LABOUR
BRIEFING
No. 98 March 7th-21st 1990

INSIDE:

- ☆ Nicaraguga: after the elections
- ☆ Reproductive Rights: in Britain and internationally
- ☆ Students fight back: Campaign feature
- ☆ Lots lots more!

40p

LABOUR: DON'T IMPLEMENT THE POLL TAX!

SINK THE TORIES' FLAGSHIP!



Anti-Poll Tax campaigners stop a warrant sale in Scotland.

The events of the last few days have shown that a growing number of Tories have had enough of the Poll Tax.

The resignation of 18 Oxfordshire Tory Councillors is just the latest aspect of the deepening Tory crisis over the Poll Tax, at the root of which is not the rebellion within Tory ranks, but the mass hatred of the Poll Tax.

Despite media censorship, the message that 1.5 million people in Scotland are not paying is getting through, helping to boost support for non-payment in England and Wales, and encouraging mobilisations around Local Authority budget meetings.

The growing Tory opposition to the Poll Tax arises not from an acceptance of the unfair and anti-working class nature of the Tax, but because many Tory Councils and Tory voters feel let down in the face of Poll Tax levels as high as the "high spending" Labour Councils.

Tory MPs have seen genuinely mass, militant meetings in their own constituencies against the Tax, and realise, as one back-bench member of the 1922 Committee put it, that they face the prospect of mass civil disobedience unless radical changes to the basis of the Tax are made.

Any proposals to take education, fire and civil defence, and police out of local control should be rejected. Labour should be demanding more money, not fewer services.

Heaping hot coals onto the Tories discomfort are the latest opinion poll figures showing Labour with nearly a 20% lead — the highest level of support since 1945.

But Labour's "popularity" is actually the Tory's unpopularity. If the Labour Party committed itself to supporting mass non-payment and refused to implement the Tax the opinion polls would represent genuine pro-Labour feeling, not anti-Tory anger.

It is therefore *criminal* that Labour Councils are voting to implement the Poll Tax.

Although many working people understand that it is a Tory Tax, Labour Councils will inevitably pay a price for setting high levels, making massive cuts, or both.

This price could well be large abstentions in the May elections, or even working class support for Green Party candidates who support non-payment.

By Jane Connor
Co-Chair London Federation
(personal capacity)

The lobbies of Labour Councils at the beginning of this month, many called round the slogan of "No Poll Tax! No Cuts! with the support of NALGO and other union branches, have shown that anger will be directed against Labour, and that people are prepared to take direct action to stop meetings going ahead.

Local government trade unionists shouldn't fall for the argument being peddled by many Labour Councils that supporting high Poll Tax levels will protect their jobs.

Even without the Poll Tax, the Local Government and Housing Act will force Council rents through the roof; in London the abolition of ILEA means that inner city Councils now have to foot the bill for education; Local Management of Schools will result in even deeper education cuts; and Compulsory Competitive Tendering means big job losses.

It's not "business as usual" in local government. The "dented shield" strategy is as bankrupt as ever. The only principled, and tenable, position for Labour authorities is to stop capitulating and lead the fightback.

But in the midst of the Tory crisis, what of the anti-Poll Tax movement itself?

There is growing unity in the movement around non-payment and non-collection. In London, there is now one, united anti-Poll Tax Federation.

Whilst differences on precise tactics exist, especially in relation to the trade unions, the basis and structure for a united front against the Tax exists.

There is also a sober assessment of the need to *organise* non-payment, not just let it spontaneously happen.

Mass non-payment needs to be a conscious political act if people are to have the confidence to withstand threats and harassment from local authorities.

The anti-Poll Tax movement needs to step up its work with trade unionists. Isolated action *is* taking place in some workplaces.

In Haringey, housing workers are demanding re-grading for taking on extra work; in Lambeth recently workers in Poll Tax offices walked-out over appalling working conditions; in Hammersmith housing workers are refusing to pass the names of people claiming housing benefit to registration officers.

The strength of the community campaigns will give confidence to Council workers wanting to take action against implementation. Every workplace action, however small and limited, should be supported by anti-Poll Tax groups.

The depth of the Tory crisis should not be underestimated. The anti-Poll Tax movement's threat to "sink the Tory flagship" is every day coming closer to being a reality.

But it's not just the Tory Poll Tax that has to go — but the Tories themselves.

LABOUR – TAKE THE POWER!

Letters

WRITEBACK!

We welcome your letters!
Disagree with something? — write in.
Agree with something? — write in.
Want to raise a new idea? — Write in.
Let's hear your views!

Write to: Writeback, Labour Briefing, PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY.
Please send letters for the next issue to arrive by Wednesday, March 14th if possible.
Letters over 300 words may be cut for reasons of space.

Patria libre e morir

Dear *Briefing*,

I should be writing to urge comrades to prioritize the Birmingham Six Campaign, but on the same day that Paddy Hill repeated his intention to remain in prison until proved innocent, the Nicaraguan people almost destroyed my faith in human nature.

By capitulating to economic imperialism they have ended over ten years of freedom.

President Bush and the BBC gloated over the triumph of "democracy" and the prospects of peace. They have almost certainly voted for a real civil war and a puppet dictatorship.

With the FMLN on the verge of victory in El Salvador, comrades must argue for continued support for the Sandinistas and the right to self-determination regrdless of the NSC's position.

Ex-President Carter congratulated Daniel Ortega on his stated intention to hand over power to Violetta Charmorro but she won't last five minutes.

As I write the State Police are losing control on the streets of Managua. Ortega won't stand back and see the Sandinistas split again, and the achievements of the revolution dismantled.

The militants will either attempt a coup or be forced to fight the returning *Contras*. Civil War would be an open invitation for direct intervention. Ortega is paying the price for playing the imperialists at their own game.

Patria Libre e Morir

Andy Gibbons,
Oxford

Politics not personalities

Dear *Briefing*,

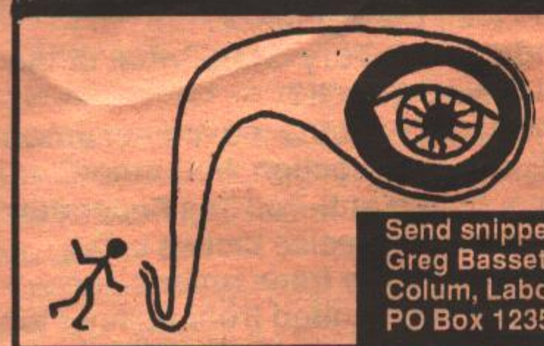
Out on a Limb? (in Periscope, p.2 of *Briefing* No. 96) is really deplorable.

To indulge in levity at the expense of a comrade's injury is no way to promote a political argument.

Politics, not personalities, please!

Eileen Gersh,
Hackney, London

PERISCOPE



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

Communists "not Communists" shock!

"Marxism by itself is no longer adequate to define our politics," says Nina Temple, General Secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain.

Briefing thought it would help the CPGB with a contest to rename *Marxism Today*. "Capitalism Now" or "Stalinism Yesterday" were obvious choices. With their obsession with New Times and a media image, how about "New TV Times"?

As for the dropping of Communist from their Party title, mirroring their Italian comrades (whoops, I mean colleagues), how about the "The Party of Great Britain" or even "The Nice peoples party who never, ever really supported the Stalinist States".

How about "The New Party" or has that been tried before? We support option one in Nina Temple's recent address to the CPGB Executive — "We could cease to exist...".

SUPPORT THE STRUGGLES OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN WORKERS
PUBLIC MEETING
Speakers from:
African National Comgress
South African Congress of Trade Unions
Anti-Apartheid Movement
Ross Galbraith
Wednesday March 14th
Hackney Town Hall, Mare Street, E8
7.30 til 9.30pm
Orgnised by Hackney Trade Union Support Unit in conjunction with the Joint Shop Stewards Committee

News extra

THE WEATHER FORECAST



Watch out! There's weather about! ...Reminiscences of the 1987 "hurricane" captured by Leesa Herbert

People in glass houses...

In dramatic contrast to January and February, March will be generally cold with frequent frosts, sleet and snow over the whole British Isles.

My long range forecast for a generally "cold dry bright March with frost and snow" was issued last November.

It said "Recent calculations suggest it will also probably be rather squally with frequent sleet and snow storms in early-mid March and the second half will be drier and brighter with harder frosts.

"Unfortunately many of February's flowers will get zapped".

January and February were probably the stormiest two months in Britain since the Great Tempest of 1703 which destroyed much of Bristol and London.

By Piers Corbyn
South Bank Poly

The correct forecasting of this very windy and very mild weather is a great success for the solar-weather cycle method.

The worst storms in England and Wales in fact came a little later than expected in the long-range forecast.

The flood tides anticipated (in a statement on February 6th) as a possibility in the West and South West for early February came about a fortnight later.

The solar-weather cycle method is capable of predicting to within a month where there is a danger of such unusual events. Insurance companies should take note!

This forecast method does not use the greenhouse effect, but I believe we should take all the planet-friendly measures proposed by the Greenhouse campaigners as a safety precaution for the future.

Weather wagers I have placed with William Hill on various aspects of temperature, wind, sun and rain in January and February gave me nett profit stake excluded of £784 (163%) and £790 (123%).

Recent wins included wind gusts in excess of 64 mph in Glasgow (5/1) and Central England. February temperatures being in the top 10 this century (at 6/1).

I have placed 29 weather wagers at £20 each with William Hill for March including:

- Average minimum temperature to be at least 2 C below March normal in Birmingham (at 5/2)
- Sunshine to be 20% above normal in various places (at 5/2)
- Central England temperatures to be in the coldest 15 this century (at 5/1)
- Snow or Sleet to fall on my Birthday (March 10th) at Heathrow (at 7/1)!

Be warned!

BRIGHTON POLL TAX

Tories see the right all right

After 12 hours of debate on March 1st, the Brighton Council meeting was adjourned until the following evening.

This occurred after a "peoples meeting" occupied the Council chamber and delayed the meeting by an hour, calling on the council to refuse to implement the Poll Tax.

In solidarity with the local demonstrators, seven Labour Councillors attempted to vote against cuts and the Poll Tax as long as it included the enforcement (prosecution) measures.

Some were completely opposed to setting a Poll Tax rate at all.

The Tories joined with us to vote against Labour's proposed £372 Poll Tax level, proposing a lower rate of £342, leading to cuts in jobs and services next year.

We reject this false choice between Poll Tax and jobs and services.

By Cllr Mark Thompson Brighton

The seven Labour Councillors were following the policy of the Brighton Labour Party. Some argued against setting a tax at all.

This will almost certainly lead to a witch-hunt and the expulsion of this seven from the Labour Group.

The seven who voted against the Tax were: Jean Calder, Sheila Hall, Kate Packham, Richard Stanton, Mark Thompson, Gordon Wingate, Andy Winter.

Stop Press: In the final vote on the evening of Friday 2nd, the Tories abstained, leaving Labour's leadership to push through their Poll Tax level of £372.50.

Disciplinary measures against the Brighton seven are expected to follow.

Larry Whitty has been rumoured to have advised the Labour Group Whip to get these "over and done with" before the campaign for the local elections commences!

Contact Briefing

Articles and correspondence should be sent to Labour Briefing, PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY; as should payment for invoices (including subscriptions) and money for paper sales in the "London" area. Payment for paper sales outside the "London" area (i.e. papers sent on the train and national-only papers sent by post) should be sent to 39 Talia House, Manchester Road, London E14 9HB. You can telephone Briefing on 01-809 3927, most profitably Tues-Friday.

