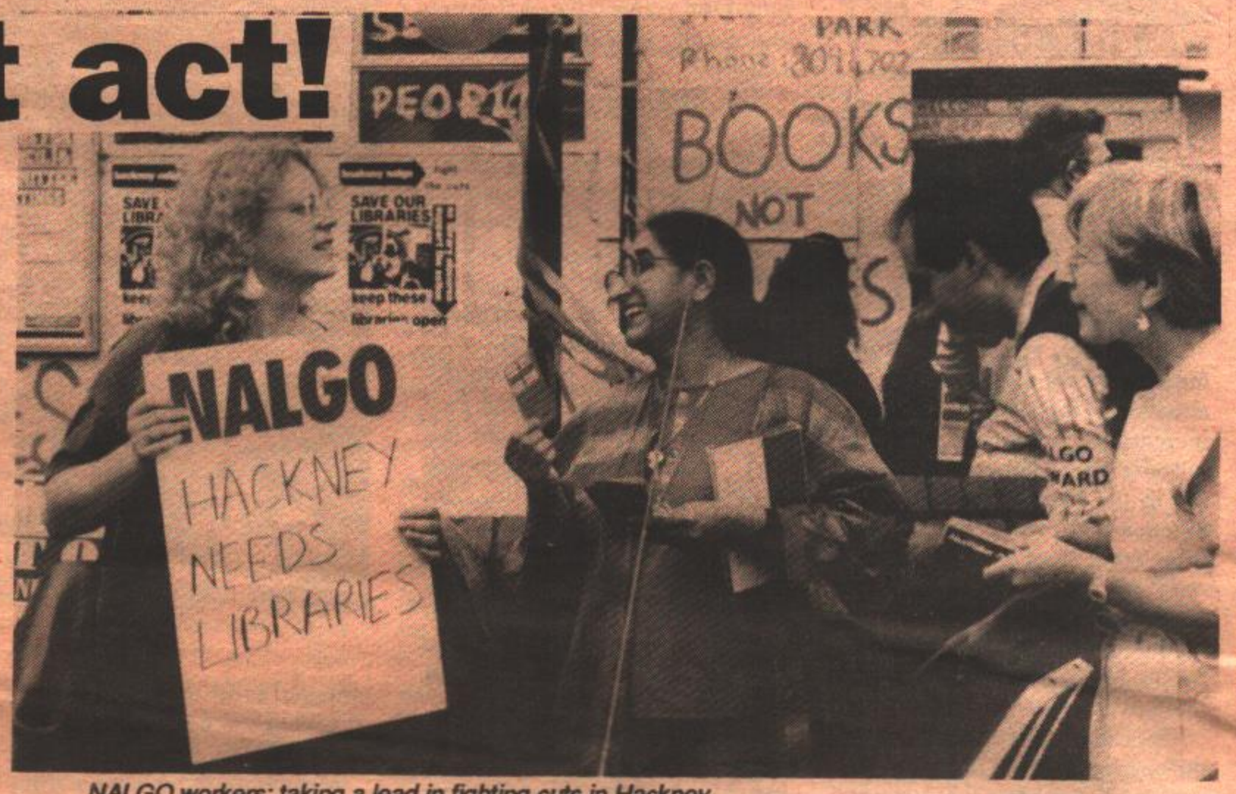


PHOTO: Martine Stead

NALGO workers: taking a lead in fighting cuts in Hackney.

Poll Tax Notes

Victory for Labour in Lewisham

Lewisham's Borough Local Government Conference began with the Leader of the Council, Steve Bullock stating that the Labour Group wouldn't follow those policies passed that it disagreed with.

Apparently the hundred delegates present weren't representative enough of the people of the borough!

The main victory of the conference was on the poll tax - support for the Lewisham Anti Poll Tax Union; for the Council to do the minimum possible to implement the tax; to cease fining people for non-registration and above all to *withdraw* the fines already imposed.

The hypocrisy of those Councillors who have supported the "implement as efficiently as possible" "fine people for not registering" positions was astounding — not one of them spoke.

The conference decision adds to the strong basis for the non-payment campaign that already exists in Lewisham. This can be built on, to stop the punishment of those not paying in April.

It strengthens the many anti-poll tax candidates selected for the Council elections.

