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

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40p

NO COMPROMISE! END APARTHEID!

KEEP UP THE STRUGGLE!



PHOTO: Graeme Cookson

British solidarity with the struggle in Southern Africa: keep it up!

No one watching Nelson Mandela walking free from Victor Vorster prison after 27 years in apartheid gaols can fail to have been moved.

The thousands of people there to welcome him, flying flags of the now unbanned ANC, were celebrating a truly historic event.

These scenes were repeated across the country in rallies of hundreds of thousands.

The celebration was not just about the freeing of a particular man. Mandela means more than this. His imprisonment was a symbol of an imprisoned people. In celebrating his release, they were looking forward to the coming freedom of all black South Africans.

However, while Mandela's release is cause for celebration, apartheid remains. The key laws are still in place, the state of emergency continues, there are still political prisoners.

But Mandela's release has raised the expectations of South African blacks. In his freedom they glimpse the end of apartheid. And it is in the process of turning these raised expectations into mass action that South Africa will become free.

In releasing Mandela, de Klerk is taking a gamble. He has not only given the black liberation movements room for manoeuvre, he has also encouraged the growth of the far right and the neo- fascists.

De Klerk hopes to defuse the situation by coming to a negotiated settlement with the ANC, which would hold back mass struggle by the blacks while being acceptable enough to the whites to marginalise the far right and the neo-fascists.

But is this possible? Will the inevitable compromise be acceptable to anyone but de Klerk?

By the *LABOUR BRIEFING* EDITORIAL BOARD

The ANC have welcomed the developments but decided against a unilateral ceasefire and set preconditions for negotiations: lifting the state of emergency, release of all political prisoners, end to all political trials, the withdrawal of troops from the townships, and repeal of "repressive legislation".

Mandela has also confirmed support for the armed struggle and the programme of the ANC. However, these statements are tempered by others that emphasise the need for "honourable compromise" and even implied that "one person, one vote" was negotiable.

Whatever Mandela actually meant, the black masses will settle for nothing short of the ending of apartheid, which means majority rule.

Socialists in this country must give unconditional support to the continuing struggle for liberation. In particular this means no let-up in the campaign for sanctions. Thatcher has never looked more isolated than she does now. The campaign for sanctions is both an act of solidarity with the struggle in South Africa and a direct attack on the Thatcher government and its continuing support for the apartheid regime.

Within the A-AM socialists should argue that the campaign must take its lead from the mass struggle against apartheid, regardless of the demands that any negotiations might put on the ANC leadership.

The struggle in South Africa will now continue apace. De Klerk has opened the floodgates and let loose a tide that will eventually sweep away both apartheid and the capitalist system it was created to support.

More on South Africa
See inside, p.15

LABOUR – TAKE THE POWER!

Letters

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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 28th if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

Flett on Veness on Healy

Dear *Briefing*

Keith Veness's obituary of Gerry Healy starts off well but ends on a much more questionable note.

Firstly, of course, Vanessa Redgrave's appalling justification of Healy's capitulation to Stalinism was not the only comment to appear in the Grauniad (sic). Jim Higgins piece was reasonable enough until it tried to suggest that Healy equals British Trotskyism and since the former is dead so must the latter be.

David Widgery's brief notice was much cut which is a pity since in the original it was much better than Higgins' effort.

My letter, as you would expect argued with Higgins and suggested that the British Trotskyist tradition was very much alive in the shape of the SWP. A point with which you will no doubt disagree.

So to Comrade Veness. Healy had "more than a few points in common with Ceausescu". Really? This is precisely the point that Walter Kendall made recently in *Tribune* in arguing that should Trotskyists ever achieve power they would be no better than Stalin.

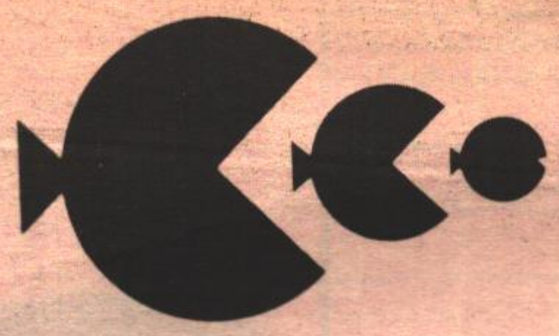
It is also, perhaps, an unconscious echo of Brian Behan's obituary in the *Independent* where he dwelt on Healy the person, rather than the revolutionary.

Anyway unless you wish to forsake the politics of Trotskyism altogether, which I presume you do not, may I suggest that Healy be analysed in terms of the politics of sectarianism rather than those of Stalinism.

In addition, particularly with regard to Eastern Europe, Marx's dictum that the "emancipation of the working class is the act of the working class is the act of the working class itself" might explain why Healy wandered so far from revolutionary politics — since he had clearly consigned such ideas to the dustbin of history very early on.

Keith Flett
Tottenham

Kim's Howeller



Dear *Briefing*,

I am writing on behalf of Cymdeithas yr Iaith Gymraeg (the Welsh Language Society) to express our disappointment with recent comments made by Kim Howells and Dai Smith, both spoken and written, regarding S4C and the "language zealots".

We also declare our superheat for those Cardiff students who have expressed their opposition to the insulting and anti-Welsh comments of the lecturer Dai Smith.

When recalling the proposals put forward by Cymdeithas yr Iaith during tea Fourth Channel campaign it is clear that their comets are directed in the wrong direction when attacking S4C and language campaigners.

Cymdeithas yr Iaith emphasised in its document demanding a channel, published in 1979, that:

"...the Welsh, both Welsh speaking and non-Welsh speaking, have a right to a full broadcasting service"

and further demanded:

"A comprehensive service for non-Welsh speakers in Wales that will include a wide choice of varied and quality programmes aiming to attract those viewers who presently direct their receivers at transmitter in England.

"In the short term the English service from Wales could be expanded by filling in the gaps left by the Welsh programmes when moved to a Fourth Channel."

It can be seen from the above that programmes from and about Wales for non-Welsh speakers had the support of the Channel campaigners.

We strongly believe that a service for non-Welsh speakers should not be introduced at the expense of Welsh speakers.

These two groups in Wales deserve the same rights and it must be emphasised that increasing the budgets if what is required, not taking money from S4C

A service for non-Welsh speakers is however essential and denying such a service is like suggesting that non-Welsh speakers in Wales are not an unique group with a history, culture, and interests of their own, that they are not "real Welsh people" because they cannot speak Welsh.

S4C as an establishment is of benefit to the whole of Wales. Welsh is not a language for one section of the Welsh people alone. Everyone in Wales has the right to listen to it and learn about it.

S4C is an important medium for the rapidly increasing numbers of Welsh learners, particularly in the very area that Kim Howells represents.

A demand for more funding from the government to improve the service for non-Welsh speakers and for an increase in programmes aimed directly at non-Welsh speakers on BBC and HTV, in addition to S4C, is what is required.

It is a naive idea to think that this is a battle between Welsh and non-Welsh speakers. The Fourth Channel was won through a consistent campaign against the government and not through prejudice against one section of society.

This brings me to Kim Howells' disgraceful claims about the Welsh "language zealots".

He accuses those ready to defend the language of drunkenness, "...fortified by alcohol...", of being elitist philistines and of being a "...poison which threatens to corrupt what is unique and special about Wales..."?

Worst still we have the following statement:

"...they [the programme controllers] should encourage all of the people of Wales to celebrate and develop our diverse, multilingual culture before it downs in the Soaps or breaks apart in the hands of the language zealots."

Therefore the Welsh language campaigners will be responsible for the breaking apart of Welsh culture!

Not the enormous pressure of Anglo-American culture. Not the lowly status of Wales within the UK.

Not the economic destruction of the Thatcher years that is destroying our communities and forcing our youth to leave Wales in their thousands looking for work.

Not holiday homes and not tourism and all the fake culture that goes with it.

Indeed it is noticeable that th article fails to criticise the Tories in any way.

Yet it is they who are primarily responsible for denying non-Welsh speakers their rights by refusing them a service when S4C was established, contrary to the wishes of the channel campaigners.

If you, Kim Howells, are serious about extending and developing broadcasting in Wales by winning additional funding to provide a service for non-Welsh speakers we can but raise our voices to agree.

You should, however, put an end to your vicious attacks on Welsh speakers and Welsh language campaigners.

If you wish to win such a battle you must be clear about where you will find your allies and who exactly is your enemy.

Make the wrong choice and Margaret "We all speak British" Thatcher will be glad of your company.

Yours,
Branwen Miles
Cymdeithas yr iaith

CONTACT BRIEFING

Articles and correspondence should be sent to *Labour Briefing*, PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY. The *Briefing* Editorial Board, Trade Union Briefing, Briefing Women, the Briefing Economics Commission, and International Briefing can be contacted at PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY, 01 809 3927:

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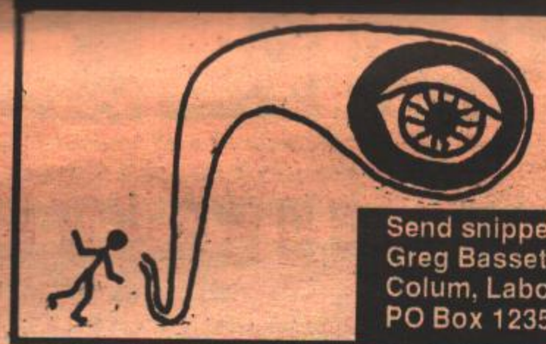
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Greg Bassett, Periscope Colum, Labour Briefing,
PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY.

On the right track?

The Railway Inspectorate's Annual Report, which came out just before Xmas, makes horrifying reading.

The Report, for 1988, was six months late because of "exceptional pressure".

During 1988, 300 railway staff and contractors suffered major injuries (including deaths), as compared with 160 in 1984. In the same period the total number of "non-movement" injuries rose from 24 to 133.

The report reveals that at one time during 1988 there were only seven railway inspectors in post out of a complement of 15.

Of the 51 planned inspections of new works, only 26 were carried out.

Only 748 inspections of temporary and fixed work sites were carried out in that year, compared with 1,240 the year before.

The growing use of subcontractors means that more non-railway staff are being killed and injured. The Report commented that the "contractual delegation of responsibility for their own safety is a matter of concern to the Inspectorate."

The inspectorate is today up to full strength — 16 people to cover the entire network!



Six of one?

The council candidate selection process is going well in Hackney. So far only around 30 people have put their names forward — for a total of 60 council seats.

Local Tories are having a field day since they got hold of a letter sent to all GC delegates by the LGC secretary predicting a Tory victory in 1990 if no one else stood.

So is there really a chance of a Tory Hackney Council by default? More to the point, would anyone in Hackney notice the difference.

80% of the other

More fun and games in Hackney... With the close of Poll Tax registration less than 80% of those elegible to pay have been registered. And that's after using all manner of personal records to put the register together, including housing benefit and DSS data.

This, of course, is just the sort of abuse of civil liberties which interests the NCCL. So Hackney Against the Poll Tax are putting a case together. This should prove to be ideal for Andrew Puddephat, new general secretary of the NCCL, to cut his teeth on. Until he started the job, comrade Puddephat was leader of Hackney Council.

Should prove to be an interesting case.

Out on a Limb?

The London leg of the CLPD AGM, (they tour the country like the fast disappearing Dr. Owen's SDP) passed almost uneventfully.

The 30 or so comrades routinely passed motions sectarian to the Socialist Movement and in defence of the block vote, slagging off *Briefing* for daring to question this "pillar of class democracy".

However, the last debate of the afternoon on annual leadership elections saw the *Socialist Action* grouping roundly defeated despite a heartfelt appeal by John Ross.

John was clearly very emotional about this setback and unfortunately slipped and fell leaving the gents loo, suffering a broken ankle in the process. We do sincerely hope John has a speedy recovery.

Commenting on the disaster, Greg Basset said:

"I had always thought that John Ross never had a leg to stand on.

"But obviously, when the Chair said it was time for a break in the Conference, he felt he had to do the decent thing."

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Poll Tax: New Realists, no response!

With the recent rumour, first admitted then denied by the DoE, that 110 Councils were up for Poll Tax capping, both the Poll Tax and the capping procedure are looking more and more embarrassing for the Tories.

In trying to play a game in which the government won't tell them the rules, Labour Councils in London and the cities are falling over themselves to make cuts and keep within whatever guidelines they imagine the DoE to be using.

Ironically, the fight to oppose the Tax seems to have moved out to the shires. Even some Tory Councils, like Surrey, are making no-cuts statements, and "Royal" Berkshire is taking the government to court over its "unrealistic" needs assessment.

If the Tory government goes ahead and caps 110 Authorities, the ensuing confusion, with all the Poll Tax demands in these areas declared invalid, would give a huge boost to anti-Poll Tax campaigners.

If the net is drawn tighter and a smaller number of Authorities are capped, it is difficult to see how Chris Patten could pick off his traditional enemies and leave his friends unscathed, even with his pernicious "differential grouping" proposals. His stated criteria for Poll Tax capping — growth budgets and cash reserves — hardly apply to the traditional "high spenders".

Any Labour Authority which is Poll Tax capped will find staying within the law impossible. Either they break their statutory responsibilities, elderly, the sick, and the homeless; or they break the financial constraints imposed by the Tory government.

The day that Poll Tax capping is announced, Poll Tax campaigners must begin to mobilise against the cuts, and expose the bankruptcy of New Realism, and to force Councils into confrontation. Only in this way will the Poll Tax be consigned to the dustbin of history.

For a United, Socialist Germany!

Today the German question lies at the heart of the political recomposition of Europe.

The right to self-determination for the German people is crucial. The population's desire for unity, for the undoing of the criminal division of their country, is being more and more vociferously expressed.

The national question has become inextricably bound up in the historic changes now underway in East Germany.

However, the real battle lies over what form German re-unification will take.

Will it be the annexation of the East by the West, carried out over the heads of the people in the interests of West German capital, as proposed in the Kohl plan?

Or will it be carried out in the interests of the mass of the people, involving them at every step?

Will it defend the gains made by workers in the East in the areas of job security, employment rights etc, levelling up democratic rights and welfare provision across the country, and taking Germany out of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact?

This is what socialists must be fighting for: for a united, socialist Germany, not a greater, capitalist Germany.

This is the objective of socialists, both in solidarity with the German workers, and because a united, neutral Germany could herald the break up of the military blocs which have weighed so heavy on *all* the peoples of Europe since 1945.

Embryo Bill: build a socialist offensive!

The offensive on women's rights and the family launched by the Right around the Embryo Bill is now well underway.

The Lords Committee Stage saw the defeat of the idea that "life" begins at conception as they voted to allow controlled Embryo Research up to 14 days, while Lady Saltoun's attempt to prohibit access to DI by unmarried women fell by the narrowest margin.

However, the central questions of equal access to DI and abortion rights remain under threat. Women's ability to control their own bodies are being assailed from all sides.

The campaign against these attacks, in defence of all women's rights must be a priority for socialists in the coming months. This campaign must be as broad and dynamic as possible, drawing in new layers of women and labour movement activists.

The Week of Action on a woman's right to choose organised for the week of the 3rd-11th March will play a key role in building and strengthening the campaign as well as providing a welcome current, political content to International Women's Week.

Briefing supporters should be getting involved in and building this campaign at all levels. There are many battles to come.

Behind the headlines

The Colin Wallace affair:

The scandals multiply

Six years after he first sent a dossier on the issue to Margaret Thatcher, Colin Wallace's allegations about dirty tricks campaigns in the 70s have finally burst into the public arena.

First, there are the substantial allegations.

These include army/MI5 disinformation and "black propaganda" against leading politicians in the North of Ireland; the use of the Kincora boys' home "sex scandal" for blackmail purposes; the planting of bombs and the use of fake press and CIA cards.

In Britain there was a "black propaganda" campaign against leading members of the Labour government under Wilson aimed, at the very least, at destabilising it.

Second, there is the question: who was behind this and why?

This was no one-off operation by maverick spooks. Ken Livingstone has correctly pointed to the likely involvement of Tory MP Airey Neave.

This suggests that Margaret Thatcher and others in the Tory hierarchy had knowledge of the operations, if not actual involvement.

Third, there is the government's claim that "it has not since the mid-1970s been the policy to disseminate disinformation in Northern Ireland designed to denigrate individuals and/or organisations or for propaganda purposes."

Few people believe that. Duncan Campbell has revealed that he has seen more than ten such disinformation reports covering 1974-88, mostly concerning Ireland.

Fourth, there may be far murkier aspects of the scandal waiting to be exposed. One is a South Africa connection. Another is possible British involvement in actual bombings in Ireland and England.