Next issue: No. 99: Deadline for articles Tuesday 13/3; distribution Wednesday 21/3.

Published by Labour Briefing: PO Box 457, London SW2 5UZ. Printed by East End Offset [TU].

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Ambulances: reject this sell-out!

Roger Poole claims that the "new deal" he struck for the ambulance workers is worth a "staggering" 19.6%.

NHS chief Duncan Nichol describes it as a "repackaging of the November offer".

As ambulance workers look more closely at the offer, they will see that Nichol's description is more accurate.

The basic increase is *the same* as that offered last year. The 2.5% productivity element will be based on *cuts*. The lump sum payment on offer is *lower* than the previous deal. And there is *nothing* concrete on leave or pensions.

Above all, there is *no pay formula*. The workers' basic demand has been ignored.

So why is Poole so keen on the offer? The cost of the dispute has been a drain on the funds of the unions involved. Poole was under pressure to settle on any terms at all by union leaders who preferred to cave in rather than escalate the action.

Similarly the Labour leadership, who see Labour's rise in the polls as belated endorsement for Kinnock's policies rather than anti-Tory protest, and the TUC, who feared the mounting pressure for another day of action, lobbied hard behind the scenes for a quick settlement.

The danger is now that the 19 counties who have taken no action over the last six months could tip the balance in voting the more militant areas back to work. This is what Poole is in fact hoping for, by his media hard-sell of the deal.

A fighting leadership of the dispute would have involved these weaker areas from the outset. But NUPE and the others reckoned that the cost of the dispute could be kept down, the fewer the workers who were paid lock-out money. All five unions thus put their bank balances above defending their members' interests.

It is not accidental that the settlement has been struck now. Frustrated with the pathetic leadership, ambulance workers were beginning to take the dispute into their own hands.

Last month Merseyside began all-out strike action with alternative emergency cover, and North West London took a similar step. Elsewhere, workers were calling for escalation.

The Merseyside action points the way forward: the dispute must be escalated. At the same time, activists from the stronger areas should visit as many ambulance stations as possible to discuss and explain why the deal must be rejected.

Support Groups can also be used as a forum for discussion on the way forward.

Poole's approach has been to appeal on TV to the least involved members to end the dispute. Against this, there needs to be a national convenors' meeting to thrash out how to reject this sell-out and step up the action to win.

Behind the Nicaraguan elections

The electoral victory of Violetta Chamorro's UNO coalition in the Nicaraguan elections represents a huge setback for the Nicaraguan masses.

The Sandinista government was brought to power ten years ago after a popular revolution which involved hundreds of thousands of workers and peasants mobilising and taking up arms against a repressive and bloody dictatorship in a fight for social justice and democracy.

A decade of international isolation, economic blockade and military incursions by the US-backed *contras* followed as the US attempted to bring down the Sandinistas.

Imperialism's role in toppling the government was abetted by the Soviet Union, which increasingly treated Nicaragua as a mere bargaining chip in international negotiations and reduced its aid to a trickle.

The electoral result does not fit neatly into some schema about the general decline of "communist" systems.

Nor was the Nicaraguan result a clear vote for the programme of UNO — because it doesn't have one. The only thing that unites this coalition of communist parties, liberals and pro-*contras* is anti-Sandinismo.

The FSLN's defeat was a reaction to the decade of dislocation wrought by the US blockade and *contra* war.

Nicaraguans voted against a 70% decline in their purchasing power, the massive devaluation of the currency, poverty, shortages. They voted against war, *contra* terrorism and conscription.

The root of all these problems lies in the naked aggression pursued against Nicaragua by the Reagan and Bush administrations.

Violetta Chamorro's ragbag of supporters are not going to be able to solve them. They will be pushed aside as the new government faithfully follows the bidding of the US embassy.

A defeat at the ballot box, however, does not immediately overturn all the social gains of the Sandinista revolution. The civil rights, trade union freedoms, education, health, and literacy programmes were won by popular force. They will be defended in the same way.

The invasion of Panama and the election defeat in Nicaragua show that imperialism is still determined to maintain its control over the people of Central America. Socialists internationally must support the fight against imperialism, including defence of the gains of the Cuban revolution.

Behind the headlines

The Social Fund

A setback for the Tory government!

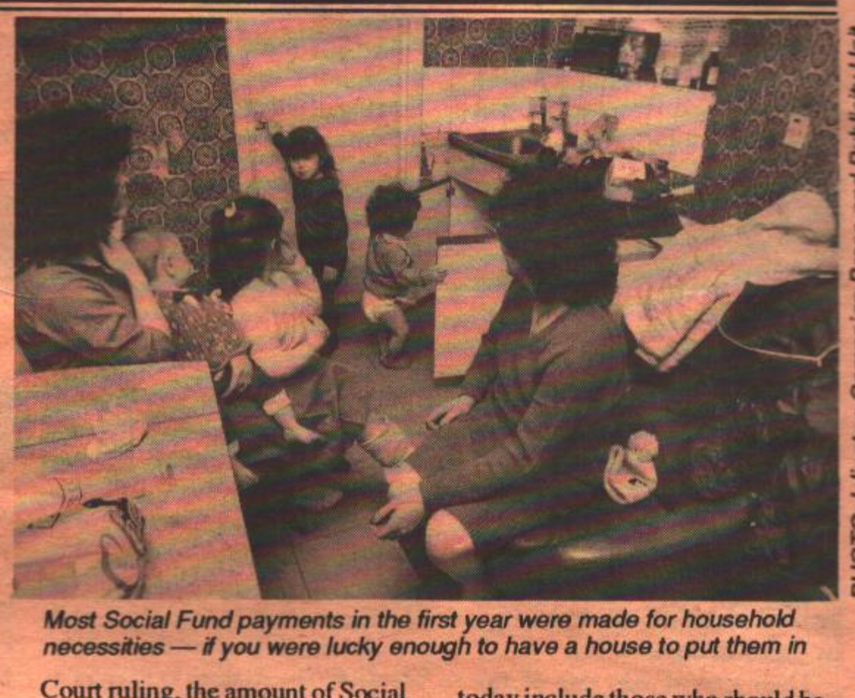


PHOTO: Islington Campaign Press and Publicity Unit

Most Social Fund payments in the first year were made for household necessities — if you were lucky enough to have a house to put them in

The High Court has ruled that the strict cash limits applied to Social Fund spending in local benefit offices is unlawful.

This has come as a severe blow to the Thatcher government's attack on the poor and unemployed.

Now, either they must change the rules, or one of the basic tenets of the Social Fund can no longer be applied.

The Social Fund was introduced in 1988 to replace the system of single needs payments made to people on Social Security to buy items such as furniture, clothing, bedding, not covered by the basic rate of benefit.

The massive growth in unemployment since 1979 brought a big increase in Social Security spending.

•Between 1979 and 1983 the number of single needs payments doubled to nearly two million, while the costs increased fourfold, to over £140 million.

•By 1985, the number of payments doubled again to four million at a cost of £300 million.

The Social Fund was a government device to slash spending to the poor and unemployed. In every respect, it was a more miserly benefit even than the grossly inadequate single needs payments system.

By MARY GODFREY

Instead of an entitlement to benefit, payment was now left to the total discretion of Social Fund Offices. There would be no right of appeal to a tribunal. The only concession was the right to have a decision reviewed by other Social Fund staff.

Instead of the money being paid in direct grants as before, the bulk of the fund — 70% — was to be in the form of loans repayable out of benefit.

The fund was also to be cash limited. In the first year the limits were set at £60 million in direct grants (one seventh of grant expenditure under the old system) and a sum of £140 million was set aside for loans.

Having massaged the unemployment figures to cut the numbers of those out of work, social security spending was to be curtailed by the introduction of arbitrary cash limits unrelated to need.

A year after its introduction, John Moore, then Secretary of State for Social Security, announced he was very happy with the Social Fund:

"The Social fund is now working well. Interest free loans are providing exactly the sort of additional help with unexpected expenses that was needed...

"It is now proving a flexible and imaginative way to help people meet unforeseen expenses and live in the community."

Moore's delight at the Fund's operation was to be expected. It had succeeded in drastically reducing both the number of payments and cutting spending.

Only one million people received any kind of payment in the first year — a quarter of those receiving grants in 1985 — and most of these were loans anyway.

Over 600,000 applications were turned down, often for the kind of needs for which a single needs payment would have been made.

For those who were successful in getting a loan, it remained a short term solution, driving people into long term spiralling debt and poverty.

As for being able to deal with "unforeseen expenses", most payments from the Social Fund in the first year were made for basic household necessities — cookers, furniture, and bedding — which would previously have been covered by the "single needs" payments.

Since, at least up to the High Court ruling, the amount of Social Fund was cash limited in local offices, a successful application was more like competing in a lottery with the odds against one's winning increasing as one moved through the financial year.

Since the Fund was introduced, Social Services Departments, advice centres, and charities have reported a big increase in the numbers of people on Social Security coming to them for advice about debts and cash help.

Success in the government's eyes simply means that desperate people have been diverted from the Social Security system to other sources of help.

Traditionally, the labour movement has not been very active in mobilising support for those outside the labour market.

This is a shameful neglect, not only because the unemployed of today include those who should be voting Labour, nor because employers are cashing in on the situation to entice new workers into no-strike agreements or even non-union workplaces.

The government is getting away with smashing up the benefit side of the welfare state — with nothing like the protest or concern voiced at its equally shameful dismantling of the NHS.

Neither has the women's movement taken up a vociferous campaign on behalf of those, many of whom are women, who rely on state income support.

With the High Court ruling on the Social Fund providing a further embarrassment for a Tory government on the run, now is the time for the labour movement to make a big push on getting rid of this iniquitous fund once and for all.

International Women's Day...

Ireland

Students lead pro-choice struggle

Fourteen student leaders in Ireland have now been stopped from giving out information about abortion.

On December 19th 1989 the Supreme Court in Dublin (the highest court in the 26 counties) unanimously granted the Society for the Protection of the Unborn Child (SPUC) an injunction to this effect.

This is the latest stage in a legal battle that has been running for over a year and a half.

In the previous judgement, an area High Court had refused to grant SPUC an injunction pending referral of the issue to the European Court of Justice.

This earlier court decision had been made against a background of large student mobilisations which had the support of some Dail deputies (mainly from the Labour Party but also a handful from Fine Gael) and various trade union bodies.

However, the campaign had begun to weaken, with a lack of a clear strategy on how to take the issue further outside the student movement and build wider support.

This combined with several defeats at the start of a series of referenda on the distribution of abortion information in colleges across the 26 counties, including University College Dublin.

Campaigning around legal battles is always difficult.

The tactics of the anti-abortionists have been to attempt to take abortion out of the political arena, to confuse their opponents and put decisions in the hands of people who do not even pretend to be democratically accountable.

By FIONA KELLY

During the last decade Irish women in the South have gone from a position where abortion was simply illegal to a situation where abortion is unconstitutional and it is illegal to give out information about how to obtain one.

It was in 1983 that SPUC, with the support of the Catholic Church and massive financial backing from the US, launched its crusade for a constitutional amendment prohibiting abortion.

The voting in the national referendum on September 7th was 841,233 to 416,136 in favour of such an amendment — although just over 50% voted.

In 1987 the Courts ruled in a judgement of unbridled reaction that it was illegal to give out information which might lead to a woman procuring an abortion.

Since then student unions and the underground Women's Information Network have been the only organisations prepared to give out information on all pregnancy options, including abortion.