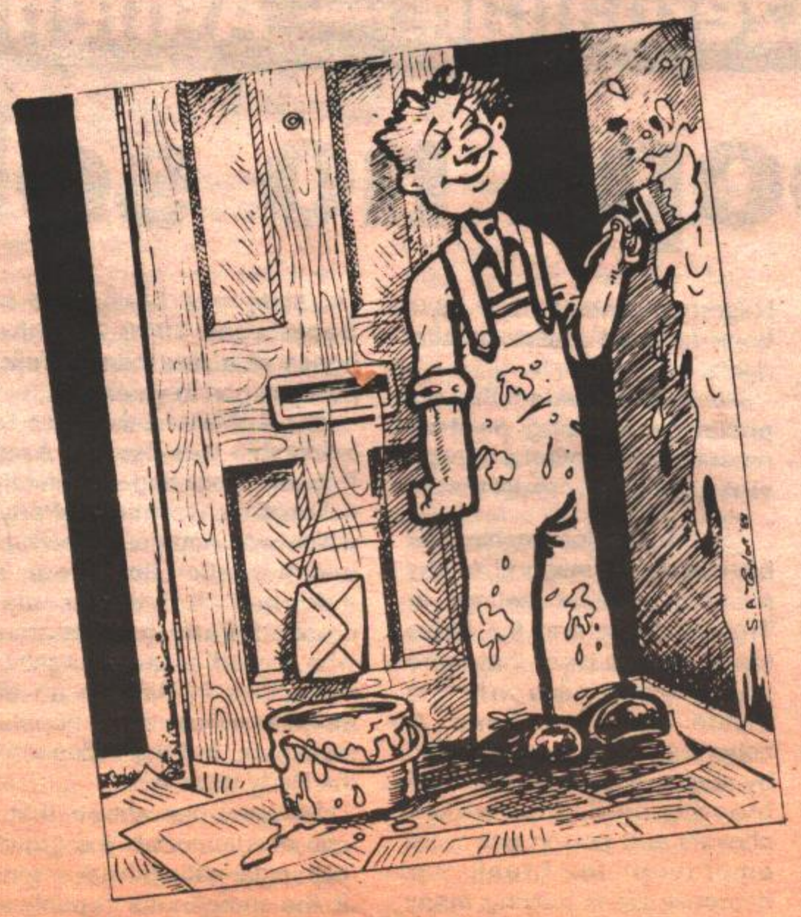
It gives those arguing for non-payment a chance to seize the initiative within the Labour Party and involve Party branches in the local estate and ward based campaigns.

By DAN CARTER

It shows that where mass campaigning is carried out,it does have a knock on effect in the Labour Party and shows there is still reason for the left to stay active in the Labour Party.

Saturday February 17th
12-2pm
Lewisham Clocktower

Mass petitioning and collection against the poll tax, organised by Lewisham Anti-Poll Tax Union.



NALGO members in England and Wales must now face the harsh realities behind "implementation of the Poll Tax" [above]; while campaigners hold their ground in Lewisham [left].

Maidenhead

Fighting the Poll Tax in the Tory heartlands

The very small group of organisers in Maidenhead were astonished when more than 600 people turned up to their public meeting on the Poll Tax.

The hall was full and it was necessary to hold an overflow meeting of more than one hundred people outside. Many more turned away when they found the hall full.

Why the big turn out? The predicted level of the tax per head, was £537, as compared with a current average rate level of £572 per household.

Although it may be nearer a mere £500, as a disenchanted Tory councillor commented: "People have an absolute right to be in uproar."

At the meeting, which was not organised by political activists but working class people outraged at the impact of this tax, there were speakers from accross the entire political spectrum.

There was much talk of the iniquities of the tax, but little on what to do, other than protesting to the government in order to get the level of payment lowered.

But lo and behold, the Chair of Windsor and Maidenhead Labour Party pulled no punches.

"Refusing to pay is not an option. It would be irresponsible to suggest to anyone that they should refuse to pay. It could land them in even further trouble and could ultimately lead them to being sent to prison."

By a Reading *Briefing* supporter

The solution? You guessed it — vote Labour at the next election.

One speaker from the floor declared himself a Tory for the last 28 years, but not after that evening.

The level of the tax in the "Royal Borough" has sent the local Tories screaming about "betrayal" and being "stabbed in the back" by the government.

The President of the local Board of Trade vehemently attacked the tax and has declared his intention of standing in the elections as a "No Poll Tax — restore local government" candidate!

A committee of 25 people came out of the meeting. It has agreed to link with the campaign in Reading, which was initiated by the Trades Council.

It also agreed to support the Thames Valley anti-Poll Tax conference being organised by the Reading campaign, for March 24th.