By Piers Mostyn Holborn & St. Pancras CLP

Fifth, there is the question: why is all this coming out now? As with the Stalker and Guildford affairs, answering this is difficult.

Though, as Brian Sedgemore MP put it, "No one in their right mind believes that this information has come to light because of a re-examination of departmental papers".

Another clue is that the new Official Secrets Act 1989 is about to come into effect. This contains an absolute prohibition on the disclosure by former, existing or future secret service personnel of any information about the security services.

Under it Wallace could be threatened with years in prison. Anyone wanting to spill the beans would be advised to do so now.

Finally, there is the Tory cover-up. Thatcher and Co. have effectively admitted to lying on the issue for three years.

As the *Irish Post* put it: "Ken Livingstone has asked 350 parliamentary questions on the subject since 1987, that must mean that 350 lies were told in response".

Reactions to the affair have been predictable.

The Tory right state there is "evidence of subversion" but that if there is, it's justified.

The government aims to wall off, depoliticise and limit damage. This will be difficult given the logic of Livingstone's allegations and the fact that the Prime Minister has overall responsibility for the security and intelligence services.

The Labour leadership and the centre have called for a plethora of inquiries.

In the light of revelations that army disinformation in the 70s included activities relating to the Widgery Inquiry into the Bloody Sunday shootings and of criticism of David Calcutt's handling of the inquiry into the Cyprus "sex for secrets" affair — the less said about inquiries the better.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Ken Livingstone

As usual it has been left to socialists, Paul Foot and Ken Livingstone, to uncover the dirt and pursue the issues with vigour.

Their campaign should receive the widest possible exposure in the labour movement.

Socialist Movement

The year ahead

After a period of consolidation, the Socialist Movement is moving forward into the nineties with an important series of initiatives.

First and foremost will be our contribution to the development of a sustained network of international contacts.

By Richard Kuper
Socialist Movement
Steering Committee

There could not be a better opportunity for organising dialogue, solidarity and joint initiatives between democratic and anti-capitalist movements East and West.

Speakers

February will see two mini-tours with speakers from the Russian socialist trades union movement, SOTSPROF, and the Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution).

In addition, we are co-operating with others to raise funds for SOTSPROF to help them acquire printing and other resources they need.

The Agenor Group is convening a meeting in Brussels this Spring to bring together left socialists from many European countries. This, together with other activities planned for later this year, will feed into preparations for our major conference in November around the theme "After the Cold War — The International Future for the Left".

Discussion

The Europe Policy Group is finalising a substantial discussion document which will be widely circulated.

It highlights the issues which have now emerged high on the agenda — German reunification and disarmament in particular — and elaborates the goals we should now be working towards.

A new democratic security system for the whole of Europe, a Europe-wide economy with social pluralism and finally, but of supreme importance, a new relationship with the Third World.

While European developments are currently the most exciting, other areas of work are not being neglected.

Building

We are involved in building the fight against New Realism, in the Labour Party and the trades unions, campaigning against the Embryology Bill, while in Scotland, there is the practical consideration of constitutional issues which have barely reached the agenda south of the border.

The second Green and Socialist Conference is taking place on 24th/25th March in London. It will be an important opportunity to explore a much wider red-green co-operation than we have at present.

For while there are differences in philosophy and outlook between Reds and Greens, there are many areas of overlap. We all see the interlinked nature of the problems we face, we all stress the radical democratisation as part of the solution; there is a shared commitment to internationalism.

There are also many practical areas of co-operation — campaigning for health and safety, public utilities — and we have no doubt that if we can work together on the ground, many of the issues which can be exaggerated into wider divisions between us will fall into their proper perspective.

So too in work in the Labour Party and in the trade unions, our aim is to encourage co-operation and the emergence of wider networks of people engaged in campaigning for socialist alternatives.

Labour's retreat from socialist commitment is almost complete and it is crucial that discussion of and campaigning for socialist ideas and alternatives does not get bogged down in the electoralist politics which are currently so prevalent.

Unites

What unites the left is infinitely greater than what divides it; a Socialist Movement which concentrates on forging new links in an open and democratic way has an immense contribution to make.

Labour Party Socialists

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

Saturday, March 3rd: next Open Planning Meeting, Sheffield.
Saturday, April 7th: CLPs conference, Wakefield.
Saturday/Sunday May 19-20th: LPS Conference, Sheffield.

To contact Labour Party Socialists for speakers, literature etc, write to:
Labour Party Socialists,
PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UD.

MODEL RESOLUTION ON THE "FIELDS INQUIRY"

This CLP condemns the Field dossier and the NEC inquiry launched in response to it as a diversion from the central task of fighting the Tories, especially given the forthcoming local elections in May.

We further condemn the release of the dossier to the capitalist media, the unwarranted intrusion into people's personal lives contained in the document, and the proven factual inaccuracies contained therein.

Given the NEC decision to proceed with an inquiry, we call for all Party organisations and members who are subject to accusations in the dossier to be provided with all material relating to them and to be given the right of reply.

We oppose: any suspension of the Labour Party bodies in the course of, or as a result of, the inquiry; any imposition of Parliamentary candidates by the NEC on CLPs where the selection procedure has been properly carried out; any expulsion of Party members for their political views.

Copies of the resolution to be sent to:
Labour Party NEC c/o Walworth Rd., London SE17 1JT.
Wirral District Labour Party, c/o the Secretary, Rob Donald, 224 Allport Rd., Merseyside, L63 OHD.

The miracle that never was

The Tories' "economic miracle" has officially ended.

It is now clear that Thatcher's obsession with monetarism and the free market has failed to revamp Britain's ailing economy.

Certain sections of the ruling class are returning to more traditional approaches to keeping down wages as unit costs rise and productivity rates begin to fall.

Talk of either "productivity agreements" or even a return to the "incomes policy" method of the 70s has featured in the financial pages of the bourgeois press.

Though these two approaches are different, both differ considerably from the "firm by firm" approach to wages and costs that is the sense of free market theory.

The free market theory preaches survival of the fittest through creating the necessary competitive climate which along with slackness in the labour market will drive wage levels down.

Thatcherism has been unable to defeat significantly the working class, although Tory policies have certainly taken their toll.

As rates of accumulation began to pick up in 86/87 and the labour market, particularly in the South East, tightened, workers slowly began to grow in confidence as the ruling class was left with less room for manoeuvre.

The increased integration of Britain's economy into Western Europe has meant that the old option of resorting to inflation becomes less effective as a method of protecting profit margins.

Thus, recent hysteria in the press, particularly when it seemed very possible that Ford workers were about to reject a 10% plus offer, is about fears of a knock on effect among trade unions which would establish a "going rate" that weaker sections of British capital will not be able to resist.

Sections of the ruling class, particularly those in the manufacturing sector, are ditching any remaining attachments to abstractions such as the "money supply" or the "PSBR", which were a feature of capitalist economics in the early 80s, and once again starting



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Neil Kinnock

to point the finger at the organised working class *directly*.

But, what is the link between wages, productivity and inflation? To begin with, it is certainly true

By Martin Allen

that one way of increasing both profits and productivity is to hold down wages.

Marx's early writings on economics concentrated on this, along with how capitalists attempted to lengthen the working day to increase rates of exploitation.

But, a brief look at the leading advanced capitalist economies clearly points to the importance of levels of investment — the introduction and continual replacement of "labour saving" machinery as Marx called it.

In fact, wages in Britain are only on average 70% that of West Germany and well below levels in the USA and Japan.

If investment levels are taken into account, then it is possible to see increases in productivity, profits *and* wage levels in particular capitalist economies, although this situation in the short term does nothing to disprove Marx's theory of a long term declining rate of profit.

The British ruling class continues to be way behind the West Germans and the Japanese in their investment programmes and in the use of scientific methods to alter the way in which production processes take place.

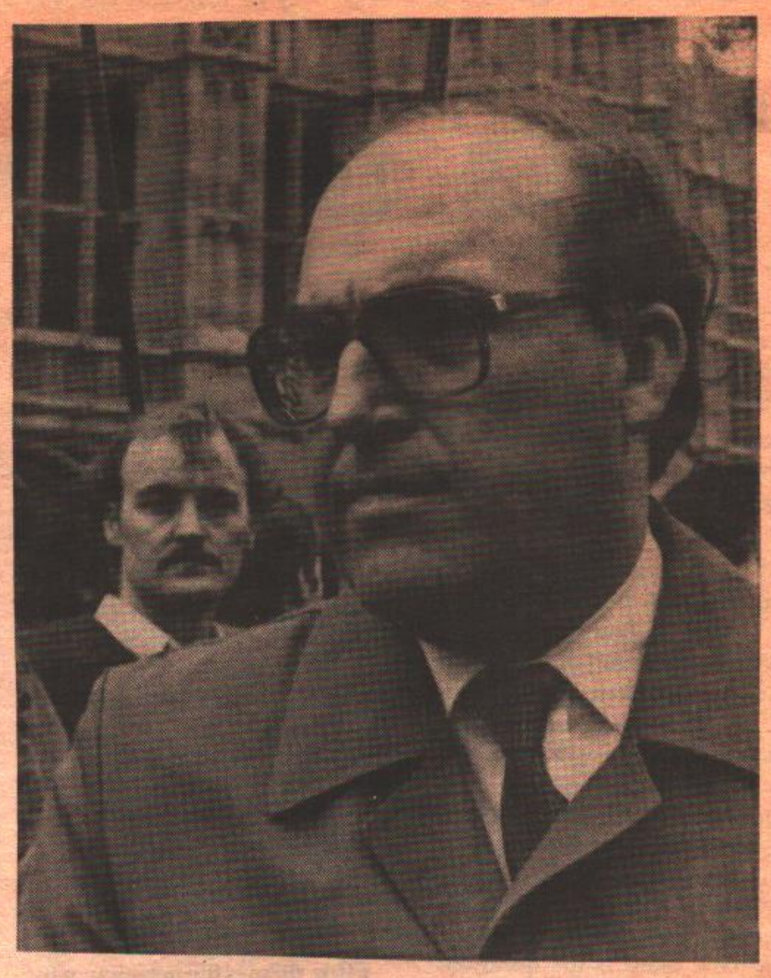
This long term feature of British capitalism is accompanied by the fact that vast amounts of capital continue to be invested overseas.

In the first eight years of the Thatcher government, direct and portfolio investment overseas reached a staggering £140 billion, while domestic investment, apart from a short period of time when the economy was pulling out of the slump, has remained low, and in fact has fallen to about 6% of total expenditure.

Failure to deal with the "supply side" of the manufacturing economy has resulted in the British capitalists being relatively exposed to pressures from organised labour.

In fact, the high levels of organisation among the working class have traditionally led the resistance to attempts to bring in new methods of production.

Britain remains a *high cost, low value* capitalism, sandwiched between the most sophisticated and capital intensive economies of Japan and West Germany and the sweat shops of the labour intensive "newly industrialised" countries.



John Smith

The "mini-boom" of Nigel Lawson's chancellorship has been replaced by the "stagflation" (low growth and creeping inflation) of the current period.

The British economy continues to "overheat" quickly and at increasingly higher levels of unemployment.

Kinnock and John Smith may rattle on about regenerating manufacturing and making Labour the "Party of production" but, though the ruling class have little to fear from their economic policies, Kinnock's mild dose of Keynsian interventionism is unlikely to do anything to change the basic structure of the British economy.

In the meantime it is the working class that will again be asked to pay for the crisis.

Week of Action on the Embryology Bill

Round-up of events

Birmingham

Public Meeting, Tuesday 6 March, Mew Imperial Hotel, 7.30pm.

Demonstration, Saturday 10 March, Assemble 11am, Chamberlain Sq.

Bristol

Demonstration, Saturday 10 March, 11.30pm.

Canterbury

Demonstration, Saturday 10 March, 2pm.

Edinburgh

Contact Edinburgh Campaign for Choice, 031 556 7318.

Glasgow

Demonstration, Thursday 8 March, assemble Blytheswood Sq, 6.30pm. March to rally in George Square.

London

Mass lobby of Parliament for equal access to donor insemination, Thursday 8 March, 2pm onwards. Followed by CADI/LCLGR/NUS Rally 6pm, House of Commons.

STAC Rally in Central Hall Westminster, 7pm.

Brent NAC Public Meeting, 7.30pm in the Irish Centre.

North West London action at the Marie Stopes Clinic on Saturday 10 March.

Hackney STA-FCC Public Meeting, Tuesday 6 March.

South London groups are planning an open-air rally on Saturday 10 March in Brixton.

Manchester

Demonstration, Saturday 10 March, Assemble 11am, All Saints.

Nottingham

NAC Public Meeting, Monday 5 March, 7.30pm, ICC, Mansfield Rd.

Scotland

STUC Women's Committee are organising activities in Dundee and Stirling.

STAC National Organising Committee
Saturday 3rd March
Wesley House

STAC Steering Group meets every monday at 6pm at Wesley House.

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Half proceeds to "Birmingham 6"

Ambulance Support Groups

Keep pressure on the TUC!

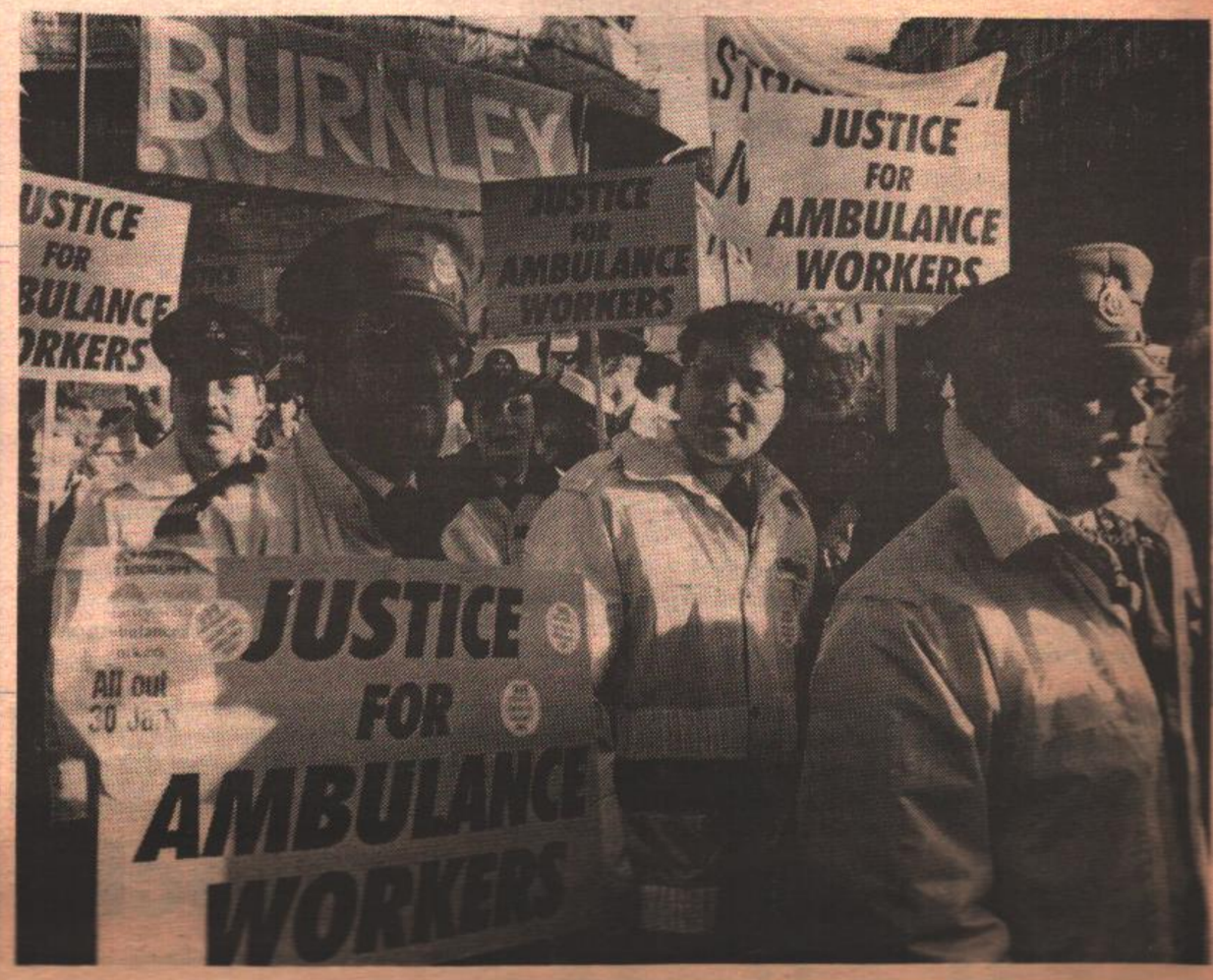
With the ambulance dispute deadlocked as it enters its sixth month, it is timely to look afresh at the unions' tactics and the role of Support Groups.