Unions

It has been the student unions, and their national organisation, the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), which have led the way on this question, with the support of large sections of the labour and Republican movements.

College unions have published the phone numbers of the British Pregnancy Advisory Service (BPAS) and other British abortion agencies in handbooks distributed to all students.

They have answered queries in writing and by phone and remained defiant in the face of legal action.

The Irish government has also attempted to clamp down on other possible avenues of information.

The Office of Censorship of Publications has forbidden *Cosmopolitan* from carrying advertisements for abortion agencies in its Irish editions.

Despite protests, *Cosmopolitan* will comply with this demand, and *Company* magazine will follow suit.

Nor is the right just on the offensive on the question of abortion.

At the end of October last year a case against the Irish Family Planning Association (IFPA) fell on a technicality. They were charged with selling a condom to a person unknown at the "Virgin Megastore" on Dublin's Aston Key.

Condoms

The Family Planning Act 1979 only allows the sale of condoms at authorised chemists or registered clinics to people over 18 (access to other forms of contraceptives is even more restricted).

However, the IFPA admits to selling up to 350 condoms a day in the Dublin Megastore and is thus open to future prosecution, with the possibility of a fine or a prison sentence as a punishment.

In the run up to the case, Christine Donaghy, Chief Executive of the IFPA, received messages of support from organisations all over Europe.

Prosecuted

As she said to the *Sunday Times*, "None of them can believe that in the middle of an AIDS crisis we are being prosecuted for selling a condom in a record store."

This situation of repression and oppression will not be radically altered in women's favour while Ireland remains divided.

Partition rests on the power of the Catholic hierarchy in the South and the Protestant Unionists in the North. Both are united in their reactionary views on women's rights and sexuality.

Meanwhile defiance remains the order of the day amongst the student population in the South.

Twenty-two colleges from the 26 counties' five universities have voted in favour of distributing abortion information and only five have come down against it.

The vote at Trinity College Dublin was three to one in support of their student union's actions.

USI has stated that 33,000 of its members had backed the provision of abortion facility details and 11,000 had opposed it.

Karen Quinlivan, the Women's Officer, has stated that "We will continue to provide information and have discussions on how to deal with the injunction."

It is essential that socialists and feminists, both inside and outside the student movement, do all they can to support the ongoing struggle for women's rights in Ireland.



PHOTO : Martine Stead

Over 250 women (and some men) picketed Magahberry jail last year to commemorate International Women's Week and the assassination of Mairead Farrell, to who Bernadette McAlisky paid moving tribute

Romania

Pregnancy police!

Ceaucescu's draconian laws against abortion out-lived him by just two days.

Their repeal was one of the most publicised and immediate reforms carried out by the Romanian National Salvation Front.

However, the hypocrisy of much of the British press obscured both the real extent of the changes and a history which clearly shows us that the issue of abortion is centrally and essentially a question about women's lives.

Romania, like all of the other Eastern European countries, liberalised abortion availability following the re-introduction of the 1920 Abortion Law in the Soviet Union in 1956.

Falling birth rates in the 60s prompted several Eastern European governments to embark on what are, rather euphemistically, called "pro-natalist" policies.

These ranged from financial and social inducements to have children to increasing legal and administrative restrictions on abortion. The strategy in Romania was particularly repressive.

By Rebecca Flemming Women for Socialism.

In 1966 having an abortion or helping a woman have one was made a criminal offence, punishable by up to five years in prison. The only legal exceptions were for women over forty or who already had four children.

All forms of contraception were banned.

The failure of these changes significantly to effect population growth led to further coercive measures from the regime, reaching terrifying proportions with the edict of 1984.

Under this provision women were subjected to gynaecological examinations every three months. Doctors came to the factories, schools and institutions to monitor every woman between the ages of 16 and 45 under the supervision of the Securitate.

Pregnant women were registered. All other medical treatment could then take place only on presentation of the pregnancy registration form. It was even required for dental treatment!

Women who were not pregnant had detailed notes taken on their menstrual cycle and a report made on their fertility.

Childless couples over the age of 25 had 20% deducted from their wages. The age of women allowed to have an abortion was raised to 45 and the quota of children was raised to five.

The black market trade in contraceptives was subjected to a state crackdown reminiscent of George Bush's "War against Drugs".

A story told by a Romanian woman to the West German woman's paper *Tarantel* illustrates the suffering and devastation caused by this cruelty and repression.

"A medical student in her last year of studies is pregnant. She attempts an abortion on herself. In the process she contracts a high fever.

"She must go to the hospital, but out of fear of prosecution and imprisonment she hangs herself in her dormitory room.

"The officers of the medical school convene an open meeting. The student is expelled posthumously from the college".

Estimated

An estimated 13,000 women died every year as a result of illegal abortions — which are thought to be running at about 1.2 million annually. The effect of illegal abortions on the health of the women who survive can also be appalling.

Cases of sterility and "cervical incompetence" (which causes spontaneous miscarriage) are common in a population in which the *average woman will have undergone 5 illegal abortions by the age of 40.*

Sexuality

The authorities also sought to regulate women's sexuality more generally. Young, unmarried women, in particular, were subjected to harassment by the Securitate.

To imagine that this whole system of repression was brought tumbling down in December would be illusory.

The National Salvation Front repealed what were clearly some of the most hated and destructive of Ceaucescu's laws, and abortion is now legal on a number of medical grounds.

This is one essential step forward, but for real and lasting progress to be made Romania needs a broad, independent women's movement which is based on the reality of women's lives and is able to fight for their rights.

The ideological justifications for restrictions on abortion in the East are different from those in the West.

There were no religious ideas of "life" beginning at conception, no championing of foetal rights, no discussion about viability in Romania.

There was just Ceaucescu's (and therefore the nation's) determination to raise the population to 30 million by the year 2000.

But the concrete effects of abortion restrictions on women's lives is the same, East and West. We are denied our basic right to control our bodies and lives, subjected to degradation, pain and suffering, and ultimately, condemned to death.

...Reproductive Rights

Embryo Bill

No to an anti-woman, pro-family Bill

The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill has finished its progress through the House of Lords.

As it heads back towards the Commons, we should take some time out of the urgent fight against the specific attacks on women's abortion rights and access to Donor Insemination to consider what we think about the Bill as a whole.

It is quite a complicated issue. Most people (and certainly socialists) believe that scientific research, particularly in an area as sensitive as genetics, should be controlled.

This goes for clinics which provide fertility treatments and donor insemination too.

What is wrong with the Bill is not that it attempts to control these things (though in a very muddled way), but that the framework of the Bill as a whole is completely anti-woman and pro-family.

The Tories are divided on the question of genetic research. The mainstream do want it to go ahead — and it is their supporters who, by and large, can afford the very expensive treatments involved.

By Debbie Epstein
Selly Oak CLP
Women's Section

On the other hand, the extreme right, who call themselves "pro-life" (but support capital punishment and would deny access to DI for lesbians and single women) are totally against any form of genetic research.

Socialists should support genetic research, and, in the context of the current Bill, support the 14-day clause rather than the 0-day clause, while at the same time, recognising the problems in the Bill.

First, the actions of scientists should be controlled by making them accountable to patients and the community through bodies elected by patient and community groups.

Second, the context for legislative action on genetic research should be about the purposes of the research, not the rights of the human embryo.

We want and need research which will help cure and eliminate genetic disorders and improve the quality of life for people with congenital disabilities or hereditary diseases.

We do not want genetic engineering aimed at producing some kind of monstrous "super-race".

Neither of these issues is dealt with at all in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill which restricts itself, in terms of research, to providing a time limit.

Any idea of a Code of Practice is left to the new Licensing Authority — which will be appointed by the Secretary of State, be unaccountable, and consist of at least a third doctors and scientist concerned with embryo research.

Progressive

Other matters dealt with in this wide ranging Bill include one positive and progressive measure giving women who agree to act as surrogate mothers the right to withdraw from any such arrangements.

However, virtually everything else in the Bill is problematic.

The Statutory Licensing Authority will have jurisdiction not only over embryo research, but also over in-vitro fertilisation (IVF) and donor insemination (DI) — but within the same anti-woman framework.

Clinics should be licensed in order to protect those who use them and to prevent them from making fortunes out of people's distress.

There is no place for a licensing authority which makes moral judgements about the type of woman who should be able to use clinic services, whether they be New Reproductive Technologies (NRTs) or the very old (and un-technological) method of Donor Insemination.

Disease

Women using DI need to know that the sperm they are getting has been adequately screened for disease or genetic disorder.

Women using NRTs need to have some control over how they are used and need to know that (given the relatively low success rate of these methods) they will have the best possible chance of success.

Just as in the case of genetic research, any Licensing Authority must consist of and be answerable to those who use the services provided by these clinics.

Women should form a majority of members of such a body, and they should be elected by women's groups, lesbian groups, groups of clinic users, and so on.

Technical

They may need the advice and assistance of professionals (who are independent of the clinics) in dealing with technical matters, such as the adequacy of screening. They do not need to be professionals themselves.

The Bill as it stands, without any amendments, represents a threat to women:

- because of the statutory status in gives to embryos, which could be used later by anti-abortionists;
- because of the way in which the Statutory Licensing Authority will be constituted;
- because of the fact that this Authority will be asked to consider whether clinics are treating the right people.

The legislation we need is quite different from this.

We need legislation which defends women, which prevents genetic engineering, while allowing research into genetic disorders, and which gives the people who use services the power to control how they are run.



Women trade unionists on the march to protect jobs and services — will they march to protect reproductive rights?

Women – take the power!

The personal *is* political!

Why are so few women jumping up and down about the Human Fertilisation and Embryo Bill?

Local lobbies mobilise only the staunch hard left, and articles centre around the Parliamentary procedure and debate.

But as with all previous attacks on the right to choose the real issue is women's lack of power.

During the 19th century childbirth became "safe" when men took over the procedure. More recently, abortion became "safe" when it became legal and moved into the male-dominated medical profession.

However, the whole process of seeking an abortion is a humiliating experience for most women — from realising that an unwanted conception has occurred, to living with the consequences.

Abortion

In the health service, an abortion is recorded on medical records for ever, and even routine check-ups often illicit some reference to the abortion from doctors.

In hospital, women in for abortions share wards with women undergoing fertility treatment. The taint of termination is marked clearly above the bed in red, and no counselling is given.

At the same time, women will not be free to choose whether to *have* children or not until they all have access to free child care facilities and economic independence.

A spokesperson for a Birmingham pregnancy advisory service recently revealed that many young couples on high incomes now pay by instalments for their facilities. High mortgage rates have cut their disposable incomes to the point where pregnancy is a financial disaster.

By Pauline Purnell
Birmingham
Briefing

For a single parent with two teenage children, the cost of an abortion in the private sector would mean £75 less spent on each of them that year. The cost of childcare provision in local authority nurseries is over £40 per week, or £70 per week for a registered childminder able to accommodate flexible hours.

Even when choosing to have an abortion women are not expected to care about the tissue they reject — but many do. They want research to continue to enable people who wish to parent a child from childbirth to do so.

Many women want to be able to contribute to the alleviation of Parkinson's Disease and other disabling conditions. Aborted embryonic foetal tissue can be used to this end.

But women must have the right to make such decisions and control how such tissue is used, to ensure that women benefit.

Women should also have the right to decide how we bring up children. We must continue to explode the myth of a cosy nuclear family. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

Two single colleagues of mine conceived as a consequence of private agreements with male donors. Both remained in contact with the donors.

One has retained a business-like arrangement that allows occasional contact with the child. This woman leads a full and fulfilling life in work and as a mother.