In one sense, Ambulance Support Groups are superfluous.

The ambulance workers themselves have had no problem in mobilising public opinion — and, more vitally, cash — to support them over the last 25 weeks.

But many of those active in the Support Groups which have sprung up around the country embody a wealth of experience in solidarity work going back to the miners' strike.

By Mike Phipps
Greenwich Ambulance Workers Support Group



Solidarity with the ambulance workers on January 30th: organised Support Groups are vital to the success of every dispute.

Mobilising public opinion is not enough: it is necessary to build links with sections of workers prepared to take supporting industrial action.

In Woolwich, the Ambulance Workers Support Group was set up in November 1989. It played a key role in getting ambulance workers into workplaces to explain their grievances and in raising the issue in the local labour movement.

Before the January 30th Day of Action, we contacted scores of workplaces to ask for support for the local demonstration. On the day, over 2,000 people turned out on the biggest rally in Woolwich for several years.

Besides organising solidarity, Support Groups are a key forum for discussion about where the dispute is going.

In no other framework is it possible for rank and file union activists to discuss with ambulance workers the tactics of a dispute we all want to win.

The complex nature of the struggle is rarely appreciated. Weak union leadership has meant that ambulance workers in many regions are taking little or no action in support of the claim.

In others, management are soft-pedalling by paying all staff full pay even though only 999 calls are being answered.

Now Manchester is the latest area to join London and others in actively dissociating itself from management in the control room and deciding on its own level of service provision. This elementary form of workers' control is the key to maximum involvement and moving forward to full strike action.

London

Support Groups get organised

Sixty five people from 24 support groups and crews from ten ambulance stations attended the first joint delegates meeting of London Ambulance Workers' Support Groups and ambulance stations.

The very positive meeting, on February 13th, was initiated by Hackney Support Group.

Glynn Powell from North West London NUPE led off a discussion on the current state of the dispute.

He said that although the idea of a London-only deal had been easily defeated at a stewards meeting, there was still a lot of support for it amongst the rank and file together with the danger of a drift back to work.

What could make the difference would be further solidarity action after the success of January 30th, and the London stewards meeting had been virtually unanimous in calling on the TUC for further action.

Reports from Support Groups showed an unevenness across London.

By Pete Firmin
Brent Ambulance Workers Support Group

Many groups have a large, regular attendance of ambulance workers and strong links with workplaces. For instance, in Hammersmith there is a Support Group in the hospital as well as the Borough-wide group.

However, there are still a few areas where the ambulance workers are wary of working with Support Groups.

Some of the successes of the 30th were reported, such as the walk-out by 2000 BBC staff, and Groups are trying to build on this by strengthening and extending links with workplaces.

The danger of a sell-out by the union leaderships remains. Clarke is still intransigent, and the union leaders are not willing to mobilise the wider movement or confront the anti-union laws on secondary action.

The London meeting agreed that the main focus needs to be a drive for such action.

It agreed to mobilise for the lobby of the TUC on Wednesday 28th February calling for a one-day strike, and to combine this with resolutions through workplaces/union branches calling on union executives to take this up.

Further co-ordination was agreed through a bulletin of all London Support Groups to be produced in the next few weeks and the possibility of a mass rally being organised in central London.

Delegate

The next delegate meeting will take place on Tuesday March 6th (venue to be notified) to assess the success of the lobby and discuss further initiatives.

A member of the Socialist Movement Trade Union Steering Committee asked that Support Groups raise with ambulance workers the possibility of holding a national conference of ambulance workers and support groups, which received general sympathy.

A discussion also took place about how further solidarity action could be called if the TUC failed to do so. It was generally felt that, while this was essential, it could only be called by the ambulance workers themselves.

It was reported that the London stewards had agreed to start to call for solidarity action if the TUC will not and hoped to co-ordinate this with similar calls in other regions.

The immediate tasks are:

- to strengthen the Support Groups and their links with ambulance workers and workplaces;
- to get the largest possible lobby of the TUC General Council on February 28th (especially of ambulance workers in uniform);
- to put pressure on the unions by flooding them with resolutions for further action.

Labour Party

Ealing

Council gives in to Tory pressure

If there was any doubt left in anyone's mind that the 1986 manifesto is now a dead letter in Ealing, the latest round of budget cuts must have removed it.

A thoroughly political package of "savings" was sold to both Labour Councillors and Labour Party members on the local government committee as financially necessary.

This time it is the commitment to equal opportunities that has suffered, as the budgets of the race equality and women's units have been attacked, and the police unit slashed by more than half.

Many of the gains made in 1986 have been savaged. There have also been cuts in front line service areas like education and highways maintenance.

By Bob Wood
Ealing Southall CLP

Some of the cuts in capital expenditure, such as abandoning all energy conservation measures, do not even make financial sense and will actually cost the Council more in the long term.

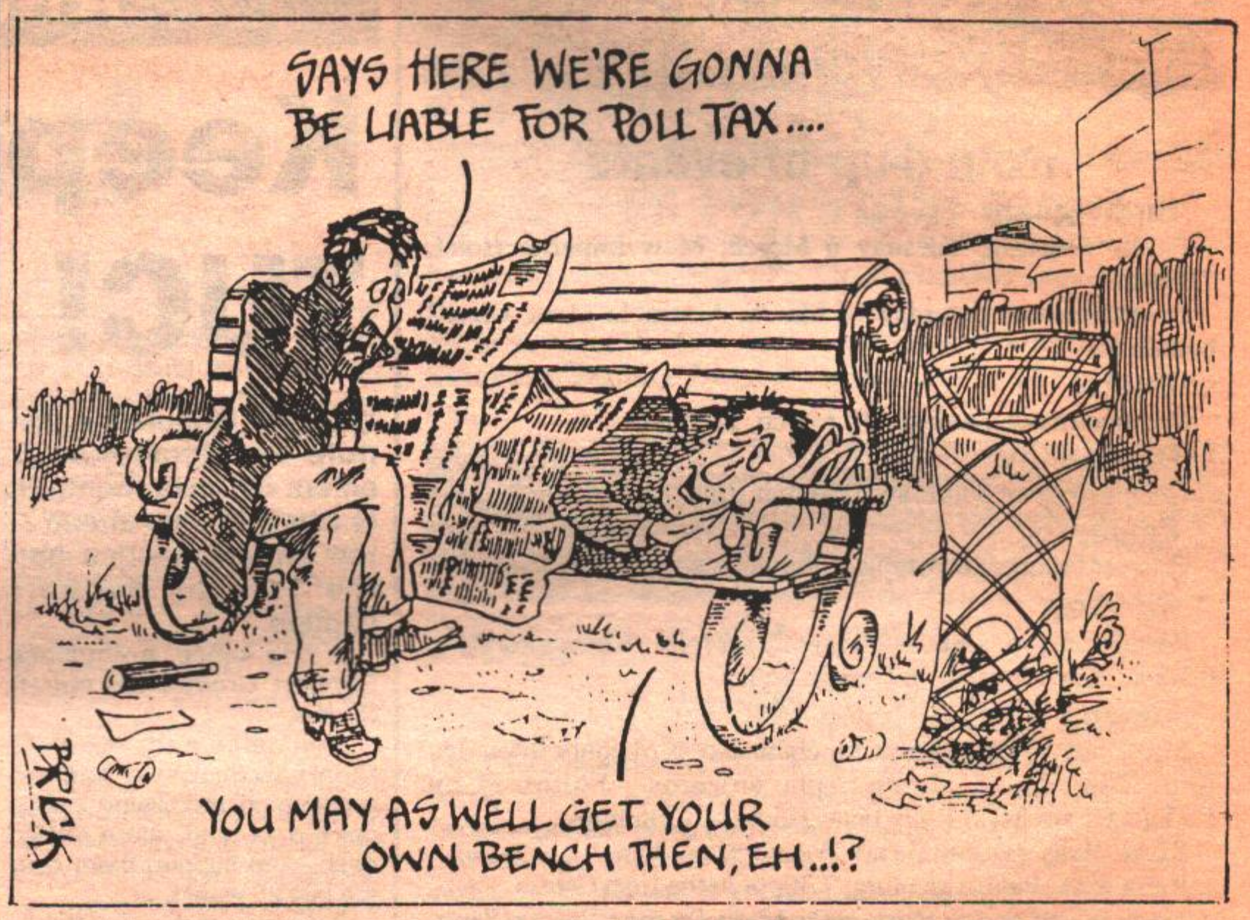
Clearly acting on the advice of finance officers, a decision was taken to avoid Poll Tax capping at any cost.

A package of cuts in the region of £6m was eventually agreed, but this was not enough for the more voracious right wingers who demanded further cuts with the aim of bringing the budget to only 12.5% above the government determined "needs assessment".

A small group of Councillors opposed the cuts as they did last year, with the support of the left in the Party. And one committee chair, unable to stomach the latest round of cuts, has announced his resignation.

Ealing Fightback is organising a lobby of the Council meeting at 6.30pm on Tuesday 27th February outside Ealing Town Hall, to protest against this latest attack on Ealing residents.

Fightback will be demonstrating together with Ealing Against the Poll Tax Campaign — Ealing Council has been more concerned with the efficient administration of the Poll Tax than opposing it.



Newham

Countering an attack of the Hodges

Is your Council talking in abstract terms about how to implement the Poll Tax in a "caring" way?

Do you spend all your time arguing against the "do the Tories' dirty work for them" line so strictly adhered to by Margaret Hodge and others?

You may find that when talking about policies involving attacks on Council workers and the local community, attention can be focused wonderfully by discussing the consequences in direct concrete terms, rather than abstractly around "cuts" and "prosecutions".

By Charli Langford
Bow & Poplar CLP

If we adopt the "minimal hardship" policy, prosecutions will become concrete around July 1st as the poorest people, those least able to pay the Poll Tax, will be robbed by the local Labour bailiffs. The cuts question is concrete immediately.

the question "who will be sacked?" is being answered by Newham Labour Council now.

In a 22-page report to the Labour Group Newham Director of Finance Tony Elliston and Central Policy Head Tony McBrearty identify at least 550 job cuts in addition to the cuts lists already being prepared by the Chief Officers.

The cuts are almost all in white collar jobs — manual jobs have been cut to the bone or contracted out already.

McBrearty and Elliston are very clear that the cuts are to be achieved by "a very significant number of staff being made redundant", and "the opportunity is taken to weed out non-performers and under-achievers" (the Newham NALGO leadership are based in the areas with the highest cuts).

"In some cases this will involve making staff redundant by the beginning of April 1990."

The Report contains a number of comments indicative of the authors' attitudes to cuts.

•On community centres: "Members may need to ask whether they really feel it is appropriate to support drinking clubs from public funds".

•On Working Parties: "These are Member hobbies."

•On Docklands Planning: "The Council is not the planning authority for Docklands."

•On the DLO: "must include the removal of traditional demarcation lines ... the move towards consolidation of pay needs to be looked at very critically in terms of its effect on productivity." (I.e., having low pay and bonuses makes them work far harder.)

•On Meals on Wheels and Home Helps: "The introduction of charges needs to be considered."

The job cuts identified are 320 relevant to NALGO (in a branch of 1800) and 220 to the NUT (with around 900 teachers employed by the Borough).

The Report indicates cuts but gives no figures in Benefit Administration, Drivers, and Management Administration. The DLO, Cleaning, Building, Maintenance, and Catering services are contracted out.

The Report demands a 10% increase in productivity, which translates as less staff or lower pay for the same amount of work.



Newham is working on a first year Poll Tax of around £390 (information: Newham NALGO).

So when your Councillors or Labour Party carpetbaggers start talking about charging each adult living locally the sum of money many of them spend on their fourth winter break, ask them some concrete questions.

What happens if we decide to implement the Poll Tax?

What happens in the two years before 1992?

Which individuals will our Labour Council sack?

How will the hardship of their job loss be minimised?

How will the Council operate with its workforce on strike against 30% redundancies (or whatever).

Will we send the bailiffs against the poorest among us when the Tories tell us to?

And why can't we fight with local people and Council workers against the government, instead of with the government in 1992.

Or we might not *get* a Labour government in 1992.

Local Government Conference

No ideas on Poll Tax

Only one speaker at Labour's local government conference in Cardiff on February 10-11th raised the possibility of Labour councils refusing to implement the Poll Tax.

His reward was first hisses, then chants of "lunacy" and ultimately a slow handclap.

Seconds after Cllr. Clive Walder (East Sussex) stepped off the podium, it was announced that Neil Kinnock had entered the hall. His mere arrival was greeted with a standing ovation.

By EDWARD DAVIES

Those few minutes said it all.

Those who shouted down Walder but claim to be opposed to the Poll Tax could have at least come up with some coherent counter-proposals. They had none.

Islington leader and chair of the Association of London Authorities, Margaret Hodge, even admitted that Labour's opposition so far had been worthless:

"The shouting about the Poll Tax in the corridors of Westminster has ended and nothing has changed," she said.

Precisely. That is why Walder was right.

Even accepting the limits of Kinnockite politics, laying out a clear alternative in Cardiff could have won tens of thousands of votes in the local elections on May 3rd.

What we got was Bryan Gould's "range of options" based on a list of "key principles" couched in deliberately vague terms.

The proposed new tax will be calculated on the market value of homes — both owned and rented — but only charged according to ability to pay.

This would mean either extensive rebating and means testing, or the use of income tax data to assess liability. People on low incomes are not exempt.

Labour has bought the Tory argument that everyone, no matter how little they possess, should pay something for local government in the name of accountability. Suddenly the ballot box is not enough.

You may even have to pay a Poll Tax bill or two under the next Labour government.

David Blunkett told the press that the tax would be introduced "without undue delay", conceding that this may mean "a couple of years".

The closing ceremony was the weekend's saving grace. Even Kinnock had rewritten his keynote speech to take in the release of Mandela while studiously avoiding any endorsement of the armed struggle.

A Welsh choir came on stage to sing the Red Flag, but the colours of the standards raised high were black, green and gold. Not a few councillors left the hall with tears in their eyes — perhaps a reminder of why they call themselves socialists.

Leeds

Bureaucrats cling on

By GARTH FRANKLAND

Parliamentary reselections in Yorkshire, like those in the rest of Britain, have seen a series of liberal Kinnockites returned.

East Leeds CLP selected George Mudie (as predicted in the columns of *Labour Briefing* 12 months ago) — with over 88% of the electoral college vote.

The size of his victory (and that of others in Yorkshire) is probably due to the actions of full time and in the main unelected trade union officials.

The trade union side of the electoral college is decided by the Regional Officials according to Neil Kinnock's own resolution carried by the Labour Party NEC.

To avoid any real conflict or change, the full-time officials of the major unions in Yorkshire and Humberside have allocated the seats between the different unions. Candidates chosen in this way obtain practically the whole of the 40% vote.

George Mudie, long time NUPE hack, was their choice for East Leeds. Unfortunately, the left failed to get together to present a credible alternative. A round of local Council reselections followed the same uneventful course.

But while the bureaucrats cling on to their positions, the class struggle continues.

Labour Briefing supporters have been working within the local Anti-Poll Tax Federation to organise a highly successful lobby of the Leeds Labour Group.

The left Councillors almost found themselves popular as the shouted slogans penetrated the normally somnambulant Group meeting.

Similarly, *Briefing* supporters have been active in support work for the ambulance dispute. Work led by the Labour Party and Trades Council Support Groups has raised thousands of pounds.

Labour Briefing supporters also organised a public picket on the Saturday before Christmas against the US invasion of Panama.

There is now a bid to make the District Party wake up to the many campaigns going on around it. A left slate has so far been backed by three CLPs.

Labour Party Socialists

Now get building!

Labour Party Socialists was initiated by the Socialist Movement to organise the left in the Labour Party.

The latest meeting to plan its founding conference was held in Sheffield on February 10th.

The Conference will be in Sheffield on the weekend of May 19th and 20th. It will concentrate on three themes: policy, Party democracy, and organisation/campaigning.

Documents are being prepared on these themes and will be open to amendment at the Conference.

A serious national organisation of the Labour Party left, a forum which can overcome the demoralisation and isolation of left activists, is long overdue.

Our first task will be to mount a coherent challenge to the right on policy and democracy (particularly the Edmonds proposals).

Similar attempts in recent years have floundered because various organisations have claimed to embody the left rather than working with all activists within open and democratic structures.

There has been an over-concentration on slates and resolutions to the exclusion of campaigning.

By Pete Firmin
Brent East CLP

LPS hopes to rectify this, with a plan of campaigning activities over the next period, and by electing the Steering Committee at the Conference.

The only "reserved" places on the Steering Committee will be for Regional representatives and women and black supporters of LPS.

Some of the campaigning work is to start now.

The planning meeting agreed that LPS should initiate a campaign of Party members stating their commitment not to pay the Poll Tax.

This will be both a sign of resistance and opposition to official Party policy and a rebuff to the increasing witch-hunt in the Party (particularly in Scotland) against anti-Poll Tax campaigners.

After a report from a member of Wallasey CLP on Frank Field's deselection and the "dossier" he has produced, it was agreed to make a priority in the coming



Organising for Women's Conference policies to be implemented...

months of campaigning on the associated issues:

- Field's deselection;
- the possible witch-hunt against the left on the Wirral;
- the possible prevention of Wallasey CLP selecting a left candidate in the most winnable seat in the country;
- any use of Field's deselection by the right as a justification for the introduction of one member one vote for selections.

The meeting agreed to co-operate with the CLPs conference in using all possible contact with the "soft left" on the NEC to get them to reverse their support for Fields.

LPS will also be working to get the model resolution (see page 4) adopted as widely as possible.

The meeting further agreed to sponsor a model resolution to this year's Labour Party Conference.

This will point out that world events have overtaken the Policy Review and ask for a special conference to be called in Spring 1991 to determine new policy.

Activists now have to begin seriously building for the Labour Party Socialists Conference.

Sponsorship letters and an outline of the Conference are being sent to CLPs soon and the Left need to take this up.

Regional Conferences have to be leafletted and contacts established in areas where the left is weak.



Leafletting the left at Labour Party Conference: when will the left organise into a coherent force?

The Conference should be raised in every left caucus, Campaign Group, etc., in order to take it into wards, Women's Sections, union branches, etc., both to obtain the widest possible support and to begin committing people to attend the conference.

This conference is not intended to be another "talking shop", but to found a serious campaigning left organisation. It can only succeed if we begin now to organise for it.

Labour Committee on Ireland

Why we need the LCI

The 1990 AGM of the Labour Committee on Ireland is on February 24/25th.

This will be the first opportunity for members to review the progress of building a withdrawal movement since the ending of the 20th Anniversary Year of Action.

Perhaps more importantly it will lay down the general direction of the LCI's work in the period up to the next General Election and a possible Labour Government.

The main debates are likely to centre on the *Time to Go!* initiative, launched in 1988 with the aim of widening the debate on withdrawal.

While *Time to Go!* made some gains in the unions, many members of the LCI are very concerned at the virtual disappearance of the Committee as a distinct campaign for withdrawal and self-determination.

Judged by the numbers of new forces which it mobilised, *Time To Go!* can only be seen as a failure — the turnout for August 12th was no more than on the recent Bloody Sunday demonstration, though it claimed to have been built on a broader basis.

There is no doubt that the failure of *Time to Go!* to draw in wider forces represents a serious setback for the withdrawal movement.

It means that the left have little leverage against the bureaucrats, who are opposed

By Padraic Finn
Westminster North CLP

to mass movements on the streets and for whom the main lesson of August is that the slogans were not rightist enough.

The pull to the right in the run up to the election will be irresistible. But the problem will be compounded if the LCI liquidates itself into *Time To Go!*, which is what the LCI leadership are advocating.

Then, whatever resistance might have been offered by the activist base of the LCI will be neutralised and the drift out of the LCI and the Party will become a flood.

We should be supporting *Time To Go!* while maintaining organisational and political independence of the LCI. The formula that "building the *Time To Go!* is the best way to build the LCI" is as wrong as it is bizarre.

Maintaining the organisational and political integrity of the LCI is not just a longing for the return of the early 1980s when the LCI grew among an influencial left. It is a current necessity after Peter Brooke's signal that a new internal settlement is being prepared.

The Six County State is to be reconditioned and installed on the foundation laid by the Anglo Irish Agreement of 1985.

There will undoubtedly be big political carrots to entice



Bloody Sunday demo, January 1988

the SDLP and, unlike 1974, Thatcher will face down any Unionist (or Tory) opposition to the involvement of Dublin.

The problem for the LCI is that many supporters of *Time To Go!*, including Clare Short, supported or abstained on the Agreement, seeing it as laying the basis for unity by harmonising conditions north and south of the border.

The real purpose of the Agreement and indeed of the new scheme (which is getting a steady media build up) is withdrawal on British terms and to prevent self-determination.

In the run up to a General Election and with the Tories' new initiative, support for *Time To Go!* will be very vulnerable to the "peace at any price" merchants.

If the LCI is tied to *Time To Go!* we will be unable to resist that and there will be a serious risk of undoing the good work of the last 10 years, an outcome obviously in the interests of the British State.

The Northern statelet has not worked, and will not work. The only solution in Ireland is self-determination, seemingly not a wildly radical demand when articulated in Eastern Europe.

The British could withdraw without conceding self-determination — the Anglo Irish Agreement is the first step in that process.

So, while the LCI is prepared to work with anyone who favours withdrawal, we must continue to fight within that for Irish self-determination.

Time To Go! is a tactical alliance, not one which binds us forever.

Manipulation

Even a tame media and highly developed manipulation by the British State has not prevented a gathering flood of information on their activities: shoot-to-kill, Stalker, MI5 actions against Labour *and* Tory politicians, adding to a long catalogue of repressive measures going back to internment without trial in 1971.

As bits of the Berlin Wall are being sold for souvenirs, the British are putting the finishing touches to a 300 mile line of concrete watch towers across the middle of Ireland.

The Guildford 4 were not released because of new evidence or a sudden attack of conscience by the establishment. Their release was a sop to Dublin worries about the open collusion between the "security forces" and the loyalists.

But their release shows also the divisions within the ruling class over the dirty war and the possibilities of mass action in forcing their hand.

Soviet Union

Mass actions force the pace of *glasnost*

"Either we prove able to lead a rapid but controlled process of transformation, or it will become an uncontrolled deluge."

This was how Vadim Medvedev, who replaced Ligachev as chief of ideology in the Soviet leadership, summed up the significance of the Central Committee meeting held in Moscow on 5th/6th February.

The previous day had seen a demonstration of 200,000 outside the Kremlin, the largest rally of its kind in the Soviet capital in modern history.

The Central Committee meeting marked another important stage in the political process unfolding in the Soviet Union.

Although the full text adopted by the plenum has not yet been published, its main points are clear.

Article 6 of the Soviet constitution, which makes the Communist Party "the leading and guiding force of Soviet society and the nucleus of its political system" is to be either deleted or amended.

The final wording of the proposal will be determined by the Party Congress of 5,000 delegates in June or July year and then it will be taken to the Supreme Soviet. An executive president with increased powers will eventually be elected by popular vote.

The change in Article 6 will legalise other political parties. A new Soviet constitution is being prepared which was due for discussion in 1991 but the pace of events might mean that it will be decided on this year.

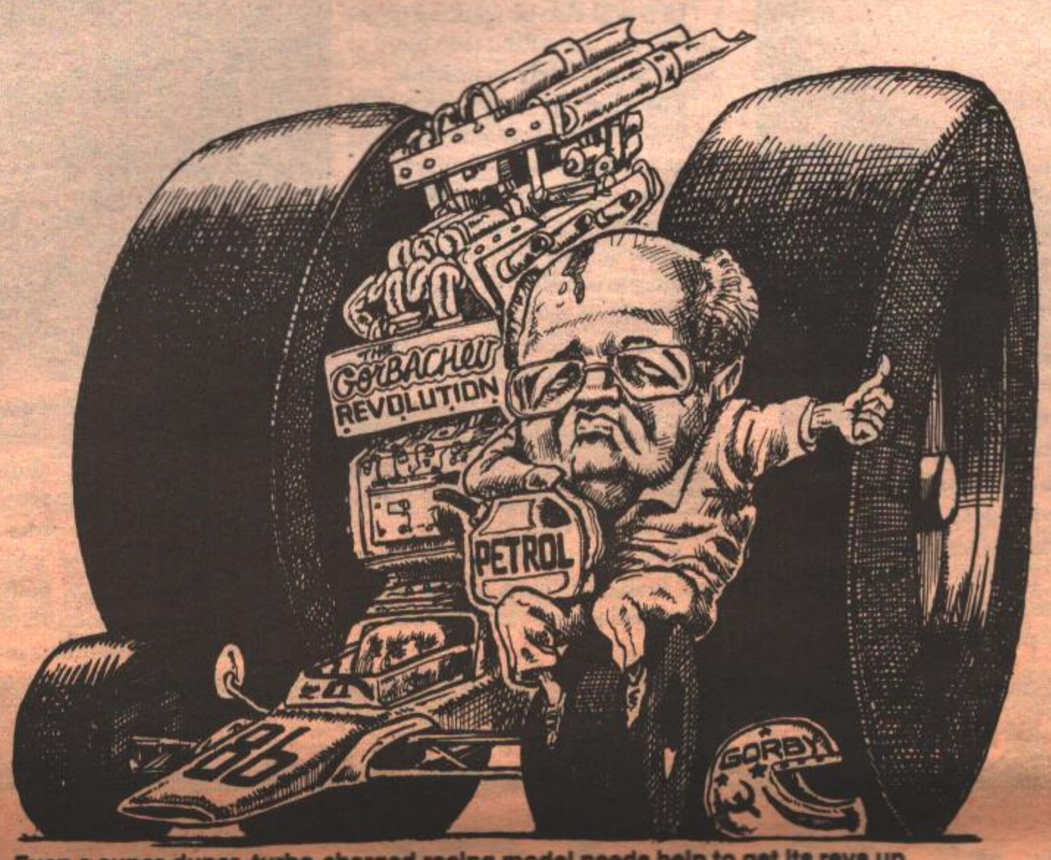
By Gus Fagan
Labour Focus on Eastern Europe"

In any case, it seems that a multi-party system will be legally recognised before the end of the year. This is, of course, already a *fait accompli* in the Baltic republics.

In fact, the events in the Baltic republics, along with the collapse of the Party in Azerbaijan and the mounting pressure in Russia and Ukraine for a change in the role of the party show that Gorbachev is reacting, to some extent, to pressure from below.

The other significant change to come from the meeting, although the details are not clear, is party democracy. More grass-roots democracy is proposed in the election of local and regional officials and in the election of delegates to the Central Committee and Party Congress.

The grass-roots rebellion against the conservative bureaucracy has grown rapidly in recent months. The fact that the Central Committee voted almost unanimously for the changes can only be seen as a reaction to mounting popular anger.



Even a super-duper, turbo-charged racing model needs help to get its revs up

Three quarters of the Central Committee are full-time bureaucrats, ministers and deputy-ministers; 61% are over 60, 94% are male and only 11% are working class!

In fact, it is this mounting mass activity in Russia and Ukraine, the heartland of the USSR, which lies behind the recent changes. Large East European-style demonstrations in many Russian and Ukrainian cities have demanded the resignation of local party leaders and sometimes the entire party committee.

Many of these mass protests have been directed against privilege and corruption. In Leningrad, Politburo member and former local leader, Solovev, was expelled from the party after he had bought himself a Mercedes.

On 8th February, four days before the plenum, thousands of Ukranian miners demonstrated in Donetsk, centre of the Donbas coal fields, demanding the resignation of the party leadership.

Similar demonstrations have been held in other Ukrainian cities and following the Central Committee, on the 11th February, there was a demonstration of 15,000 in the capital, Kiev, demanding the resignation of the local party boss.

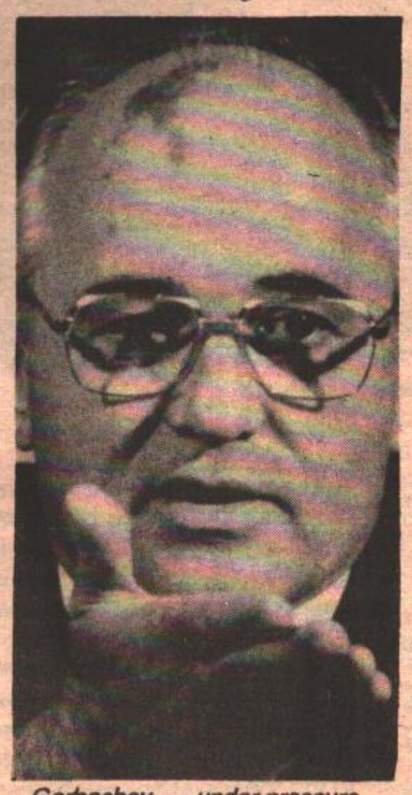
There have been strikes and demonstrations in the Siberain oilfields at Tyumen and Kemerovo, and at Volgograd, Sverdlovsk and Vladivostok where local party leaders have been forced to resign.

As well as privilege and corruption, an important factor has been opposition to the economic effects of perestroika. The dislocations in supplies caused by self-accounting and greater freedom to export have led to loss of wages while food supplies become scarcer and more expensive.

Economic grievances of this kind were important in the Ukrainian miners' strike and in the workers' protests in the Siberian oil industry.

But in all these examples of increasing involvement of the workers the demands were not simply economic and defensive. They have demanded the resignation of party leaders and more political democracy, including a multi-party system and a transfer of power away from the party to the soviets.

For instance, in Pavlohrad in Ukraine, the striking miners' 41-point programme called for repeal of Article 6, abolition of the leading role of the CPSU and of all party privileges.


Gorbachev — under pressure from all sides

The next big event in the Soviet Union will be the local and republican elections. The Communist Party will be challenged in an unprecedented manner. The outcome of these elections could severely undermine the Party's unity.

Boris Yeltsin, Gorbachev's radical critic from the Inter-Regional Group in the Soviet parliament, is campaigning for the presidency of the Russian federation.

It is important, however, to see these recent changes within the overall Gorbachev project, which is to move towards a more liberal form of state (rule of law, separation of party and state, a more parliamentary system) within which a renewed party would continue to lead and preserve the basic system.

All of this would be based on what the new document calls a "planned market economy". Alexander Yakovlev, leader of the Inter-Regional Group, described the recent changes as simply part of "the process of transfer of power to the soviets".

Where the different party factions differ is with respect to the pace and extent of democratisation and marketisation, with the Yeltsin wing calling not just for greater democracy but a more radical and rapid marketisation of the economy.

The really crucial element in the recent developments, however, is the growing politicisation and involvement of the working class in the Russian and Ukrainian heartland.

Soviet wo

Mass nationalist movements are spreading from one Soviet Republic to the next.

Demonstrations against the Communist Party are taking place in cities across the USSR, while the conservatives raise the cry that capitalism is being restored.

These may be Gorbachev's most obvious problems at the moment; but there is another development that is more threatening to his attempt to stabilise bureaucratic rule.

This problem gives great cause for hope to socialists across the world: for the first time in 60 years a real workers' movement is beginning to emerge in the USSR.

The current SOTSPROF tour is just one reflection of the changes that flowed from the miners' strike of July 1989.

By Tom Loucas
Islington North CLP

Since then, permanent independent trade union and political working class organisations have emerged as the level of workers' political consciousness develops.

They reflect, as did the strike itself, the response of Soviet workers to perestroika's deepening of the economic crisis.

The miners' strike last July involved, at its height, over 250,000 miners in the Soviet Union's largest coalfields, the Siberian Kuzbass and Ukrainian Donbass.

The combination of economic and political demands arose from the complete failure of bureaucratic management.

In the mining regions this was particularly acute. The shift from coal to oil and gas has led to low investment and deteriorating conditions and restrictions of wage rises.


Soviet workers take the power in 1917

In the current five year plan, miners' wages have only risen by half the national average. The erosion of wages is aggravated by price reform that has led to sharp

SOTSP

Solidarity Soviet unio

The tour of Britain by Oleg Voronin has laid the basis for the development of real international trade union solidarity with the Soviet socialist trade union SOTSPROF.

In the short period that Oleg has been in the country he has spoken at dozens of meetings of trade union activists.

He has had discussions with the Executives of the NUM, NALGO, and the NUJ, and with the leadership of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

At a successful press conference at the House of Commons, with Tony Benn, Eric Heffer, Alice Mahon, and other MPs, Oleg explained how the new union was growing rapidly.

It achieved this growth by supporting and organising workers in struggle with the Gorbachev leadership, whose inability to turn to the working class in a genuine sense — through workers' control and democratic soviet power — has led to workers and the oppressed paying the price for the crisis of the Soviet economy.