The other eventually formed a relationship with the donor. They live together and she has the extra burden of compromising her lifestyle and sharing decision-making. The child has two parents, but neither is free to be themselves.

At a recent NALGO meeting some men voiced the opinion that single women should not have children!

I do not remember a rush to remove all children from war widows, or a flood of propaganda that men in dangerous professions should not have children (except if they work at Sellafield, of course...).

Nannies

One of the least acknowledged "single parents" are the nannies of the rich who care single-handed for two, maybe three, under-fives whilst wealthy parents flit around the world.

The children of the rich are sent off to boarding schools or private children's homes. These are communal homes surely, not nuclear families.

We must confront the hypocrisy, expose the half truths and work to ensure that



our daughters have power over their own lives!

The debate about the Embryology Bill and the latest threat to the time limit on abortion is often dealt with clinically. Discussions lack the use of personal experiences to convince men and women of the arguments and the need for women to have power.

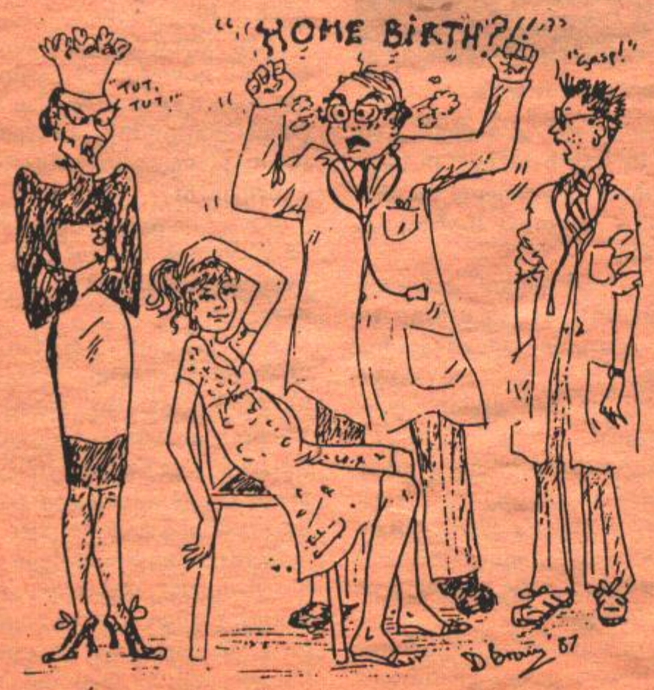
Romania

In France, women now have access to very early, safer, abortion through the RU486 pill. We should campaign for access to it here.

In Romania, women were criminalised for not wanting children. That must not happen here.

And in Britain, the right of lesbians to have and to rear children is under attack.

We want all women to have the opportunity of childbirth if they want it, but it must a woman's choice. And until there are more women doctors, researchers, politicians and legal advisors to project and protect that choice, the right to exercise choice is lessened.



Labour Party

Local Government Debate

What's left for Peter Chowney?

Fight the dented shield!

I was confused by reading Peter Chowney's article "What's left for local goverment?" (*Briefing*, no 96).

I can only conclude that what he thinks *is* left is a left version of the dented shield!

The piece is based on some serious miscalculations of why socialists should stand for "the Council", and what they should seek to do once elected.

The role of socialists in local government is to provide direction for those opposition forces outside the Council Chamber.

Peter falls foul of his own logic when he correctly criticises the "new idealists" for being only custodians of the local state, but he goes on to call for "a coherent strategy for running inner city local government."

Comrade, if you characterise local government as the state, why do you aspire to run it effectively? The state operates purposefully against the interests of the working class.

It is misguided to suggest that the battles against ratecapping and abolition of the GLC and metropolitan counties were lost because of a lack of "popular support".

Has mass popular support won

By Cllr Steve French Lambeth

the ambulance dispute? Popular support means nothing unless it can be turned into real effective action. The GLC did have such support, but what good did it do them?

It is wrong to say that "Many Labour Authorities were ... unaffected by the local government revolution."

All Labour Councils have had their Rates Support Grant & Housing Investment Money cut.

All will suffer from the imposition of the Poll Tax, and many will be punished by the ringfencng of the housing revenue account. Other legislation such as Section 29 and "Widdecombe" have also taken their toll.

The prime reason why it's still "all quiet on the non-metropolitan front" is because of the Labour Party's "dented shield" response to Thatcher's attacks.

What has happened over this period in local government is that the majority of the left have shifted over to support for the dented shield. There is no such thing as the pro-cuts left as Peter describes.

This is not the politics of the "absolutely righteous", but the facts.

You canot be a tribune of the people whilst attcking them and cutting their jobs and services. You cannot blame those who have held the line and fought the cuts for bad tactics or being marginalised.

If Peter believes that the left have been marginalised because the cuts have been minimalised; then the corollary of this assessment is that we too should support caring cuts. Nonsense!

Refusal to make cuts has never been an end in itself, but a demand to mobilise opposition as part of an overall battle. Socialists have never maintained that holding the line on "no cuts" is sufficient in itself.

It is not a magic policy to run a Council, but part of building resistance within the organisations of the working class, the only force that can win such battles.

If a "no cuts" position is won in Council but overturned by officers, this only exposes the undemocratic nature of the local state, and it should be a key issue to mobilise support around.

It is complete hogwash to suggest that equal opportunities policies can be protected in a time of cuts — whether those cuts are "caring" or not.

Cuts in social provision are a general attack on the working class, and those suffering special oppression will be hit hardest.

Socialists should always seek to win the leadership of the working class, and locally this will mean aiming to "regain control of the Party apparatus."

But precisely when did the left have control of any Labour Party apparatus above and beyond their base in the CLPs?

It is not "the lack of a clear and coherent strategy for running inner city local government" that has lead to our defeats.

Socialists should not have a blueprint of how to run the local state — we want to smash it and create a workers' democracy.

To suggest that we keep our heads down then "move back fully into local government when the nationl political climate changes" can only translate as a "left" variant of "wait for a Labour government".

What *is* left in local government is sticking to our principles and building resistance to every single attack on the working class: not the dented shield.

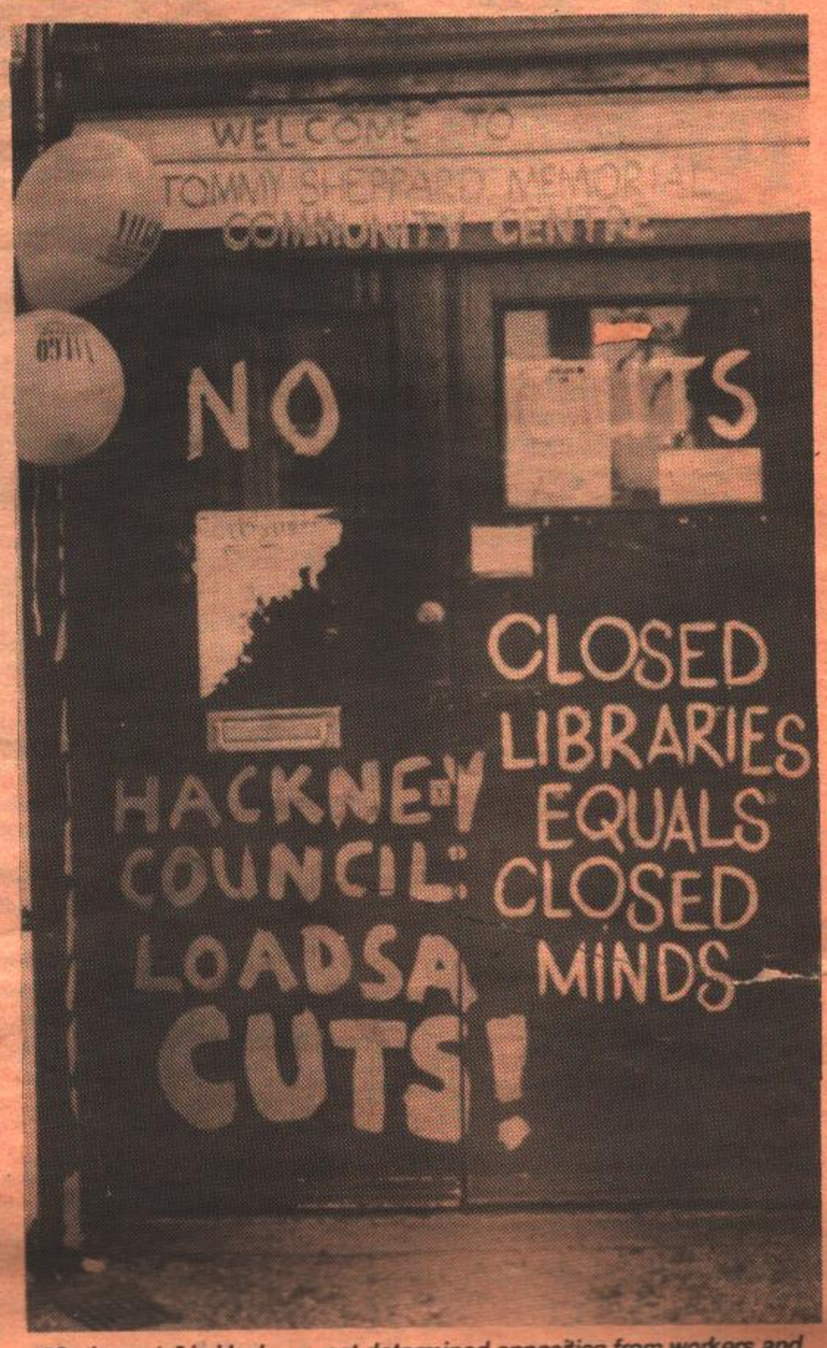


PHOTO: Martine Stead

"Caring cuts" in Hackney met determined opposition from workers and service users alike.

POLL TAX PAMPHLET

All the answers!

***The Poll Tax*, Labour Research Dept, £1.20 plus postage.**

At last! The definitive Poll Tax guide — who pays what; bills and payment; penalties and rebates; Scotland; and the unions.

This pamphlet aims to inform rather than agitate, but still takes campaigners through the steps of resistance and non-payment. As such, it fills a gap we should have filled long ago, along with our publicity leaflets and posters.

If you've ever been stumped for an answer while canvassing or on a street stall; if you're still not sure what "joint and several liability" means; and if you want to know how much each government minister will gain, buy the pamphlet!

By DAN CARTER

Labour Party Socialists

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

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

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

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

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

Labour Party Socialists

Conference

Saturday 19 May — Sunday 20 May 1990

Sheffield Polytechnic

Economic policy

The market or the plan?

Eastern European Communist Party leaders are rushing to endorse private enterprise and the market, in desperate efforts to stay in power.

The leaders of Western Social Democracy are seizing this opportunity to re-endorse the "social market" economy.

The Labour Party front bench economics team have been touting this idea for some time.

It was introduced by David Owen, at the time of the SDP split from Labour. He counterposed it to "old fashioned" notions of nationalisation and state planning — in particular the Alternative Economic Strategy of the Bennite left.

By Martin Allen

The AES, which had been partially endorsed by the Party Conference, involved a commitment to the nationalisation of some 25 leading firms. Theoretically planning agreements with other large enterprises were to be enforcible.

There were attempts to control capital movements, import controls, and, in some of the more radical versions (promoted by the Labour Co-rdinating Committee!), extra-parliamentary mobilisations and some moves towards industrial democracy.

While the AES was a fragile half-way house, not a socialist policy, it certainly raised the stakes. Attempted implementation would have put a Labour goverment on a collision course with capital.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Livingstone: trying to find a new economic tightrope to walk.