He said that SOTSPROF has 60,000 members across the USSR, and that amongst its affiliates was Shield, an organisation of officers in the Soviet army.

The main aim of the tour is to raise funds for SOTSPROF. Within the first week over £2,500 had been raised from unions across the TUC.

Developments in the Soviet Union

rkers movement emerges





The struggle for democracy flows directly from the experience of oppression in the workplace and in society as a whole.

However, economic reform is more complicated. Here attitudes reflect a combination of the lived reality of the command-economy and the ideological pressure from the mass media.

The economic failures of the bureaucracy are equated with planning *per se*, while the only solution presented is the market.

Radicals

For the radicals of the Soviet parliament, democracy is only possible with a market economy and planning inevitably leads to totalitarianism. A socialist alternative is absent.

In this climate, activists, though hostile to capitalism as a system, follow the radicals in their support for the market.

However, their understanding of the market is somewhat different to that of the radicals. They see it as a way of creating incentives as a basis for self-management free of bureaucratic control.

Representative of the positions forming within the working class is the programme recently adopted by the Conference of Worker Collectives of Kemerovo Oblast.

On political issues the document calls for a multi-party system within genuine soviet power, free access to the press, direct elections, and referenda.

It is a self-declared socialist programme, which has not surprisingly met with a very hostile response from the local party authorities.

However, on the economic front there is less clarity.

System

While arguing for a system of production under workers' control with full autonomy for factories, it says that this can only be achieved through the market, which it sees as an "invaluable experience of human civilisation".

All forms of property, from nationalised through co-operative to private, are treated equally.

But at the same time, the document calls for the market to be combined with planning: "one of the great inventions of the twentieth century."

And socialised property is seen as the only appropriate form for the main branches of industry and construction.

The notion that capitalist private property is a way out of the crisis is rejected. And the document calls for the ultimate control of management personnel and decisions to rest with the workers.

Clearly on economic questions the workers' thinking is contradictory. But illusions in the market will only be dispelled by actual experience of markets.

As market reforms increasingly affect prices, wages, and employment, the realities of market mechanisms will become apparent.

To ensure this understanding is transformed into a programme for democratic socialism, a socialist current basing itself on the Marxist tradition is needed.

Fortunately, there are beginnings of such a current, in organisations like the new Socialist Party, led by Boris Kagarlitsky, and SOTSPROF.

It will be up to them to show the way forward by developing alternatives to both the old Stalinist model and reliance on the market that base themselves on a programme for a self-managed, democratic, socialist society.

cils, and in some cases mine directors were sacked.

However, what is most impressive about the miners' strike, and subsequent events, is the high level of political consciousness and organisation demonstrated.

Strike

From what was an essentially spontaneous strike, workers committees rapidly emerged. They became the real authority in the towns and cities where they existed.

Workers militias were formed and the committees ensured that essential services were kept running and that the mines were maintained.

After the strike the workers committees were maintained to ensure that the authorities kept their promises. This distrust of the bureaucracy reflects the strong anti-bureaucratic and democratic feelings within the working class.

Although conditions particular to the miner led to their vanguard role, there are indications of more general and significant developments in workers' consciousness.

On the question of political power the attitude of the workers is clear. Recent demonstrations against the leading role of the Communist Party serve to underline the miners' calls for the abolition of bureaucratic power and privilege.



Confusion over socialism through the market

s in the prices of goods and ser-
es.
Additionally, chronic industrial
lution and the arbitrary power
l corruption of the local
norities fuelled the miners' dis-
sfaction.
The strike forced the
eaucracy to concede the
miners' demands. Improvements were promised in wages and investment, benefits and conditions and, although they were not publicised, political gains were made.

Provision was made for new elections of trade union committees and labour collective coun-

ROF

with new
ons!

By MARTIN WATSON

lewcastle NALGO has donated £200; Frickley NUM, 00; Newcastle engineering MSF, £100; Manchester spitals Trade Union Committee, £100.
urther donations have come from Newham NALGO, LSE dents' Union, and Swansea District NUPE amongst ers.
n tour cities, groups made up of Socialist Movement, cialist Worker, and other labour movement activists have rked together to build this solidarity initiative with the viet working class. Its importance cannot be underesated.
he tasks for labour movement activists are clear. First, we st raise SOTSPROF as an issue in our unions and Labour rties. Labour movement activists must invite a TSPROF speaker to their town or city in March.
econd, large public events must be organised now that to begin a major fund drive for SOTSPROF.
hird, we must begin discussing more permanent support socialist movements in Eastern Europe and the USSR.
OTSPROF will soon be only one of many independent kers' organisations struggling for socialist democracy in tern Europe and the Soviet Union.

Statement from Oleg Voronin

SOTSPROF is a federation of independent workers' organisations.

Under the term "worker" we include intellectuals, engineers, and all those who live by their own labour.

In other words, SOTSPROF is an independent trade union.

Within SOTSPROF there are more than 30 organisations — in Moscow, Leningrad, the Donbass, Kharkov, and other towns. The organisation numbers some 60,000.

SOTSPROF was started because there were no trade union in the USSR.

The official trade unions are part of the state structure. They are Stalin's creations. They are incapable of carrying out their basic function — the defence of workers' rights.

SOTSPROF has taken up precisely this task. SOTSPROF fights for workers self-management and for collective ownership. It is for these reasons it calls itself "socialist".

In the struggle to defend workers' interests, SOTSPROF supports fully all forms of working class struggle, including both economic and political strike action.

It was during the miners' strikes in the summer and autumn of 1989 that SOTSPROF sprang up in the Donbass and Vorkuta pits.

The Socialist trade unions put themselves forward as an *alternative*, but not in opposition to Gorbachev's economic programme. They believe that full implementation of a market economy would make workers even poorer and deepen the economic crisis.

Market relations are only one element of a general solution of the economic problem.

They can work only together with workers' self-management, democratic planning from below, and the transfer of the ownership of the majority of enterprises to the Councils ("Soviets").

The economic programme of Gorbachev, Ryzhkov and Abalkin says nothing about this.

We see the events of Azerbaijan as a bloody provocation by the party apparatus and the KGB, which led to the pogroms and to the vicious suppression of the democratic movement.

In Baku over 300 innocent people were killed — not the figure of 80 given in the Soviet press.

We demand the rapid removal of armed units from Azerbaijan and the release of the leaders of the Azerbaijan National Front and of the Armenian movement Miatsum. We demand the punishment of those guilty of this bloody tragedy.

The Women's Page

Reproductive rights

The fight is on!



PHOTO: S. Potter

The broad mobilisation which rose to fight the Alton Bill needs to be repeated for March events.

The Embryo Bill finished its Committee Stage in the House of Lords on Tuesday 13th February.

The Lords surpassed even themselves with the depth of their ignorance and the breadth of their prejudice.

The forces of reaction were revealed in all their glory.

The discussion on access to DI centred around the family, "the fundamental unit of society" as Lord Ashbourne called it.

It must be "buttressed, supported and built up," he added. However, their Lordships approached the question from a variety of different angles.

Lady Saltoun was most concerned about the problems of fatherlessness, both in terms of material disadvantage, and, more importantly, in terms of role models.

"It is by example that a boy learns how to be a responsible husband and father and how to treat his children in turn. It is by example that a girl learns how to be a wife, from seeing how her mother cares for her father."

Others attacked moral laxity and sexual depravity more generally.

The Earl of Halsbury wanted to see "the seal of Parliamentary disapproval set upon the machinations of the permissive society, which has been a disaster for this country".

By Rebecca Flemming Women for Socialism

Similarly, Lord Gisborough found it "bizarre that artificial means should be suggested to encourage lesbian couples to have children...

"It takes me back to the 1960s, when licence was given which, in my view, has done immense damage to this country."

The Earl of Lauderdale was simply downright rude, when he said that "AID is the farmyard, like it or not, but AIH (Artificial Insemination by Husband) is the home."

This view was echoed by Baroness Phillips who complained that "Human life has dignity. It is the result of two people who love each other and want to have a child. It is not this cold blooded business."

There were few voices raised in dissent against this tide of reaction. The Labour Party was hamstrung by its historic role as the "real Party of the Family."

Thus Lord Ennals felt obliged to give his credentials as a "family man, sharing fanily values" before he went on to opine that:

"...it is really not for the state to decide who should or should not be allowed to have children...

"We must respect the right of a woman, after appropriate counselling... to make her own decision. Marriage is no indication necessarily of a serious committment to creating a loving home."

Baroness Ewart-Biggs gave her support to the "nuclear family as the right setting in which to bring up children" before attacking the amendments as clearly discriminatory.

This anti-discriminatory theme was picked up by Lord Macgegor and Lord Houghton, who also denounced the amendments as "Victorian" and even went as far as to say:

"If one examines the social aspect of this matter, one can become a little confused about the blessings of family life"!

The Lord Chancellor, in summing up for the Government, assured Lady Saltoun that "the sanctity of the family unit should not be lost sight of in the wish to help childless couples have the children they can so fervently desire."

He added that the Code of Practice drawn up under the Bill "will need to give general guidance to clinics on this sensitive aspect of their work."

Following this he abstained on the vote on Lady Saltoun's amendment to prohibit the provision of DI to all unmarried women. This was most fortunate as the amendment fell by 61:60!

The other central debate was on Clause 11 — the controversial section dealing with embryo research. This turned out to be a fairly straightforward battle between biology and a variety of theology.

The scientists successfully marshalled their forces of zona pellucida, blastocysts and recombinant DNA to defeat the religously inspired argument that:

"...an embryo is the start of life and must be given the same status as a child, a grown up person or a Member of your Lordships' Chamber."

(This assertion provoked a brief debate about whether embryos would therefore be liable for the Poll Tax).

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

The Duke of Norfolk's amendment to prohibit embryo research was defeated 234:80. Clause 11 as it now stands permits such research up to 14 days and regulated by the Government.

While it is not ruled out that some of these debates may resurface at the Report Stage in the Lords, attention must now shift to the House of Commons, where the Bill will arrive in March.

Ann Winterton MP has already stated that she will be tabling an amendment to restrict access to DI to "stable, heterosexual couples".

There is also talk of some sort of sliding scale of amendments beginning with prohibiting DI altogether and ending with just prohibiting it being provided to lesbians.

The vote in the House of Lords, where virtually all the Government supported the amendment, does not bode well.

However, the mass lobby of Parliament organised by CADI, LCLGR and NUS on March 8th gives us a focus for building opposition to these discriminatory measures.

In addition, the failure of attempts to amend the long title of the Bill to prevent any abortion amendments being tabled very much increases the probability of there being a battle over abortion time limits.

The struggle to defeat the anti-abortionists must be stepped up. The way to reverse this trend is to go on the offensive about women's rights to control our own bodies, about women's access to abortion.

The debate around abortion time limits is neither a numbers game, nor a science quiz. It is about women's lives.

The Week of Action on women's right to choose is therefore of crucial importance, So get out there and get active!

Week of Action Activities List: See page 5

The family

Thatcher's family values

Mrs Thatcher is a successful populist.

Her latest venture in this direction is "making fathers pay". She is concerned at the number of fathers who do not contribute to their children's maintenance.

This is an idea with an immediate appeal — how many single mothers have never said or felt, "I wish I could make the bugger pay."

The proportion of fathers who do not pay maintenance awarded by courts is high. On the face of it, it seems reasonable that they should be made to do so. Even some socialist women are nodding in agreement.

But we need to look further to understand the motivation for this measure and the actual effects it is likely to have.

By Debbie Epstein Selly Oak CLP

The Tory Government has no interest in the welfare of single mothers and their children. This is amply demonstrated by the way they have treated benefits. Reducing them and making them more difficult to get, with the most vulnerable suffering most — including single parent families!

This present move is preparation for a further reduction in child benefit. Every penny of maintenance paid to single mothers comes off their benefit.

If the thousands of men who currently do not pay maintenance were made to do so, this would save the government millions of pounds.

Removing

Making fathers pay will not be the end of the story. This is the first step to removing the rights of single mothers to benefits.

After all, if the men are supposed to be paying why should the state? In the end those who suffer will again be single mothers and their children — already among the poorest in the community.

However, this is not the only reason for making fathers pay. It is an appeal to the "moral majority" — part of the Tories' pro-family drive.

By making fathers pay they hope to make it more difficult for couples to split up.

This fits very well with other attacks on women and in particular on single mothers. The right-wing amendments to the Embryology Bill, which would prevent single women and lesbians having access to donor insemination (DI), are an ideological attack on all women.

In effect, what they are saying is that the state will decide who is and who is not a fit mother — and that lesbians and single women are not among them.



Only stable heterosexual couples need apply... (are they giving babies to horses, now?)

The state already takes the custody of children away from lesbians through the courts. These amendments take this a step further. Anne Winterton MP is quite up-front about this. She openly states her belief that single women should not have children, because children need a father and a mother (and a cat and a dog and a gerbil?).

The same MPs who support limiting the rights of women to DI and other fertility treatments are also anti-abortion — so much for their claim to be "pro-life".

Nuclear

Moreover, any way-of-life that does not conform to the stereotypical nuclear family drives the Tory right-wing to hysteria. Anne Winterton's Early Day Motion on DI drew attention to the fact that 55 lesbian couples and eight single lesbians over a period of three years had babies as a result of DI.

One of the main reasons given for the introduction of Section 28, prohibiting the promotion of homosexuality, was that, as well as being perverted, lesbian and gay families were somehow "pretending".

However, the family being defended is very narrowly defined. Lesbians regularly lose their children. Black families are separated by draconian immigration laws, with children being parted from parents and partners from each other. Black women are prevented from having children by education and contraception for young women. In their view, the lives, bodies and fertility of women should be controlled by the state rather than themselves. Anything that challenges this control should be stamped out.

forcible sterilisation and the use of dangerous drugs such as depo-provera.

Time and again it is women who have to pay the price for the Tories' moral declarations.

But it is not only women who pay. The hardest hit are working class people who have no option other than living in the nuclear family, however unsatisfactory they may find it.

As socialists we must oppose any measures which seek to drive women further back into the home, to control their fertility, or to dictate how ordinary people should live their lives.

Book Review

Kagarlitsky's revolutionary reformism

"The transition to the revolutionary stage of struggle by the Left in our epoch is only feasible on the basis of successful reformist activity".

This is the central thesis of Boris Kagarlitsky's new book *The Dialectic of Change*.

On the first page, Kagarlitsky expresses his hope that his book will be "of assistance to other people, in other parts of the world, who are seriously involved in the struggle for the transformation of society."

In the same preface, Kagarlitsky, a 31-year old Russian socialist, outlines his own standpoint: "consistent democratisation demands a decisive repudiation of any form of market or plan fetishism, of the defence of the privilege of an elite, or of any attempt to overcome the crisis at the expense of the workers. It requires a decisive defence of social ownership and a no less decisive struggle against any concentration of economic power."

The Dialectic of Change, by Boris Kagarlitsky, _Verso_ 1990, £10.95 paperback

The book's main purpose is to reappraise the role of reforms in the struggle for social change and to apply the conclusions to the East European and Soviet context.

By Mike Phipps Woolwich CLP

In his controversial first chapter, Kagarlitsky argues that it is wrong to see reforms merely as concessions from the ruling class.

Far from being counterposed, reform and revolution are complementary parts of the same political process.

Marx, Luxemburg, Gramsci and Jaures — whose views Trotsky dubbed "organised opportunism" — are cited in support of this line.

Orthodox Marxists may disagree with Kagarlitsky's view that it was therefore permissable for the French Socialist Millerand to participate in a bourgeois government at the beginning of this century, but he does at least distinguish this coalition from later crisis governments into which socialists were admitted solely to sell austerity to the workers.

In fact it is a key plank of his argument that Social Democracy has lost its way in the dead-end of technocratic managerialism, which itself has much in common with centralised bureaucratic rule in Eastern Europe. A new synthesis is thus necessary which integrates the fight for reforms into a perspective of revolution.

Here Kagarlitsky draws on the East European experience, where reformists have been obliged to fight for their demands in a revolutionary manner, as in Hungary in 1956 or Czechoslovakia in 1968.

Even the *crushing* of these movements produced changes in the social structure which reflected the *new* correlation of social forces which gave rise to movements for change.

Solidarity in Poland was the highest expression of this.

Jaruzelski's coup in 1981 could not bring a return to the status quo, but signalled a Bonapartist *interregnum* and the terminal crisis of the Stalinist party.

The tragedy was that its theoretical weakness and lack of political strategy allowed Solidarity's leadership to become "hostages of the ruling caste" in 1989 in implementing large scale attacks on the Polish working class.