The debates around the AES seem light years away in today's "New Times" Labour Party. David Owen would not have left if he had seen John Smith and Gordon Browne through his crystal ball.

With the disintegration of the Bennite left, Labour closed the door on planning and state regulation and adopted economic policies from the extreme right of social democracy.

What exactly do John Smith and Gordon Browne mean by the "social market"? It is all very vague.

Those members of the ruling class who have had a flying visit from Gordon Browne's "Industry 2000" tour are, left unimpressed and bewildered, as Labour goes out of its way to be nice to business, promising national training subsidies, regional investment banks etc.

The "social market" economy runs essentially according to market principles but, as Gordon Browne assures television viewers, "in partnership" with government.

The manufactuing sector generates enough wealth to rebuild and fund the Welfare State — a climate of economic justice is achieved (hence the "social" part of the strategy).

This picture completely ignores all the historical contradictions of British capitalism.

But since the days of the AES, the left has had very little to say about alternative economic strategies to the "monetarism" of the Tory right, or the "social market" of the Kinnockites.

Ken Livingstone continues to tread a cautious path between developing an alternative to "Aims and Values" and endorsing parts of its main direction.

He, too, sees the future for Labour as being the "Party of Production", but combined with a reduction in defence expenditure in order to free resources for increased levels of training and scientific research.

It has been three years since Andrew Glynn's pamphlet "A Million Jobs a Year".

That would have committed a Labour government (endorsed, but soon forgotten, by the Campaign Group of MPs) to a return to full employment in the lifetime of a parliament.

It went on to take up the issues of exchange control and state planning and looked at price controls.

A welcome addition is "Beyond the Casino Economy" by Nick Costello, Johnathon Michie and Seumas Milne which takes on "post Fordist" arguments about the economy and restates the need for a socialist plan.

Both this book and Glynn's earlier pamphlet have many weaknesses, particularly the emphasis on a parliamentary programme, but successfully raise the debate about the market v. the plan.

They provide a useful starting point for socialists.

Regional government

Labour's pride in London?

London Pride, published by the Labour Party, available for 75p from 150 Walworth Road, London SE17 1JT.

***London Pride*, the Labour Party's new document, addresses the need for strategic London-wide government.**

The body which will also act as a prototype for regional government elsewhere will be responsible for:

- public transport;
- strategic planning;
- roads;
- fire service;
- waste-disposal;
- the police.

The case for London-wide government made so frequently during the Save the GLC campaign has stood the test of time. As the pamphlet points out, "ours is the only major capital in the world with no city-wide government of its own".

By BEN JONES

A campaign for London and regional government should be a vote winner for Labour. The experience of living in London is not an easy one. As Kinnock points out in the introduction "...the quality of life has declined alarmingly during the last ten years of Conservative government...with all Londoners facing squalor, congestion and deterioration of vital services."

The strength of the document is its damning catalogue of London's failings: poor quality services; crumbling public transport; the Poll Tax; the collapse of the education system; the housing crisis and the neglect of the NHS.

To be credible Labour needs to go beyond outlining London's problems — these are recognised by a broad range of politicians — Labour also needs to outline an alternative.



Neil Kinnock

In its editorial, the *Local Government Chronicle* denounced "the mess of quangos, public and private organisations which have replaced the GLC", but went on to denounce its record.

For the stuffy local government traditionalists of the *Local Government Chronicle* the left GLC had become "lazy, contemptuous of its people and ineffective".

London Pride does not launch a defence of the GLC, it hardly ever mentions it! Speaking to the *Municipal Journal*, Kinnock attempted to banish concerns that the new body would have none of the faults of the old one, such as high spending!

The new authority would be "lean and tightly managed".

Equal opportunities is one memory of the GLC that seems to have been erased by *London Pride*. The document makes an important point about women's safety but fails to say anything about equal opportunities in employment.

A cosmopolitan nature is one of the most positive features of London. The GLC focused on this and championed the capital's diversity of communities. It was because of this, more than anything else, that the GLC won such popularity. The GLC, in a very small way, really was the "People's Council".

The document fails to address the undemocratic nature of the Corporation of London, which governs the City square mile and has the powers of a County Council. Kinnock, again playing the role of sensible statesman, stated to the *Municipal Journal* that it would be no good abolishing the Corporation for "ideological reasons"..

It appears that our leader has managed to elevate policies above ideology (*sic*), when what is needed is a clear strategy to deal with the undemocratic power of the City.



Lambeth Council, refusing to set a rate in 1985

PHOTO: Dave Sinclair

Another worrying omission is a commitment to re-establish ILEA. It appears the fragmentation of London's education system is likely to outlive the Tory government.

The re-establishment of strategic government in London would be a welcome development. The way in which the pamphlet focuses on the dire state of London should be used in the May elections.

A campaign to re-establish the GLC could be very popular, but unfortunately the dire record of Labour local government undermines the enthusiasm that exists.

It is a sad reflection on Labour Councils that they are implicated when the blame is handed out for the collapse of London's services. No amount of finger pointing at the Tories can get over the problem that *Labour* has implemented Thatcher's policies in London.

The need to spell out an alternative to the Tory policy on local government must always be linked to a campaign to defend and improve existing services.

Unfortunately, the pamphlet smacks of the "wait for a Labour government" mentality combined with a very limited perspective of what we can expect.

Reselection

No joy for the left

With well over half the winnable seats selected, the left is in a unique position.

It appears to have no new candidates selected. Prolonged witch hunts and NEC attacks have taken their toll — for example, there was no challenge to George Howarth in Knowsley North.

The fact that Gwyneth Dunwoody was reselected unopposed sums it all up.

In particular, there have been very few women selected, though this is changing slowly as the Tory marginals decide. In Scotland, just one new woman has been selected.

Despite this, the "woman on every short list" has proved its worth by forcing real reselection contests in areas where MPs would otherwise have been put on shortlists of one.

The lack of women selected has caused much embarrassment to the "New Labour Party" and the "New Men" in the unions, like the GMB's John Edmonds.

The NEC even sent out a note calling for all-women shortlists that later had to be withdrawn!

Only one new black candidate has been selected in a winnable seat, though many of the London marginals have yet to decide.

There have been just three deselections — two supposedly from the Campaign Group (although neither could be called effective or particularly left-wing) and one from the right.

John Hughes in Coventry and Gerry Bermingham in St. Helen's South both appealed to head office over their deselections — Hughes was thrown out at regional level but Bermingham's is to be re-run, apparently because the NULSC (the Labour Drinking Clubs) did not deliver for him en bloc.

By DAN CARTER

In Birkenhead, Frank Field was clearly deselected (see Cllr. Marshall-Clarke's article in *Briefing* 96). Informed sources are unsure if the re-run is to keep Field as an MP or to stop him causing a by-election; what is undisputed is that there is a witch hunt on the Wirral against both *Militant* and *Socialist Organiser* supporters.

In Scotland, the witch hunt is continuing apace despite the lack of publicity over the expulsions since "Our Tommy" Sheridan was given the boot.

The basis of the attacks is involvement in the Anti-Poll Tax Unions; this bodes ill for other areas, like London, where campaigns are bound to embarrass the right and soft left in the council elections.

Briefing is keen to support any moves to re-establish a broad national body to oppose witch hunts.

John Evans, ever a master architect of Party organisation, looked set to finally face a reselection contest in St. Helen's North, having avoided it in 1983 and 1987.

In fact, the candidate withdrew following disputes about procedures, but Evans was reselected on less than 80% of the vote in the "affirmative ballot".

In Birmingham, following Martha Osamor's relatively good showing against Hattersley in Sparkbrook, news from Small Heath reveals a battle between candidates recruiting madly at branch level and the GMB affiliating equally madly at CLP level.

MP Howell announced his decision not to stand again; the irregular GMB delegates have now been replaced; but the 1989 AGM has yet to be completed!

John Edmonds's "New Man" image is suffering from the GMB's backing for its own research officer, Roger Godsiff.

Apparently APEX bought the seat years ago but no-one told the members.

The Small Heath case shows that when a CLP is not functioning, Walworth Road have a lot of trouble under the new rules in vetting membership forms sent in; after 8 weeks, if the CLP does not object, any applicants of course become full members!

Practise

Party practice has been overturned to allow full-time staff to stand — not only comrade Mandelson in Hartlepool, but regional organiser Peter Kilfoyle in Liverpool Walton.

Kilfoyle was imposed on Merseyside as a full-time organiser at the time of the witch hunt of *Militant*; he has now been selected in Heffer's seat.

On the positive side, he oversaw Field's deselection and insists it was all above board!

The new reselection system is unworkable — it was said so at the time it was adopted. But the logic of returning to the old federal structure of GC voting will be ignored to bring in Kinnock's one-member-one-vote.

The unions — apart from the TGWU — will vote themselves out of a say in a misguided attempt to get Kinnock elected.

The present system vastly favours sitting MPs — see Dave Nellist's 70-30 victory in Coventry over the AEU's Ken Cure, and right wing union branches voting for Benn in Chesterfield because it is national policy to back the sitting MP.



Eric Heffer — standing down

PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Mandarins

Ironically, where the left has a real base amongst the Party branches but is outvoted under the current system because union votes are decided by Walworth Road mandarins, it could do better under OMOV than at present.

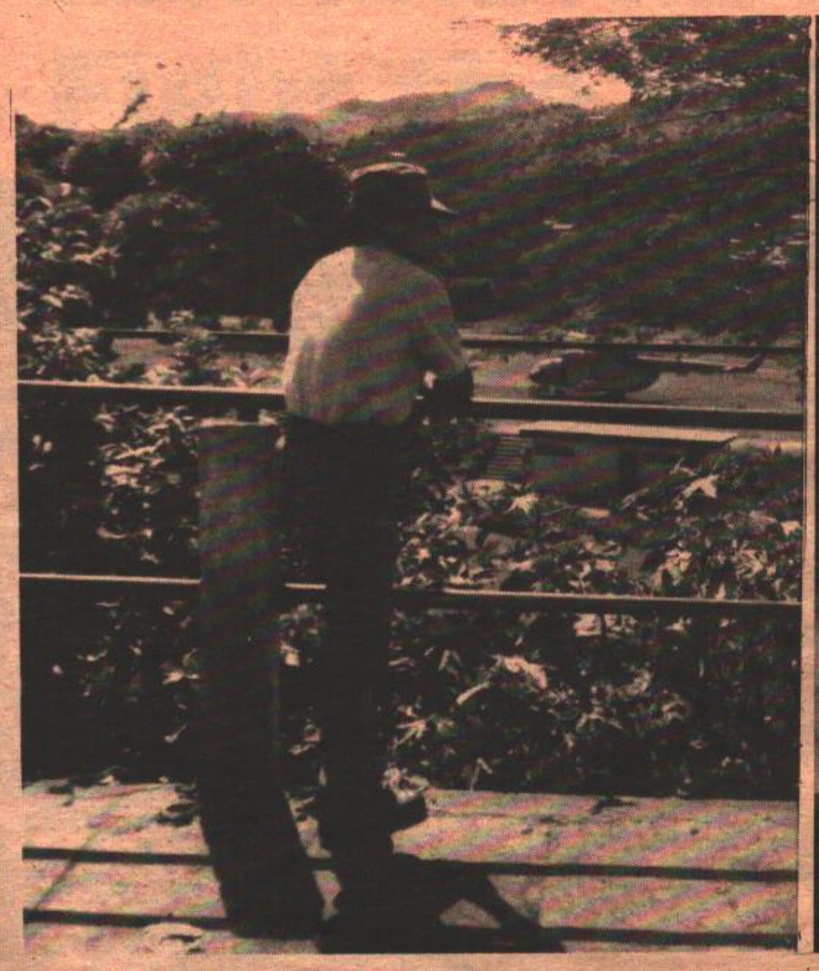
Well, it could not do worse.

The present system also allows the media to dictate the running — see Mandelson in Hartlepool, where according to *Tribune*, he broke the NEC guidelines by personally phoning newspaper editors to call in old debts, and by hyping Glenda Jackson all the way into Hampstead.

Only a return to the old federal system of GC delegates voting — but with the addition of mandation of those delegates — can possibly produce accountable MPs that are really in touch with their local Party and the community which elects them.

Nicaragua

A defeat at the polls...





PHOTOS: Ruth Clarke

The revolution is protected by the army (left); while celebrations in the streets of Managua were commonplace in happier times.

The struggle continues!

UNO's victory in the Nicaraguan elections is a heavy blow for the workers and peasants in Nicaragua and the whole of Latin America.

It heralds the consequent further isolation of the FMLN in El Salvador and of the Cuban Revolution.

The defeat of the FSLN at the polls was the culmination of a decade of destabilisation by the United States.

Having decided that it was not possible to overthrow the Sandinista regime militarily, the US and its supporters in Nicaragua decided on counter-revolution from within.

The combination of the second and third fronts, economic boycott and a unification of the counter-revolutionary forces finally produced what a rag bag army of Somocistas and politically backward peasants had not be able to.

The FSLN's difficulties were also a direct result of the Gorbachev leadership.

Cutting oil supplies and

By RUTH CLARKE and WILL McMAHON

moving towards "realistic prices" for "aid" to the FSLN, amid an overall attempt to assure "peaceful co-existence" in Central America, were crucial to the chaos that enveloped the economy in the late 80s.

Over the last two years the FSLN's international isolation led it to an austerity programme which resulted in:

- the closure of factories;
- the sacking of over half of the state's employees;
- the cutting of farm subsidies;
- lack of resources for hospitals, health care centres and schools;
- and the development of the free market in basic grain prices.

For the Sandinista faithful all this hardship was worthwhile. Nothing was as important as Nicaragua's national dignity and independence.

Yet for the thousands who were not members or ideological supporters of the FSLN, the economic crisis and the deaths of over 40,000 Nicaraguans in a civil war became too high a price to pay for a revolutionary path, the direction of which was becoming less clear as the revolution progressed.

Why did the Sandinistas fail to understand these realities? This was surely down to the electoral system (which was hailed by many at its institution as an example of "socialist democracy").

The system gave the workers and peasants only one opportunity in six years to have a real say about what was happening to their lives and what they thought about the FSLN's policies.

Most of the local CDSs (Sandinista Defence Committees) and certain other organs created by the FSLN became the structures through which Sandinista policies were implemented rather than discussed and/or changed.

Hence the links between the FSLN and the people, the links which had led to the victory in 1979, were broken by top-down decision making in the face of a huge military and economic crisis.

The response of the US government was predictable.

After a decade of calculated misinformation about the so-called Ortega dictatorship it suddenly found itself with a victory it wanted to publicise as much as it wanted to hide the 1984 result.

According to Whitehouse spokesperson Marlin Fitzwater the lifting of economic sanctions will be "a matter of first consideration."

Chamorro, a liberal puppet of the US, will go for a slow but sure destruction of the gains of the Sandinista revolution.

Like Cory Aquino, she will be incapable of having an independent political existence of her own and will be pulled more and more to the right by the rich and economically powerful who still exist in Nicaragua.

The US government will attempt to pour money into stabilisisng the UNO regime.

They will try to dismantle the army and the police in order to build support for the political and economic attacks on the poor and the FSLN which will surely be the outcome of this election result.

It is, however, doubtful whether the UNO alliance will be able to hold together for more than six months.

The "yanquis" will not be able to pour endless resources into Nicaragua. UNO, a coalition made up of every political colour from *contra* to Stalinist, has only one thing in common — its opposition to Sandinismo.

The FSLN's intention to rule from below is also a sign that the class struggle in Central America is far from over.

The key factor is not only that the FSLN defends the gains of the revolution from below but that there is an open debate about the mistakes that were made.

The FSLN must return to the first principle of Augusto Sandino:

"Solo los obreros y campesinos iran hasta el fin"—

"Only the Workers and the Peasants will go all the way."

A personal view

Sandinistas down but not out

An abiding image of the Nicaraguan revolution for me is an 80-year old toothless peasant saying that they will stop the Yanquis.

He had just begun to read and write.

That was in 1984, on the first solidarity trip from Britain. There was an elderly CP member in the group who had previously been in San Salvador. In his contribution to our pamphlet on the trip he contrasted the two experiences.

The Nicaraguans he met were frank, cheerful and open, he recorded. They were poor, certainly, but with a dignity and obvious faith in the future.

In the 50s he had been appalled by the degrading poverty and hopelessness he had witnessed in Central America.

"Now to hear a peasant leader say proudly: We are ending mans' inhumanity to man. That I should live to see this day. Marvellous".

Back in Britain I listened to Militants saying there was no revolution. How could it be when the Sandinistas had not nationalised the top whatever it is.

Never mind that they ran the state, the army and the police; that they expropriated land and factories where the owners had gone to Miami or were deliberately under-investing.

And — above all — that they promoted grass roots organisation.

By GEOFFREY SHERIDAN

From the moment of the "Triumph of the Revolution"— as the Sandinistas called it — Washington's trade and aid embargo meant dependence on Cuba and the USSR.

Nicaragua's infrastructure, such as it was, had been built on US imports, so spares for machinery then had to be contrived from bits. A workshop we visited had lines of army boots awaiting nails.

With no natural resource of metal, the list of import requirements was extensive. The shortage of materials for production and of goods in the shops was the usual reason.

Now, ravaged by the Contra war and astronomical inflation, it is not surprising if many Nicaraguans are desperate and perhaps feel the need for a government favoured by Uncle Sam.

But Uncle's disparate friends in Nicaragua know that they are in for a hard time. Daniel Ortega's promise to "continue governing from below" is no idle boast.

The FSLN's defeat is not akin to say, a Labour government losing power.

Tragically, the power of the Sandinistas has been diminished. But the manner of support and organisation they enjoy will give second thoughts to entrepreneurs and opponents of the social gains of the revolution.

There is a long queue for US largesse right now. There is price attached to maintaining imperialism, and Washington is running short of the readies.

Attem

The Sandinistas' failure at the polls is generally seen as a result of war weariness and economic crisis.

But a question remains as to the role of the Sandinistas' own policies towards the problems they faced.

Eleven years after the revolution, the workers and peasants of Nicaragua had a standard of living no better than that under Somoza.

Social and economic gains, such as access to health care, literacy programmes and the controls on the buying and selling of land were being put in reverse.

Nicaragua was not the first post-revolutionary society to experience these problems, which stem from the attempt to break imperialist domination.

The first problem was that the economy was forced to devote vast amounts of money to construct and maintain a revolutionary people's army — both to deter imperialist intervention and actually to fight against a counter-revolutionary war.

Over 60% of Nicaragua's national expenditure went on paying for the defensive war against the *contras*.

The second problem was the dependence on the role of the Soviet bureaucracy for the production of heavy goods and trade relations on favourable terms, which resulted from imperialist embargo.

Key

Although with Gorbachev's foreign policy this is likely to be less salient in future, it is key to understanding the Sandinistas' economic position.

Cheap oil and armaments were useful to the Nicaraguan economy but the political price for these favours was high.

The FSLN's support for the recent San Isidro Accords — in which the Sandinistas recognised the legitimacy of El Salvdor's semi-fascist Christiani government — has possibly been one of the most recent sacrifices.

The third problem was the economic structure bequeathed by the old regime.



Hill school in Matagalpa: a gain for th

The revolution's economic crisis

pting to break with imperialism



It was marked by one overhelming factor: its total integraion into the world capitalist ivision of labour and the resultng one-sided nature of the conomy.

By WILL McMAHON

The economy's integrated but artial and distorted nature nanifests itself in three important vays.

•The economies became rimary production centres for mperialism. In Nicaragua these reas were principally cotton, cofee and cattle. The creation of vealth was dependent on the adanced capitalist economies.

•There is unequal exchange beween the imperialist heartlands nd the primary producer. There is net outflow of surpluses from the rimary producer to the advanced conomies.

•Because the economy of a ountry like Nicaragua was haped by the capitalist world conomy, there was very poor inegration between its different ectors.

All capital goods for agricultural production, the key area of roduction, were usually imported, as were items such as pesticides etc.at the expense of increased indebtedness.

Moreover the exploitative conditions established by multinationals or local ruling classes squeezed the consumer durable market to a tiny fraction of its possible size.

Hence there is often no economic rationale for other sectors of the economy to exist bar services, which are often the next largest sector of the economy after agriculture.

The fourth problem was that the poor peasantry are a key feature of such economies.

They are often at the sharp end of counter-revolutionary wars, have suffered under decades of super-exploitation by local bourgeoisies and multinationals and receive little for their produce in the periods before and after the revolutionary seizure of power.

The crisis of the war economy and the absence of both a consumer durables sector and an agricultural tools and services sector in the economy often leave the poor peasants in only a marginally improved situation to that which they face before the victory in economic terms.

The motivating factor is the absence of political repression, the death, exile or imprisonment of local agents of the defeated oligarchy who for years terrorised the local population, and the belief that things will eventually get better.

If this seems a gloomy picture that is because for the most part it is. This is what the FSLN had to face and has been the feature of the post-revolutionary periods for regimes of its type.

The attempt to break with the imperialist economy has led to economic crisis as a permanent state of affairs. And the regime was unable to deliver social justice as long as the break was not made or was only partial.

After ten years in power, what sort of economy had the Sandinistas built?

Central to the answer is the relationship between the amount of popular control and the size of the private sector as the most important distinguishing features of a socialist economy.

Two things are clear. The majority of wealth creating enterprises were in private hands.

Economy

The FSLN's strategy aimed to regenerate the economy via export earnings from the technologically advanced agricultural sectors owned by the non-Somoza landlords and to keep them producing with economic incentives.

Coffee and, in particular, the cotton producers have had the vast majority of available investment put into their enterprises.

The Sandinista's return from this was negligible. At the same time the level of popular control had been low and has now almost disappeared.

Here the difference between Nicaragua and the Cuba is instructive.

The Castro leadership, when faced with economic crisis and potential invasion, moved rapidly towards liquidating the comprador bourgeoisie and its allies.

All the links between the Cuban economy and imperialism were broken; several years of economic chaos ensued,but this enabled the Cuban leadership to reorganise the economy so that it was not at the mercy of international capital.

It also meant that the Cuban Communist Party had to involve the masses in organising and ensuring production was carried out.

Eventually, the living standards of the Cuban workers improved to a level envied by those in other Latin American countries, and provided a focus for an extension of the revolution in Latin America.

This is the crucial step that the FSLN did not take.

The key lesson of the Nicaraguan revolution is that it is impossible to reconstruct any society in favour of the poor and the oppressed without creating institutions of popular power.

Whatever we call them — soviets, workers and peasant councils, committees for the defence of the revolution, the name is irrelevant — the key point is that the workers and peasants are able to make democratic decisions about running the economy.

Only in this way will they be able to expropriate the old ruling classes.

In this process, which in all future as in all past revolutionary societies will be a learning one fraught with difficulties, there will be chaotic results and failures.