Kagarlitsky's following discussion of the social and economic problems of the USSR is the best I have ever read. He charts the huge social and demographic changes behind the profound economic and political stagnation of the Brezhnev years and explains how Brezhnev's policy of institutionalising "small privileges" at all levels has created a class of bureaucratic "idlers", innately hostile to even the most timid reforms under Gorbachev.

Socialists will find much to argue about in *The Dialectic of Change*. The assertion that "on the whole, the Euro-communist phenomenon reinforced radical tendencies in world Social Democracy" is particularly suspect, although Kagarlitsky's discussion of this area is detailed and concrete.

However, the breadth and creativity of this book is truly invigorating. £10.95 was never better spent.



Boris Kagarlitsky

Book Review

Cowley against closure

***Cowley Works — Why it Matters and Why it Must Be Saved*, by Oxford Motor Industry Research Group, £1.00**

Since British Aerospace management (BAe) announced the closure of the Austin Rover South Works in Cowley in 1991, every attempt to build a campaign capable of defending the plant and the thousands of jobs there has been undermined by right-wing conveners.

They have refused to mobilise the workforce in defence of the plant and even failed to challenge the stream of spurious management figures and media disinformation which have repeatedly clouded the issue.

Now a remarkable report has blown management figures out of the window.

By Alan Thornett

The report has been prepared by the Oxford Motor Industry Research Project, which was set up following a public meeting organised by the Oxford Trades Council on the closure.

It comprises a number of Oxford academics who voluntarily gave up their time to help defend the Cowley plants, including Theresa Hayter and David Harvey of St. Peter's College, Andy Kilminster from the Polytechnic School of Business, Matthew Lockwood of Wadham College, and Ann Schofield, of Ruskin College.

According to their report entitled "Cowley Works", 7,500 jobs will be lost when the proposed closure (now revised to include the whole of the old Morris plant with some assembly transferred in to the present body plant) takes place.

And many more if the whole plant closes as a result of its non-viability as a single model plant.

They nail the government as ideologically motivated in the sell-off of the Austin-Rover Group (ARG) to BAe and point to the scandal of the sale itself: "In fact it did not so much sell Rover to British Aerospace, as pay it to take it off its hands".

They say BAe actually paid "minus £422m" for Rover with a £38m additional secret "sweetener" which was deliberately withheld from the European Commission.

They nail BAe as being one of Britain's major asset-strippers and property speculators saying: "It decided, in effect, that it is in its interest to make profits from the sale and redevelopment of land rather to invest in the volume production of cars".

They also challenge the secrecy and absence of accountability which has characterised the whole process. In fact the closure was only announced when it was because of statements by the European Commissioner.

They point out that: "Neither the people who would be affected, nor their elected representatives, were able to control the company's decision through any democratic process... It is surely right that those who have given their energies and skills over the years deserve more respect and dignity than suddenly to be tossed aside as useless and redundant."

The report contains extensive research on the effects of the closure on the local community. It points out that huge job losses have already been absorbed. The Cowley workforce has gone down from its 1973 peak of 28,500 to a 1989 figure of 11,490.

The majority of those who would lose their jobs at Cowley are male semi-skilled manual workers, whilst many of the jobs available are for women and are at much lower wage levels than currently exist at Cowley.

The effects of the closure on the local economy are obvious. The report quotes a leaflet distributed by the ARG management at its last factory open day two years ago that claimed its "cash contribution" to the local community that year was £134m.

It went on to say that: "We should be proud of what we do for the Oxford area and the country — and its time we let everyone know it".

The authors acknowledge that without industrial action by the workforce — something which the workforce has never had the opportunity to express its opinion on — there are limitations to what can be done.

This is true. But they have made an important contribution in raising the issues and analysing the situation. Hopefully the work they have done can be translated into an active campaign to save the plant whilst it is still there — both amongst the workforce and the local community.



The Cowley car plant

Book and TV Review

Peaches too

***Oranges are not the only fruit*, by Jeanette Winterson, *Pandora*, £3.99. BBC TV serial; dramatised by Jeannette Winterson, directed by Beeban Kidron, shown January 1990.**

***Oranges are not the only fruit* is the story of Jeanette (Jess in the television version) and her childhood among the evangelical Christians of Lancashire.**

Her life is steered by her mother, who adopted her with the express purpose of bringing her up to be a missionary.

Her world is dominated by women, with men in walk-on parts in the background, described mostly as pigs and weaklings.

But when Jeanette discovers it is women that she loves, she is attacked by the faithful to whom she formerly preached, and eventually forced to leave.

Oranges is an extremely funny book, with the foibles of the faithful laid out in detail. Mother graduates from DIY bathroom installation to building her own CB radio (call sign Kindly Light).

Wreath-makers

Jeanette is in daily contact with wreath-makers who bewail the lack of imagination in a populace who want only cross-shaped wreaths; with vermin-exterminators driven out of business by central heating; and guest house proprietors who practice voodoo on their elderly guests.

By Felicity Harvest Hackney South and Shoreditch CLP

No wonder her essays on how she spent her summer holidays cause raised eyebrows at school.

The book is also a very perceptive commentary on growing up, on the process of identifying and developing ones own sexuality, and on the oppressive nature of organised religion.

The television version, probably because of the close involvement of the author, was a faithful interpretation of the spirit of the book, including most of its detail and incident.

Although the TV version almost completely abandoned the various mythological and allegorical interludes which run through the book, the flavour of near-fantasy mingling with reality was maintained by the use of music and by the dream-like credit sequences.

In the TV version, as in the book, the men were largely invisible — as also in the production team — the series was written, directed and produced by women.

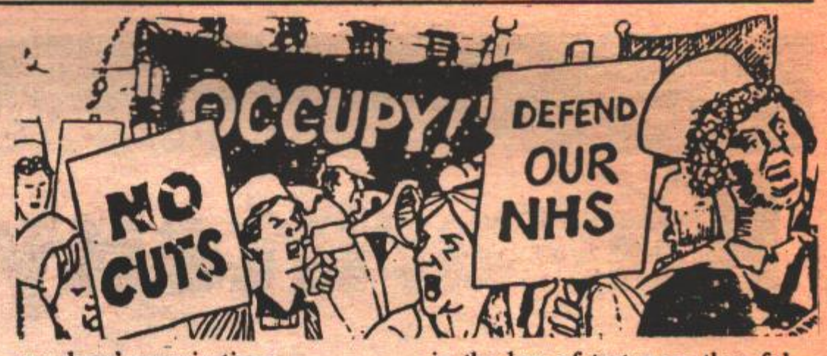
In view of the pressures which are now put on mainstream broadcasting, it was refreshing that the BBC not only produced a serial with a central theme of love between young girls, and containing scenes of their love-making, but also advertised it extensively in advance, rather than hiding it away at an unpopular hour.

Oranges are not the only fruit is a book well worth reading, and, if the TV series is shown again, it is one not to miss.

Trade Union Briefing

Trade unions and the law

Why we need the right to strike



The repeal of all Tory anti-trade union laws by the next Labour Government is a key fight for all socialists.

However, the form of *pro-union* legislation is not a matter the left would usually feel it necessary to discuss.

This is partly because this is seen as a technical problem and partly because there is a widespread view throughout the labour movement that the less law there is relating to trade unions the better.

Therefore, the most common demand that will be raised is for the restoration of the trade union immunities.

In my view, there is a general misunderstanding as to how legal controls over industrial action actually work, and, therefore, what is needed to minimise the scope for state intervention (legal rights cannot, of course, ever act as a total barrier against state attacks).

In this, and subsequent articles, I will seek to establish that it is in the interests of the labour movement not just to demand the repeal of the Tory laws but also to demand *positive rights* to take industrial action.

The first article will show how the law developed historically, the second will explain how the law has worked since the post-war boom came to an end in the 1960s, and the third will argue the case for positive rights.

The starting point for understanding the law today is the trade union "reforms" of the 1870s passed by the Gladstone and Disraeli governments.

These laws gave immunity to trade unions from the criminal law as it had been developed by the judges so that trade unions and the organisation of industrial action could no longer constitute conspiracies.

These changes were clearly not made because more enlightened sections of the ruling class accepted the justice of the workers' case.

They were made because those sections either understood how trade unions could be made to function in the interests of capital through the promotion of bargaining, conciliation and arbitration, or because it was recognised, in the words of a Tory Prime Minister, Lord Derby, that:

"They [trade unions] exist; they are a fact; they never were more strongly supported than now, and they are not likely in our time to disappear."

What is interesting is that Robert Applegarth, who was in effect the first General Secretary of the TUC, had originally wanted trade unions to be given *rights* to organise, but had been persuaded by his Liberal Party advisers that it would be better to obtain *immunities* from common law, i.e. judge-made liabilities.

In my view, this was because it was understood that resistance to the "reforms" would have been greater if there had been an attempt to secure a legal right to strike.

By Roger Welch
Chelmsford & District Trades Council

This cannot be proven, but what is clear is the ease with which the judges swept aside the immunities — a mere 20 years later — when the economic crisis and the militancy of the "new unionism" meant that capital could no longer afford to adopt a liberal attitude to workers' organisations.

The basis of the judicial offensive against the trade unions was (and is) the law of tort. A tort is a civil as opposed to a criminal wrong, and the "victim" of a tort is entitled to compensation and/or an injunction to prevent the tort from being continued.

Failure to comply with an injunction is contempt of court which is punishable by a fine and/or imprisonment.

What the judges did in the 1890s was to apply the then obscure tort of inducing a breach of contract to the organisation of industrial action.

Given that virtually all forms of industrial action involve workers breaking their contracts of employment, it can be seen that the organiser of that action — be it a union, an official, or a rank and file militant — will be inducing that breach and therefore committing a tort.

Relate this to the use of an injunction, and it can be seen that in effect the judges had once more made organising a strike a crime, and had totally circumvented the immunities obtained in the 1870s.

This and similar developments in the law of tort were then followed by the notorious Taff Vale judgement, when the Law Lords decided that a trade union, and not just its officials, could be made the defendant by an employer bringing an action in tort.

These attacks by the judges were initially short-lived because in 1906 a Liberal Government, under pressure from the growing support for the embryonic Labour Party, passed the Trades Dispute Act which restored the unions' right to organise strikes.

However, as in the 1870s, this was done by giving unions and their officials immunities from the newly-created torts. Therefore, the torts themselves remained in force, so that in common-law organising a strike still amounted to a breach of contract.

The practical effects of this were that restrictive interpretations of the immunities would mean that liability for this tort could be restored.

Moreover, what was intended to be the provision of a right to strike could be castigated as giving the unions privileges to break the law.

NALGO and individual contracts

The killing of collective action

Individual "personal contracts" are becoming a serious problem for white collar unions.

Their introduction is undermining negotiated collective agreements.

Staff have been "made an offer they couldn't refuse" or forced to accept new personal contracts in:

•British Telecom and British Rail (managerial grades);

•provincial and national newspapers (journalists) such as the Essex Chronicle and Associated Newspapers (the *Mail* and *Evening Standard*);

•and in some Local Authorities.

Kent County has been the most prominent local government employer to force its staff to opt for personal contracts (known as "Pay Plus"), breaking away from national agreements in the process.

The Council has given recruitment problems as a reason for the change.

If this was the real reason, then a cost of living supplement, payable to all staff like London Weighting, could have been negotiated within the national agreements. The Council's real motivation is the breaking away from the national agreements and the introduction of strings.

Kent's "Pay Plus" might initially sound attractive: 8.9% pay rise, a "top-up" Kent factor, and more "headroom" in each scale.

In exchange, staff are expected to sign personal contracts which do not come under the national agreements.

Closer examination shows that the new personal contracts include more flexible scales, with more "bottom" as well as "headroom".

Progression is on appraisal; there is performance related pay; promotion and advertisement of vacant posts become more flexible; and establishment levels are to be abandoned.

By signing the new personal contracts some staff will get more money, but their security and promotion will be at the whim of management.

In October,the Council started a campaign (directed at the staff over the head of the NALGO branch) to win staff away from the national agreement.

The branch immediately launched a vigorous campaign amongst its members to resist the attacks on the national conditions (which, incidentally, has left the branch in deficit and waiting for financial help promised by the NEC).

By Fred Leplat
Islington NALGO

The campaign started from a weak position. Out of 11,500 APTC staff, only 4,000 were NALGO members. Furthermore, individual contracts had already been imposed or negotiated by NALGO branches in other Local Authorities in Kent and the South East.

Despite the branch's campaign, which included petitions and a boycott of vacant posts, a resolution for industrial action against "Pay Plus" was lost at a branch meeting.

The January 31st deadline for signing the contracts has passed, and there are now only 2,000 staff who have not opted out of the national conditions.

The branch has therefore been obliged to withdraw its boycott and to mitigate the attack, while continuing to campaign for the national conditions and agreements.

This is only the thin end of the wedge. Wes McLachlan, Kent County NALGO Branch Secretary, says:

"Any branch that thinks this is going to be restricted to Kent is deluding themselves and should be preparing to fight back now.

"There is a need for a vigorous national campaign on the issue, and strong branches ought to be helping out weaker ones in building local campaigns."

NALGO has to launch a national campaign against this trickle of personal contracts before it becomes a flood. Employers are already exchanging information on their successes through their own formal and informal network.

Branches that have negotiated the introduction of personal contracts should be disciplined in order to discourage others.

Defence of national conditions and opposition to "flexibility" and other strings ought to be a prominent feature of this year's pay campaign.

NALGO scored a victory last year in our strike for a decent pay rise without strings.

This victory renewed the confidence of the membership which could be mobilised again to fight for this year's claim: £1,500 flat rate increase; no strings; and national conditions.

Teachers' pay

Fight for the full claim!

As expected, the results of the Interim Advisory Committee's report on teachers pay will mean a real cut for many teachers.

The award is to be in stages, £620m will be available from April 1st, which constitutes an average 7.5% rise for individual teachers, followed by another £113m from January 1st 1991, giving an average increase of just over 9%.

The National Union of Teachers' leadership is merely demanding that all the money should be available during 1990.

Even if this were the case, some teachers (the award is not being distributed evenly) would still see no increase in the value of their take home pay after allowing for inflation.

The award is nowhere near the 20% claim put in by the union.

The IAC report also signifies an attack on the national pay scales for teachers.

By Martin Allen
Ealing NUT

It provides for Local Education Authorities making "shadow" awards — in units of £250 — to individual teachers as well as allowing them to grant additional increments beyond the top of the main scale.

This means that "merit pay", something the Tories have always wanted, is to be used as a carrot (or rather as a "creeps charter") to woo individual teachers away from collective action with their colleagues over defence of conditions of service and pay.

The report also allows Inner London Authorities to award an extra £750. However, this is only an option and, as with other extra payments, will be beyond the means of many LEAs.

The departure from national pay scales should be seen in the context of local management of schools (LMS) introduced in the Education Reform Act.

Distribution

Decisions on distribution of salary and additional allowances will pass entirely to individual headteachers and school governors.

So despite the fact the IAC and government disagree over the phasing of the award, there is much in common over the question of a "divide and rule" strategy.

The leadership of the NUT continues to empty the strike fund by financing glossy advertising.

Action

The only form of "action" they have managed is a lobby of MPs involving two teachers per constituency — although many London schools have voted to send larger "delegations".

Lack of action by the leadership should spell big trouble for McAvoy and company at the NUT National Conference this Easter.

The left will be arguing for strike action and flat rate pay increases.

This will be accompanied by demands for non-cooperation with parts of the national curriculum — the imposition of which has resulted in huge increases in the workloads of individual teachers.

Ambulance dispute

Keep up the pressure!

After five months and 15 minutes the massive victory our popularity should have assured is still not ours.

The inflexibility of Kenneth Clarke and the Tory government has been matched by the tenacity of the ambulance workers.

How are we going to shift him?

To date, the willingness to make the kind of positive decisions needed to win has been lacking in our leadership.

The frustrations of the ambulance workers and their ability to meet and organise more militant action locally have pushed Roger Poole into supporting escalations he personally eschewed.

When we told him the overtime ban was getting us nowhere and that we would only work to rule, he responded with much head shaking and a worried expression.

By Vincent Driscoll
Brixton Station

He shouldn't have underestimated our supporters. Our struggle has been maintained by their commitment.

They are not only prepared to sign petitions and donate regularly to our funds, but, as the January 30th action proved, they can be called upon to take solidarity action.

People want us to win. They are angry about the attacks on their Health Service and realise that the whole of the NHS not just the ambulance service, could be steamrollered if we lose.

People are repelled when overpaid bureaucrats hit an already low-paid section of workers and use the hypocritical notion of inflation control as a feeble excuse.