But the alternative to popular control and the transition to socialism is imperialist domination with the malnutrition, famine, super-exploitation and degradation for the vast majority that inevitably results.

Although the election results are an enormous setback, it is clear that the struggle is far from over in Nicaragua.

A stable Chamorro government is far from a certainty. The only thing that holds the UNO alliance together is opposition to the FSLN.

The attempt to formulate a programmme acceptable to the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie and US imperialism will pull the coalition apart.

Additionally, given the US's current economic problems, a question mark hangs over the availability of the vast amounts of money needed to stablise the Nicaraguan economy.

The combination of a divided government, a bourgeois programme and limited US aid, alongside the 42% FSLN block in the national assembly means that the Sandinistas have the chance to learn the lessons of the last decade.

They will have the chance to develop a policy capable of achieving the socialist transition the leadership often publicly aspired to.

The rejuvenation of the Sandinista Defence Committees will be crucial to defeating the offensive of the Nicaraguan bourgeoisie and their US backers.

They will also be key to organising the support needed to split UNO and force new elections.

In new elections, governmental choices will be much clearer than before: either the subordination of the Nicaraguan economy to the capitalist world market or to the political control of the workers and peasants and a transition to a socialist economy.



Tree planting — heavy work!



poor of Nicaragua.

Eye-witness account

FSLN prepares to fight

Mexican Trotskyist leader SERGIO RODRIGUEZ was in Managua during the election. The following account of the reaction to the defeat is a short extract from a long speech he made after the result was known.

On the eve of the election Daniel Ortega spoke to a rally of 600,000 in the Plaza Amador — you couldn't see where the crowd ended.

But it's a sad fact that many in that crowd must have voted for UNO. The vote was a protest vote against austerity and the compulsory military draft.

On election night I was in a crowd with some of the FLSN commandantes. At 2am the daughter of the French ambassador came in with the news that UNO was winning. None of the commandantes knew what to do. It was a profound shock because the FSLN had mobilised 70,000 election workers for the campaign, and there had been huge rallies all over the country. At 6am Ortega went on television to concede defeat.

Everyone was shocked — there was no popular rejoicing. One example speaks volumes: an Italian comrade working in Nicaragua went to his office next day, and found that seven of his ten co-workers had voted for UNO. But none of them were happy that UNO had won. They wanted to sound a warning, not bring down the government.

Next day Managua was deserted until mid-afternoon. UNO called a victory rally but only a pathetic 300 turned up.

In the late afternoon the FSLN began calling the people in the barrios to meetings. Thousands of people took part: they were unanimous on the need to fight against the new government. Members of the Peoples's Militia said they were not going to give up their guns. Queues began to form to join the militia.

In the evening Sandinista youth began to attack UNO supporters. Tomas Borge had to intervene to stop them.

The next day the FSLN called a meeting to debate the way forward and 50,000 people came.

Now there is a big debate in the FSLN about how to organise the fightback. There is a strong sentiment now to strengthen the mass organisations and turn the FSLN into a real mass party — it only has 6000 party members, an obvious mistake.

In the FSLN leadership there seem to be three positions. The first option is simply to accept the defeat, allow the army and police to be dismantled and wait for the next election in six year's time. This is the worst option, which could "social democratise" the FSLN and make it a loyal opposition.

Second is to accept Chamorro as president, but refuse any other changes, especially to the police, the army, land reform and so on. This is very difficult and could lead to American intervention.

Third, is the perspective of Ortega — a "fighting retreat". Accept changes in the state, but only of a limited kind. Build the FSLN as a mass party, build the mass organisations and trade unions, prepare to fight and don't just wait for elections.

The FSLN are overwhelmingly the most powerful political force. The UNO coalition is weak and Chamorro herself is terminally ill. The Sandinista revolution cannot be overturned without a prolonged battle.

Socialist Movement

Reds and Greens

Unite across Europe!

As the Socialist Movement RED AND GREEN CONFERENCE nears, PETER TATCHELL advances some ideas for a red-green alliance across Europe.

Europe is in the process of dramatic social change. The old ideologies of free market capitalism and totalitarian socialism are being challenged as never before.

In the East, Gorbachov reforms and the emergence of new democratic and green political movements are fracturing authoritarian state socialism.

In the West, the EC countries are undergoing massive economic restructuring.

These enormous economic and political changes compel both greens and socialists to think increasingly in terms of co-ordinated, trans-European strategies for environmental protection and social justice.

Such strategies have immense potential. Democratic socialism and radical ecology are currently the principle movements for social emancipation in Europe.

If these two political movements could work together, their combined strength could begin to lay the foundations of a green and socialist Europe as part of a broader Internationalist movement towards a green and socialist world.

There are, however, two obstacles. First, not all socialists appreciate the ecological inadequacy of traditional left-wing economics with its growth-orientated, productivist assumptions.

Nor do all greens recognise the ecologically antithetical nature of free market capitalism, and the need for a green revolution formulated in the framework of common ownership and environmental planning.

Second, there are chauvinists and sectarians among both socialists and greens who assert that they alone can transform society.

Against this debilitating political egoism and ideological dogmatism, we need to proclaim the value and creativity of a diverse and pluralistic alliance of greens and socialists, both of whom have important and mutually beneficial insights to offer each other.

It is only through co-operation and joint action that greens and socialists can assume a hegemonic role in European politics and pave the way for the egalitarian and ecological renewal of our societies.

The Second Green and Socialist Conference

Red & Green

THE NEW AGENDA FOR THE '90s

24 - 25 March 1990

Kingsway Princeton College
Sidmouth Street, London WC1

Details c/o Socialist Society, 9 Poland Street, London W1V

Recent experience makes a red-green alliance more feasible. During the 1984-89 European Parliament, there was frequent collaboration between green and socialist MEPs on issues such as regional aid, women's rights, pollution control, lesbian and gay equality, and workers participation in corporate decision making.

This Rainbow Group of MEPs brings together a range of socialists, greens, and radical nationalists from across the European community.

Despite their differences, the member parties co-operate closely.

They consistently set the radical agenda within the European parliament, thus pointing the way to the kind of pluralistic politics and broad-based alliances which are critical to green and socialist advance throughout Europe.

Similar collaboration between greens and socialists is imperative if we are to counteract the damaging effects of the single European market with its competitive growth-optimistic goals, and if we are to thwart the right-wing project of creating a "Fortress Europe" superpower.

Our immediate priority must therefore be to establish a European red-green alliance which can replicate, on a larger scale, the success of the Rainbow Group in articulating a radical programme for the ecological and social transformation of the EC.



German Greens, part of a European "Rainbow Coalition"

Economic Notebook

Will the British ruling class disarm itself?

Douglas Hurd's recent speech on turning "tanks into tractors", because the West had "won" the Cold War, might have led some to believe that the Tories were trying to out do Bruce Kent and Ken Livingstone.

Do the Tories want to put all the dosh saved on arms into making Britain more competitive on world markets by spending on the infrastructure — education, training and fibre optics.

Alas, the "peace dividend" is not to be, even from that bookish Mr Hurd. There is simply too much resting on the war industry in this country for substantial cuts to be made.

Britain's manufacturing base contracted by 20% during Thatcher's first recession in the early 1980's. Nearly 500,000 people are directly employed in the so-called defence industry, many of them skilled engineers.

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) is industry's largest single customer and it accounts for the greater part of spending on research and development.

Spending cuts, apart from threatening thousands of jobs, would further weaken manufacturing industry and R&D funding in such areas as electronics and aeronautics.

By Padraic Finn
Westminster North CLP

But the regional impact is even more significant from the political as well as the economic viewpoint. Almost half the MOD's £8.4 billion procurement budget is spent in the South East.

In 1986/7 54% of employment due to MOD spending was located in three regions: the South East, the South West and East Anglia.

Surprise, surprise, the greater part of defence related spending and employment is in the Tory heartlands of southern England.

There is no chance of the Tories jeopardising their electoral prospects by seriously cutting military spending.

Which takes us back to Douglas Hurd. Events in Eastern Europe have given rise to expectations of big cuts in arms spending.

The huge increases in the West over the past ten years, led by Reagan, have caused the massive budget deficit in the US and imposed a further burden on a British economy in long decline compared to its competitors.

The British spend about 5% of GDP on defence compared to a European average of about 3.5%. Hurd and his supporters in the Tory party would like to lift this burdensome relic of Empire from the neck of the British economy.

Their problem is not just Thatcher but a substantial part of the capitalist class, especially the financiers. Thatcher does not want to lay waste blue swathes of southern England and it is unimaginable that she would cut back on defence spending to finance state investment in alternatives to arms.

Nor for that matter would Neil Kinnock — and only partly because this is the strategy put forward by his friend and colleague Ken Livingstone.

More important is the role of arms spending in maintaining Britain's position in the world.

Thatcher's riposte to the traitorous neutralism of the Church of England and the BBC during the Falklands War was to organise her own celebration.

The fly past over East London by the RAF during the "City salutes the Falklands heroes" was the clearest possible statement that British capital would brook no opposition anywhere in the world.

The greater part of the profits of the companies included in the FT Share Index come from abroad. Britain is the third largest investor overseas and is second only to the US in holdings of overseas assets.

Only recently has Japan taken over the number two position from Britain at the IMF. So, while there is a desire to cut arms spending, there is the fear that this would give completely the wrong signals to upstarts from South America or anywhere else who threaten British interests.

At the same time there is a concern that ten years of Thatcherism has only partially closed the gap between Britain and other leading capitalist economies.

Britain's fundamental problem — low investment — cannot be solved without easing the burden of spending in such areas as defence. The tussles in the Tory party are bound to continue.



Tanks into ploughshares?

Book Review

Lovesick

Love in the Time of Cholera, by Gabriel Garcia Marquez, *Penguin*, £4.99

In Colombia, some time earlier this century, Jeremiah de St. Amour commits suicide with a lethal dose of gold cyanide.

His elderly doctor and friend, Juvenal Urbino, cannot understand such an action, and is appalled to discover that Jeremiah de St. Amour had kept secret an illicit love affair these many years past.

His wife, Fermina Daza, understands fully, but knows from their lifetime together that she cannot enlighten him.

A few days later, Dr. Urbino falls from a ladder while trying to rescue an intelligent parrot. He breaks his back and dies in the arms of his wife.

By Peter Chowney
Hackney South CLP

The funeral is lavish, with much ringing of bells and many days of mourning, for Juvenal Urbino was a much respected public figure, having been largely responsible for the introduction of sanitation and the virtual eradication of cholera.

At his wake, as the guests leave, one remains. Florentino Ariza proclaims his love to Fermina Daza, still undiminished after fifty years.

And so begins the unfolding of the most beautiful and lyrical love story, principally between two people across fifty years, against a background of civil war, disease, progress, and change which has left Fermina Daza and Florentino Ariza old and approaching death, but with a lifetime's story of their own way of coping with an unrequited and inextinguishable love.

For in this book, Marquez has abandoned much of the direct political allegory of his earlier work.

There is not the fantastic complexities and intertwinings of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, nor the surreal extremes and magical fantasy of *The Autumn of the Patriarch*. He seems to have shifted from the Latin American magic realist style.

Love in the Time of Cholera is much less fantastic, much less allegorical than either of these, but it is far more accessible and has a lyrical quality which makes a lot of it a joy to read just for the way the words feel, without bothering with the story.

But it's a good story too, about sex and love, which are hardly new themes for a novelist, but which Marquez seems to explore in a quite original way, taking us through the intimacies of two entire lifetimes, yet without voyeurism or cliche.