Working people know that if a vulnerable section of the public sector workers like ourselves can humiliate the government, then chances of their pay struggles succeeding are also increased. There is a limit to the number of defeats any government can suffer.

The reluctance of our union leaders and the TUC to meet the challenge head on filters down the union hierarchy through the convenors and stewards to the rank and file on the stations.

The negative attitude of the officials can cause uncertainty in ambulance workers' minds.

There is ambivalence between the militancy we see as necessary to defeat the government, and the possibility of jeopardising the public support if we are seen to take the militant approach.

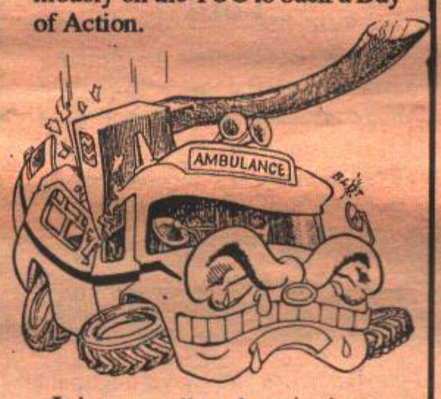
The relatively passive nature of our dispute has removed large sections of the rank and file from any active involvement in it. Consequently,the often defeatist proposals are readily accepted.

Lacking any sort of militant tradition in our service, the networks of rank and file active were never established before the dispute.

Many of our workers lack the confidence to challenge our officials more effectively, so as a result the whole union machinery is a bit ad hoc and secretive, which doesn't lend itself to democracy.

The lines of communications are the reserve of our officials, so it is very difficult to build up the networks of rank and file workers.

Perhaps there is light at the end of the tunnel. At long last the London stewards have called unanimously on the TUC to back a Day of Action.



It is up to all trade unionists to continue to put as much pressure on our leaders as possible an demand they give us what we want.

The 15 minute demonstrations were only called because the ambulance workers had started taking strike action, so we must keep Poole dancing to our tune.

If the leaders of our labour movement want us to vote for them at the next election, then they must be willing to defend the ambulance workers now they are under government attack.

LOBBY THE TUC GENERAL COUNCIL!

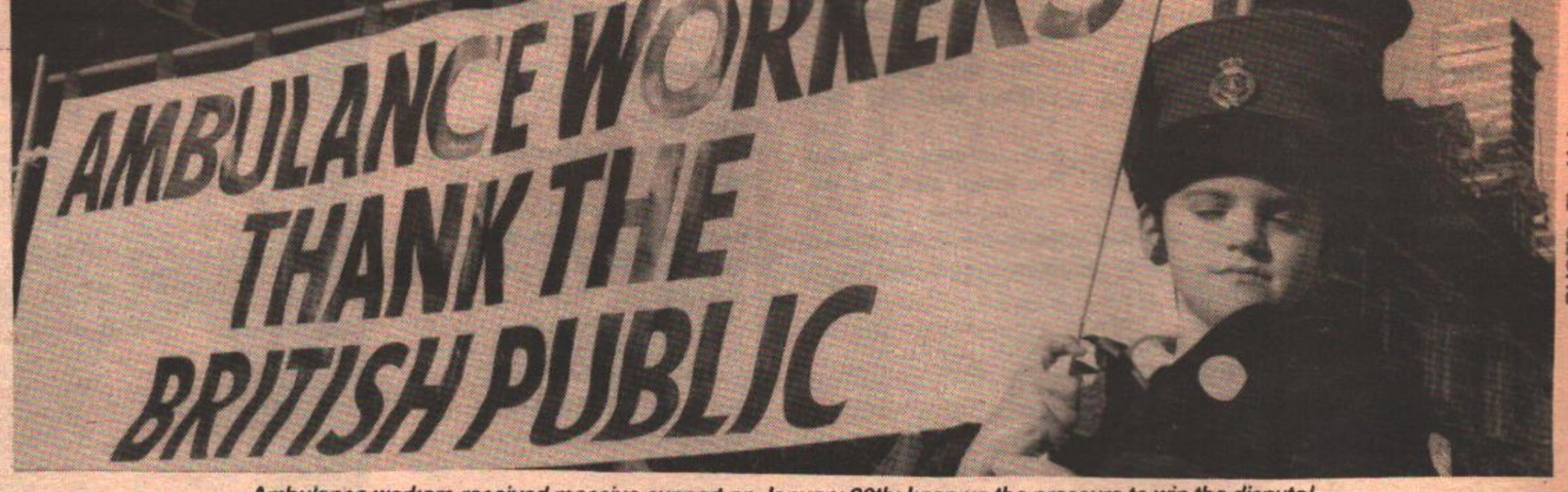
Call on the TUC to announce a day of strike action!

Called by NW London Ambulances NUPE and supported by the all-London meeting of Ambulance Support Groups.

8.15 a.m., Wednesday 28th February, Congress House, Great Russell St.
Bring Union banners!

Model resolution for workplaces, union branches, labour movement organisations:

"This ..... calls on the TUC to call a one day strike in support of the ambulance workers' pay claim.
This branch/organisation resolves to support and mobilise for the lobby of the TUC General Council on 28th February at 8.15 am."



Ambulance workers received massive support on January 30th: keep up the pressure to win the dispute!

Ford

Engineers dispute

EPIU cross picket lines

The strike by 850 skilled workers at Ford's UK plants — electricians at every plant and maintenence workers at Halewood and Basildon should be supported by the whole labour movement.

The strike has closed down the Halewood complex, the Bridgend engine plant and consequently the assembly plant at Genk in Belgium. Yet it is getting little publicity.

The 10.2% offer was accepted by the majority of the production workers but rejected by the electricians by over two to one. For them the deal eroded the differentials of the skilled sections and brought in degrees of flexibility which involves, for example, electricians working on the tracks when they don't have electrical work to do.

By BILL PETERS

There is now an all-out strike by the skilled sections — both electricians and mechanical maintenence. Eric Hammond and the EEPTU has supported the action both because skilled differentials are involved and also to increase the credibility of his union in the plant.

A massive scabbing operation has been organised against this strike. Jack Adams, the CPGB national officer of the TGWU has written to every individual member of the union at Fords telling them to cross the picket line and keep production going.

Crossing

The EPIU, to their great shame, have not only supported the deal but are crossing the picket lines with the full support of their leadership who are arguing that it is right to do so since the EEPTU is outside of the TUC! They are even recruiting members of the EEPTU who are prepared to defy the strike and go into work.

Although the strikes are sectional they are legitimate strikes against harsh management conditions being imposed on the sections concerned.

The EPIU have created a situation which will weaken them and strengthen the hand of Hammond in a factory where he had lost the majority of his membership.

Sacking was victimisation!

Mick Gosling has won his industrial tribunal for unfair dismissal by the Ford Motor Company.

Mick was chair of the Transport and General Workers' Union 1/1107 Dagenham Branch at the time of his sacking.

During the course of the 13 day hearing which spread over 10 weeks, the tribunal heard how Ford sent an un-named spy to a union meeting.

On the basis of his falsified report, the Company tried to dismiss Mick for being absent from plant during working time.

When this failed, Ford pressed ahead with dismissal on the grounds of Mick's alleged role in three instances of unofficial strike action in the area where he worked and his failure to disclose his university degree on his application form ten years previously.

One stoppage was six months old when Mick was deemed to be solely responsible for it on the basis of a single sentence the plant manager alleged he heard in the middle of a rowdy line meeting.

The second, ten weeks old, involved a short stoppage while unsafe lighting was repaired on line three following an accident elsewhere in the plant which hospitalised two workers — one who is still off sick fifteen months later.

In the third, management never challenged the fact that Mick had made two constructive proposals to resolve a stoppage but, crime of crimes, along with many other workers in the area he was heard to disagree with the convenor's decision to restart their jobs.

By GERALD MITCHELL

Ford was out to get Mick because of the socialist and internationalist trade unionism pursued by the 1107 branch which runs counter to the Ford money making machine and defends workers interests, contrasted with the collaborationism practiced in many Ford UK plants.

Making him a scapegoat for the high level of unofficial strikes in the assembly plant after the 1988 national pay strike allowed the company to kill two birds with one stone.

Documents revealed at the tribunal also showed that the company had been keeping secret file notes on Mick's movements for at least a year before he was sacked.

The most senior personnel officers in the plant had also corresponded in January 1988 on what to do about Mick's degree and ruled out any action on the basis of time elapsed and Mick's role as a trade union representative.

Eleven months later, personnel manager Phil Taylor was claiming he had only just discovered Mick's degree.

The high level conspiracy involved in the sacking was exposed when both the plant manager who made the original decision and the more senior manager who upheld it on appeal admitted to discussing their decisions with the same senior personnel and operations managers on the Dagenham Estate.

The blatant political motive was spelt out by Stuart Hamer, vice-president of personnel for the production division of Ford of Europe.

He spoke to students at the London School of Economics of a "dangerous militant cell" in the Dagenham assembly plant, then added:

"we know who these people are and we are going to sort them out."

No doubt this would be done through the services of the Economic League, which Ford has been forced to admit it uses.

If the company's decision to dismiss was blatantly political, so was the tribunal's decision to attach a 75% contributory factor to its unfair dismissal finding.

Tribunals were never established to defend the rights of militant trade unionists and there was no way Mick was going to apologise for either his own or the 1107 branch's activities over the years.

Perhaps, in the words of Ford's legal representative, this failure to show "contrition" told against him. But neither Mick nor the present officers of the 1107 branch will ever tug their forelocks to the bosses.

International Briefing

Mexico

Ford — the conflict continues

In *Labour Briefing* No.96, Dave Kelloway reported the murder of Cleto Begno Urbino, an activist in Ford Cautitlan in Mexico, at the hands of thugs from the CTM, the state-sponsored union. Below we update the situation at the plant and provide some background information.

The conflict that has developed at Ford Cautitlan began due to a series of protests waged by the workers over a cut in their Christmas bonus and in a lower profit share for workers in 1989 despite large profits for Fords.

The rank and file organised demonstrations and work stoppages in the Cautitlan plant. There were negotiations between a commission elected by the workers, and the leadership of the CTM, including the Secretary General, Fidel Velasquez.

Fidel agreed to make up a tripartite commission with representatives from the national CTM, the National Executive Committee of the Ford Union (which supported the company's actions) and the workers' commission (representatives of the rank and file). This tripartite body would further negotiate with Ford.

It was also agreed to organise a referendum on whether the general secretary of the Executive Committee, Hecto Uriarte, would remain in office.

Workers at Fords had campaigned for a long time against the bureaucratic imposition of Uriarte. Fidel Velasquez failed to turn up for the January 4th meeting at which this agreeement was to be signed.

As the first shift arrived for work at 6.00am next day they found 150 armed thugs plus federal police and state of Mexico police. The thugs attacked the workers' commission, present to report back to the workforce on the negotiations that had taken place.

Many workers were beaten, two had to be hospitalised and others were temporarily arrested by the police. The workers responded with a three hour stoppage and occupation.

Death

Urbino's death came on January 8th when armed thugs attacked the workforce with pistols and machine guns. The workers occupied the plant and sent a delegation of 500 to Mexico city to demonstrate and to contact other workers.

The workers are convinced that the attacks were organised by Uriarte with the active collusion of Ford.

Ford management have denied any responsibility and decided to close the plant "until the safety of the workers can be guaranteed by the authorities" Ford also demanded permission from the Government to dismiss the entire workforce.

The workforce responded with a series of demands including reinstatment of all workers, dismissal of Hector Uriarte, and a commitment by the CTM to the election of a new Executive Committee.

The CTM agreed to the elections, but on condition they alone were in charge of the procedures to be used.

On January 23rd police moved in to remove the workers from the plant. Ford claimed the occupation was illegal while the workforce argued the occupation was jusified to safeguard the workplace.

Faced with the persistence of the Ford workers, the support they enjoy from the public and the concrete evidence which exists, the authorities have been forced to arrest ten thugs who participated in the January 8th attack.

A warrant has now been issued for the arrest of Hector Uriarte himself though the normally efficent Mexican authorities seem unable to find him.

Absent

The CTM formally "gave permission" to the absent general secretary to leave the job to which they appointed him and have replaced him with an 'interim' Secretary, Juan Jose Sosa, without any democratic election and without consulting the proper representatves of the workers.

The Ford workers for their part have decided that if the CTM will not respect their demands they will leave the CTM and join the Confederacion Obrers Revolucionaria (COR).

The CTM has now agreed to recognise the negotiating committee and Ford has withdrawn its decision to sack the 3,800 workers. It is not yet clear whether this includes all those fired in July 89 who were sacked after organising a democratic opposition within the CTM.

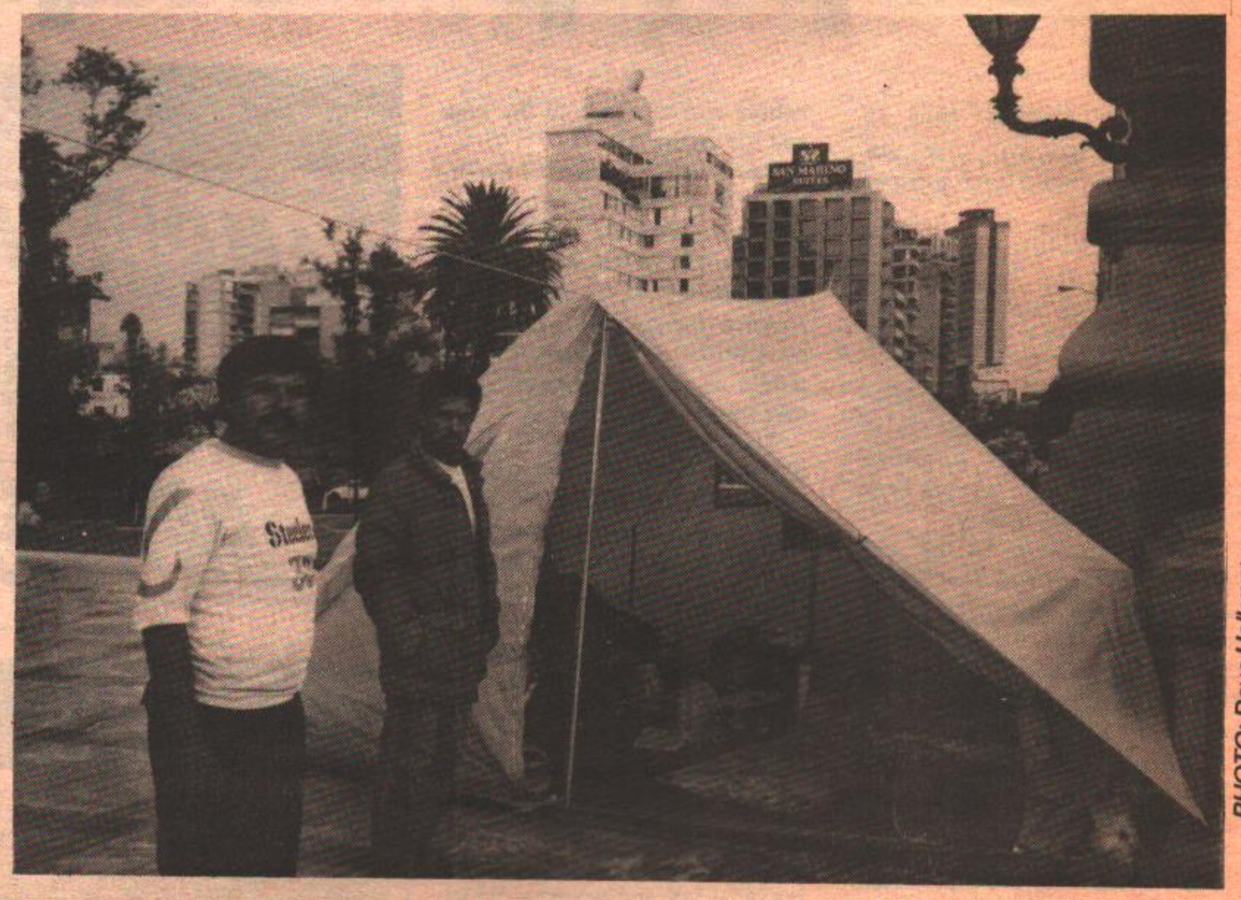


PHOTO: Dave Holloway

Marco Antonio Jiménez: on vigil after victimisation by Fords

Although partial, the workers have won an important victory. They have got rid of the corrupt leadership of the Ford Union, although democratic elections have still to take place.

Ford

They succeeded in getting Uriarte and the most important thugs arrested or warranted. Ford has not been able to get away with firing the workers' representatives and 'purging' the factory of militants.

The CTM has been forced to dissociate itself from the official it appointed and to defend the workers right to their jobs.

The victory would not have been possible without the support of many popular and trade union organisations in Mexico and abroad. Pressure still needs to be kept up on Ford, the CTM and the Mexican authorities to prevent more dirty tricks.

Iran

Iranian workers take strike action

Thousands of workers at the Melli Shoe Industrail Complex have gone on strike.

By a Tehran factory worker

This followed months of empty promises by the management in response to the workers' demands for better classification of the workforce.

The strike started on the 12th and 13th of Dey (2nd-3rd January 1990).

Initially, workers at some factories stopped work, switching off their machines and calling on other workers to join them.

By the start of the next working week, workers in most of the factories and workshops had joined the strike.

The strike grew so fast that in the week beginning 16th Dey (6th January) the only people working in the complex were members of Bassij and other anti-worker supporters of Islamic societies.

However, the workers did not remain silent. They attacked the supporters of the regime and forced them to stop work. According to the news received in Tehran, women workers in the sawing section were amongst the most determined sections.

Faced with the strike, the anti-worker forces of the local Imam, factory management and the Ministry of Labour joined forces to issue ultimata and arrest some workers.

These forces threatened the use of military personnel while continuing to issue false promises of discussing workers' demands.

On the first and second day of the strike, the joint anti-worker camp called the strike "haram" (a religious term implying sinful).

Amnesty

On the third and fourth day the arrests started. Hundreds of workers were arrested as they were driven home in factory buses, others were arrested at night as the security forces raided their homes.

Towards the end of the first week of the strike, professional government spies together with members of Bassij (pro-government Islamic militia) entered the workshops and tried to start the machines.

Large

The workers organised a large demonstration outside the complex.

At this stage the government forces brought in more than 50 military vehicles with army personnel and Islamic guards threatening to shoot down anyone who refused to work.

Yet the workers refused to give in and continued their demonstration neutralising government threats. Following their defeat, the management took a more conciliatory note and organised meetings to discuss the workers' grievances.

However, the workers boycotted the meetings or used them to air their anger. Emphasising how their rights had been trampled upon, they said:

"Look at our hands, torn by the work, and look at the thieves who have pocketed millions. We are determined to get what is due to us."

At some of these meetings the workers beat up the strike breakers who were forced to leave the factories.

The next day workers demonstrated in the streets adjacent to the factory complex calling for the release of their fellow workers, and unity and solidarity with the strike.

Although many of those arrested were consequently released, more than a hundred are still in prison. News reaching Tehran confirms that until 20th Dey the strike continued.

On 21st Dey the government renewed its attacks on the workforce, threatening a bloodbath. The workers were eventually forced to return to work on 23rd Dey.

News

However, their morale remained high and the news of their resistance for more than ten days in the face of government attacks has brought hope and encouragement to workers throughout Iran.



The shadow of Khomeini still looms over Iran

News of their struggle spread quickly in the working class estates of Tehran and Karaj. The strike is still the subject of much celebration.

South Africa

The end of apartheid?

The dramatic release of Nelson Mandela on February 11th, following announcements by President De Klerk on February 2nd, took the world by surprise.

With the unbanning of the ANC, SACP, PAC, and 30 other organisations, and then Mandela's release, a mood of euphoria is sweeping through South Africa and the world.

Is this the beginning of the end of apartheid? Is the door really open for negotiations to begin? And what are the negotiations to be about?

In the sobering light of the morning after, the first doubts have begun to arise.

The state of emergency has only been partially lifted (resistance fighters can still be locked up for six months without trial); the amnesty does not apply to those guilty of "acts of terrorism".

But perhaps more importantly, the fundamental issues were not even raised in the President's speech.

There was no reference to:

•the three acts in the statute book which are the very foundation of apartheid:

•the Land Act which allots 14% of the land (the least productive) to 80% of the population;

•the Group Areas Act which enforces residential segregation;

•the Population Registration Act which arbitrarily classifies people into racial categories.

Even the Separate Amenities Act which provided for separate recreational and cultural facilities on racial lines (such as "whites only" beaches), although now in abeyance, has not been repealed.

At a recent press conference, the Minister of Planning, Hermanus Kriel, said that while it was the intention to scrap this act, a government committee was looking into making special provision for the "very sensitive situations".

By CHARLIE VAN GELDEREN

He said of the Group Areas Act it was something "we (the whites) feel very strongly about" and the government had no plans to scrap it.

Stoffel van der Merwe, Minister in charge of black education, has made it clear that "for deeply ingrained historical and cultural reasons" the system of separate schooling, which provides five times more spending on white education than black, would remain.

Nothing has been said about the future of the Bantustans, set up without the agreement of the people forced to live in them, and against their expressed wishes.

They will continue to exist as pools of cheap labour for the mines, industries and farms.

Despite De Klerk's promise of freedom of assembly and the right to demonstrate, the police are still shooting at peaceful protestors.

The most recent occasion occurred at Tembisa, a Transvaal township not far from Pretoria.

On February 5th, a peaceful march to the local administration to hand in a petition about education and housing was met with a hail of bullets and tear gas.



The organisation of food parcels sustained the Sarmcol strikers (above). Who will consult the working class on the dismantling of apartheid?

De Klerk has stated that a new constitution would be put to the vote. Whose vote? At present this is a privilege denied to the black majority.

Mandela laid down very principled conditions for negotiations. Some of these have been met, though not in full.

He never demanded the setting up of the only forum which could guarantee a racialist-free South Africa — a constituent assembly elected on a universal franchise.

De Klerk has been forced to his present position by the heroic struggle of the people of South Africa, above all by the black working class.

Economic pressure from outside has also played a subsidiary role. Like Gorbachev in the USSR, he is trying to forstall a revolution from below with reforms from above.

Like Gorbachev and the Stalinist leaders of the satellite states he will find that these concessions are not enough. The people will not be satisfied with half a loaf.

De Klerk is also hoping that his proposals will accentuate differences within the ANC and between the ANC and other liberation movements. The practice of divide and rule will not readily be given up.

There is, of course, a section of the world community which rejoiced without reservations De Klerk's declaration of intent.

South African shares were boosted in the stock markets of the world. Big business is already feasting its greedy eyes on the prospects of investments in South Africa's cheap labour economy.

The working class of South Africa still has a long struggle ahead. It will have more space for organising as a result of De Klerk's reforms.

The Labour Relations Act, which makes Thatcher's anti-trade union laws look like a blueprint for a workers' charter, is still in force.

The De Klerk reforms have provided more space for organising and propoganda. For this alone they must be welcomed.

But the international labour movement must continue to give its full support to the continuing struggle in South Africa.

China Solidarity Campaign

Public Meeting

China — the fight for democracy goes on

Saturday 24th February
7.30pm
London School of Economics

Speakers:

Bernie Grant MP

Front for Democratic China (UK)

Siew Ming Chan (recently returned from Hong Kong)

East European speaker

The recent events in Eastern Europe have given all supporters of the Chinese democratic movement tremendous hope.

The regime has ended marshall law in an attempt to convince the world that everything is back to normal.

Don't be deceived! Although they appear to be in full control and are intimidating the people of Hong Kong even before 1997, their days are surely numbered.

Further details: CSC, 68 Shaftsbury Avenue, London W1. Tel: 01-494 3237.



Nelson Mandela: as the world has seen him for the last 27 years.

Official statement from the South African Communist Party

The moves announced by de Klerk are, "positive steps taken towards creating a climate for negotiation." And they are, "a great victory for the masses of our country."

Repressive legislation that still exists:

•Detention without trial continues unchanged under the Internal Security Act.

•Section 28 provides for preventative detention.

•Section 29 provides for the detention of persons for the purposes of interrogation.

•Section 30 provides for the detention of potential state witnesses.

•Section 50 provides for detention without trial for a 48 hour period.

•Section 50a provides for detention of up to 180 days.

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Poll Tax Notes

Crunch time for Councils

As Manchester Council looks set to scrap 3,200 jobs — including making up to 1,000 redundancies — Labour's alternative to the Poll Tax looks considerably better than its resistance.

By DAN CARTER

Many Labour Councils are preparing for cuts and redundancies in order to keep the Poll Tax low.

This is despite the fact that people clearly blame the Government rather than Councils for the high Poll Taxes.

As usual, most Councils are reacting in such a weak-willed manner that rather than take on the Government's arguments and publicity — they are going to fall back on making their workers and communities suffer.

This stance is being taken by election-year Town Hall careerists despite advice from a new corner — namely Larry Whitty at Labour HQ.

He points out, in an NEC Advice Note, "Using real cuts in services and job losses to secure small reductions in the local level of Poll Tax may well undermine public and workforce confidence in Labour-controlled Councils."

A document put to the Party's recent Local Government Conference in Cardiff also calls on Councillors to "consider the extent to which civil penalties are to be used for non-registration."

The fact that only Lambeth Council and Tower Hamlets Labour Group (expected to take control in May) at present have a policy of not prosecuting non-payers doesn't mean we should let the Labour Councils off the hook.

We must continue to place pressure on them from three areas — local Parties, Town Hall unions (Rotherham NALGO are to vote on a policy of non-collection as we go to press), and the anti-Poll Tax Campaigns.

The coming Council elections provide the opportunity for left Labour candidates to unite with local campaigns and publish election leaflets arguing for non-collection and non-payment.

Introduction

The timing of the introduction of the Tax — a month before the May 3rd elections — could make it a key issue of the campaign; but only if Labour is identified with those resisting the Tax rather than those introducing it and fining people over it.

Labour's alternative to the Tax is basically correct in the present situation — a property tax based on ability to pay. This is the first stage towards the introduction of a wealth tax, the only fair way to charge for local services at the present time.

However, as with most of Bryan Gould's schemes, firstly there is no guarantee a Labour Government will immediately introduce it in this form; and secondly, it sounds more radical than it is.

For instance, under any socialist charging system, commercial and business establishments should be made to pay more towards the funding of community services.

Unfortunately past attempts by Labour's Shadow Ministers to explain relatively simple policies (defence, the economy) to the public do not guarantee that Mr. Gould will turn this one into the vote-winner it should be.

It remains for Party members to ensure the Poll Tax is made unworkable through continuing to build the ever-growing campaigns, and maximising union involvement, rather than relying on opinion-poll hysteria and the next Labour Government.

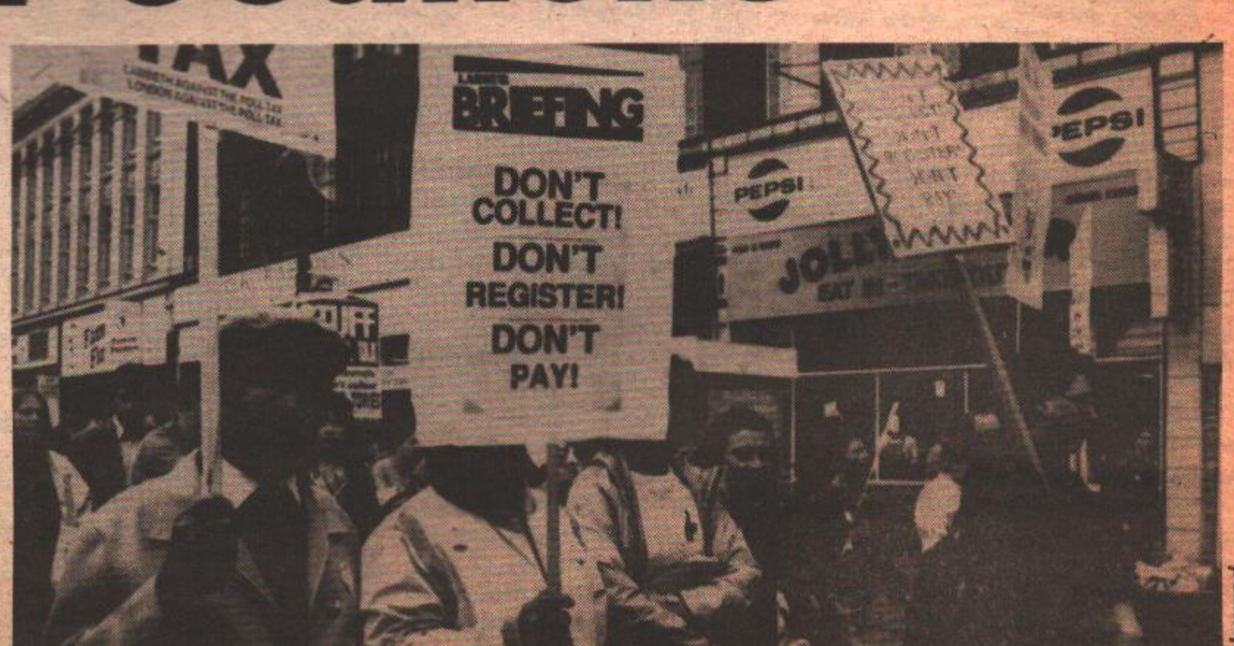


PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

"Building ever growing campaigns..." ...on the march last year.

Loughborough

Don't let Labour Councils off the hook!

Only two months after its formation, the Loughborough Anti-Poll Tax Campaign held its second public meeting on February 5th.

By Chris Hall
Loughborough
Briefing supporter

The organisers were hoping for around one hundred people. The eventual attendance was nearly 300!

The meeting was so swollen with people that we had to move into the gym.

The meeting was organised mainly by *Militant* supporters, and was attended by sympathetic Labour councillors, and a lone Tory, who did not receive a sympathetic hearing.

The rest of the meeting represented a broad cross-section of Loughborough's community. At the end over 250 people pledged not the pay the Poll Tax.

Discussion centred around the need for community action to defeat the Poll Tax; and although relevant figures and information were provided by Labour councillors, the meeting did not challenge the role of the labour movement in the anti-Poll Tax struggle.

As a supporter of *Labour Briefing* and a committed Labour Party activist, I believe it is essential that our elected representatives are not allowed to get off the hook by supporting community action while refusing to see the non-payment campaign as a political question demanding political support.

Ealing

The campaign grows

In Ealing, West London, the anti-Poll Tax campaign is growing, but there remains a lot of work to be done.

By John Finnegan
Ealing Against the Poll Tax

Estimated Poll Tax bills figures for the borough have been revised upwards as a result of the government's assessment of council spending needs, and the eventual charge will be around £440-£450.

These higher figures are likely to give a boost to the campaign in the weeks running up to implementation.

The campaign was launched in Ealing a year ago after an initial conference in Southall.

As activists from all parts of the borough became involved, local groups and anti-Poll Tax unions were set up, able to shape and develop their campaigns in line with the particular needs and wishes of their communities.

In a diverse borough such as Ealing this is very important. In Southall, for example, with its large Asian population and strong sense of community, styles of campaigning and organisation involved are different from other parts of the borough.

Ealing Against the Poll Tax has evolved into a loose federal structure which plays an important role in co-ordinating the activities of its affiliated groups and unions, providing a borough wide perspective, and allowing for information sharing and education amongst its members.

In terms of building in the communities around the slogan of "non-payment" the campaign has been successful, with a number of public meetings well attended, and more planned in the near future.

Regular Saturday stalls and petitioning take place in all parts of the borough, along with door-to-door campaigning on the estates. A recent two hour canvass in Northolt resulted in 72 people joining their local group.

Hundreds of individuals are affiliated to the campaign and more are joining every week. While this is very encouraging it would be a mistake to adopt an overly optimistic attitude and assume the Poll Tax is all but defeated.

It is important to assess realistically and attempt to redress certain weaknesses in the campaign. First it is necessary to try to draw in to a more active role the many people who have joined the campaign but whose involvement has been low.

Secondly, greater energy needs to be put into developing the other dimensions of the anti-Poll Tax strategy which have to date taken a back seat, such as building in the labour movement and the workplace for non-implementation and non-collection.

To these ends priority is being given in Ealing to an initiative of the West London and Thames Valley Trades Council Co-ordinating Committee which called a meeting on February 6th to plan a week of action in the unions against the Poll Tax.

Pressure

Meanwhile Ealing against the Poll Tax is keeping up the pressure on the council by building for a lobby on February 27th, at which a petition will be presented to the Labour administration calling for non-implementation.

Links are being made here, with those campaigning against council cuts, most notably Ealing Fightback which has recently been reconvened.

As far as EAPT is concerned it is not acceptable for the council to attempt to lower its Poll Tax by reducing services and sacking workers.

The political connections between Poll Tax and cuts are therefore being highlighted, with the campaign registering its total opposition to both.

The lobby of Ealing Council takes place outside the Town Hall, New Broadway, at 6.30pm on 27th February.