He makes the passage of two lives in three hundred pages so convincing that it is difficult to read this book without feeling uneasy about the passing of our own lives, our own intimacies, our own loves and relationships.

But then that, of course, is precisely what Marquez intended.

If the book is to be faulted, then it is for its maleness. Fermina Daza is much less well developed as a character than Florentino Ariza.

But then her opportunities to develop her own life as a "society" wife in Latin America would have been negligible, a point Marquez makes quite forcefully through his characters.

It is also, predictably, exclusively heterosexual in its viewpoint.

Safer Sex

But most of all, this is a story of *Love in the Time of Cholera*, not *Love in the Time of AIDS*, and the lifetime of casual sexual encounters on which Florentino Ariza embarks rings a little untrue in North Atlantic culture of the 1990s. Not much mention of safer sex here.

But such criticisms are perhaps unjust. This is a book about love, uncomplicated by late twentieth century quirks and foibles and social niceties.

As Marquez says, "there is nothing in life more difficult than love".

Well perhaps it comes a bit behind organising the international proletariat for world socialist revolution, but for most of us, he seems to have got it about right.



A more recent scene from Marquez's Colombia

BOOK REVIEW



Ralph Miliband speaking at the Socialist Conference

Defending the class struggle

Divided Societies, by Ralph Miliband, *Clarendon Press*.

By Mike Phipps
Woolwich CLP

***Divided Societies* is about the class struggle — past, present, and future.**

The centrality of the class struggle may not need stressing to *Briefing* readers, but this book originated in a series of lectures to Cambridge students.

Lucid and readable as ever, Miliband's problem is that his attempt to disprove the mountains of academic guff about the terminal decline of the working class and the end of class struggle puts him on the defensive.

Much of the book is a correct, but not particularly fresh, restatement of classic Marxist tenets.

The book is at its best when dealing with concrete examples.

His discussion on how capitalist governments pursue the class struggle comes alive when he looks at the attacks of the Thatcher government:

"the erosion of trade union freedoms, the curbing of activist rights, regressive taxation policies, and the wholesale privatisation of public industries and services...

"the vast inflation of police powers and the militarisation of the police; the systematic covering up of police and military abuses; the extension of the field of activity of security and surveillance agencies; the attempt to prevent the publication of material, on the grounds of "national security"...

"the drastic curbing of the powers of local government and the abolition of major local authorities, notably the GLC; the centralisation of education...

"the habitual manipulation of news by ministers and their officials, the systematic exclusion from official bodies of people whose ideological pliability might be doubtful..."

Miliband's analysis of how the state *represses* and of the international agencies, principally US-backed, which promotes such repression is very good.

Elsewhere the book sticks to well worn paths, such as historical accounts of the workers' movement or old theoretical debates about social stratification.

Orthodoxy

Even a welcome chapter on the new social movements contains little fresh.

Perhaps it is churlish to complain of Miliband's orthodoxy when there are so few books putting the case for class struggle.

But just restating the traditional Marxist view in a very dynamic world can quickly outdate your conclusions.

Thus Miliband, discussing the role of Soviet economic and military support in the Third World, writes:

"There is no evidence so far to suggest that the vast changes initiated by Mr Gorbachev are likely to include any drastic reduction in such aid."

On the contrary, not only is there evidence in relation to Nicaragua, Cuba, Afghanistan, etc., but from the mouth of Gorbachev himself.

Four years ago at the 27th Party Congress, Gorbachev announced that cutting aid costs to the Third World was one of his top ten objectives.

Despite these weaknesses, *Divided Societies* provides a useful introduction to contemporary debates about class and state.

BOOK REVIEW

The killing fields of Namibia

The Devils are among us, by Denis Herbstein and John Evenson, *Zed Books*, £7.95 (paperback).

By Mike Phipps
Greenwich & Bexley Anti-Apartheid Group

***Koevoet* was South Africa's uniformed death squads in Namibia.**

Its off-duty members used to wear T-shirts proclaiming "Murder is our business — and business is good."

This book tells the story of the systematic murder and terror they inflicted on the Namibian people.

Armoured cars would drive through Ovambo villages draped with the bodies of murdered SWAPO guerrillas.

People were shot on sight without warning for infringing the permanent dusk-to-dawn curfew in northern Namibia.

One 13 year old was roasted over a fire by his South African interrogators.

It is estimated that Koevoet killed more people than any other unit in African history.

But their deeds only became widely publicised when they reappeared as the South West Africa Police during last year's transition process.

The chapters on this covert war against Namibians are the best in the book. Elsewhere this readable account by two journalists borders on the simplistic.

The role of Britain in the exploitation of Namibia is well documented — from the way in which the country was rewarded for its war effort by the introduction of widespread virtual slavery, right up to the complicity of the last Labour government in uranium mining.

But some of the historical material is treated superficially — especially the origins and early schisms in the liberation movement.

The authors report that in 1965 the Organisation of African Unity gave £20,000 to be equally divided between SWAPO and its smaller rival, the South West Africa National Union (SWANU).

"But as SWANU was not willing to take up arms, the money was not released to them. SWANU then disappeared from the international stage."

And, indeed, from the book too — although this is only page 15, they are barely mentioned again!

Overall, the book is a useful study of a country too little reported.

Its chilling suggestion that 80% of white South African police officers are sympathisers of the fascist Afrikaner Resistance Movement should remind us, amid the current hype about reform, that apartheid is still very much alive and kicking — literally.

TGWU

Right calls ballot rigging!

Elections to the TGWU's General Council are currently being re-run after serious irregularities were uncovered in the conduct of the first ballot.

Thousands of ballot papers were found to have been removed from the "reserve stock", apparently held in Transport House.

This was discovered after a rush of late-posted, consecutively numbered ballot papers arrived at the premises of the Electoral Reform Society, who were conducting the vote.

The right-wing in the T&G are holding the left responsible for ballot rigging.

They claim this is on the basis that, apparently, the stolen papers were targeted to a number of marginal constituencies which would then swing from the right to the left as a result.

By TOM ALKINS

If this is true, and we only know it from the media, it would have needed detailed knowledge of how the vote was going as the papers arrived at the premises of the Electoral Reform Society.

It has not been explained how anyone had knowledge of voting trends prior to the closing date of the ballot. But if that is the case it should not be so diffcult to establish who it was.

If it turns out that the ballot was rigged it will be another major blow against the credibility and democracy of the union.

If it also turns out that someone connected to the left rigged the ballot, it could be a disaster for the union and the trade union movement in general.

It would not only seriously discredit the left if the right-wing were to take control not on the basis of policy, but on the basis of corrupt practices by their opponents, but the Tories would have a field day.

Ballot

They would make far more of it than if it turned out to be the right-wing who were ballot rigging. We could yet see a re-run of the ETU ballot rigging scandal of the early 1960s when the left were convicted of ballot corruption in the courts.

That disastrous situation gave the trade union movement the Frank Chapel/Eric Hammond leadership with all the consequences for the trade union movement which have resulted since.

Ballot rigging is a crime against the trade union and labour movement. It cannot be condoned or defended in any way.

It subverts the democracy of the organisation, treats its members with contempt, and opens up the movement to the state and the courts.

The TGWU Executive recently met to discuss the situation. At that meeting the union appointed scrutineer responsible for the ballot resigned. Since then a new scrutineer has been appointed by the Electoral Reform Society.

At the meeting the right-wing demanded that the whole matter be put into the hands of the police for investigation. This was rightly rejected. The issue must be sorted out inside the union, by the union's own procedures.

The meeting decided instead to ask Ron Todd to carry out an investigation and to report back to the first meeting of the incoming executive after the completion of the new ballot.

Whether this is adequate remains to be seen. But it is crucial that this investigation is thorough and effective and that full information is quickly in the hands of TGWU members.

If ballot rigging is found, all of those responsible must be expelled from the union. Any fudge on this matter would be wrong and could also lead to court action by the right-wing.

Problem

The problem is that this issue is the symptom of a long running problem in the TGWU.

For many years TGWU leaders have resisted all attempts to introduce safeguards into balloting procedures which were so wide open to ballot rigging they were almost an encouragement to do it.

Branch secretaries received bundles of unnumbered papers and a form on which to return the result.

Those who campaigned for many years for simple reforms such as consecutively numbered papers, for tight control over the issuing of ballot papers and for adequate and democratic scrutineering were opposed by the regional and national leadership.

They argued that to suggest that procedures were inadequate was to question the integrity of those responsible.

Nor have they been prepared, when irregularities have been shown to have taken place, to deal with those involved. The most they have been willing to do is to re-run the ballot.

The problem now is that the second ballot is putting the left at a greater disadvantage. The right-wing are running a disgraceful campaign on the basis of "democracy in the union".

The left must respond to this not just with an unambiguous response to all issues of democracy but also with a positive line on the issues facing the union.

The disastrous line of the left-controlled Executive over the docks dispute, or the weak position taken over the ambulance dispute is *not* the way to defeat the growing right-wing challenge in the union.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Ron Todd and Bill Morris chatting at Labour Party Conference — in happier times.

BROAD LEFT SLATE FOR TGWU ELECTIONS

Territorial Representative Candidates

REGION 1:
Inner: Peter Haggar and Steve Riley
Outer: Peter Landles

REGION 2:
Carole Rowe and John Wheeler

REGION 3:
Eddie Gillard and John Bees

REGION 4:
North: Ann McCall

REGION 5:
Northern: Pam Oldfield
Southern: Tony Richardson
Central: John Shannon

REGION 6:
Merseyside: Alan Quinn
Southern: Peter Dunnico
Northern: Alan Greenwood

REGION 7:
West: Danny Duffy
East: Andy Smith

REGION 8:
Northern: Terry Donovan
Southern: Ken Walker

REGION 9:
Jed Ashton

REGION 10:
North: Walter Greendale
South: Joan Diggle

REGION 11:
Norman Cairns and Albert McCready

Trade Group Candidates

Docks & Waterways:
Colin Coughlin (Branch 1/1873)

Passenger Services:
Laurie Marson (Branch 6/229)

RTC:
Tony Cooper (Branch 1/1337)

CAT:
Chris Green (Branch 1/1421)

Public Services:
John Swinburne (Branch 7/208)

Automotive:
Ray Sherlock (Branch 5/934)

Power & Engineering:
John Byrne (Branch 5/674)

General Workers:
Barry Miller (Branch 6/832)

Food & Drink:
Larry Grogan (Branch 1/1321)

Chem. Oil & Rubber:
Charlie Ball (Branch 6/544)

Textile:
Margaret Cassidy (Branch 7/400/9)

Building:
George Kane (Branch 7/56)

Agricultural:
Ivan Monkton (Branch 4/780)

ACTS:
Maureen Twomey (Branch 6/522)

SUPPORT TONY RICHARDSON!

Briefing **supporter Tony Richardson is standing for election to the TGWU General Executive Council from Region 5, Southern Division.**

Below we print his election statement.

I have worked in the Rover Body Plant at Cowley for the past eighteen and a half years. For most of that time I have been a Shop Steward.

I have been an active member of Oxford Trades Council for several years and am a member of the local Labour Party Executive and Vice-Chair of my ward.

For the past year I have been active in the "Cowley against Closure" campaign. At the same time I have opposed "Quality Circles" and other New Management Techniques.

For the last six years I have been a member of the local disputes support group, supporting the Miners, Printworkers, Seafareres, Pengamon etc. I am also active in the National Solidarity Network.

I was a delegate to the last BDC where I argued for supporting the Dockworkers whatever the legal implications.

I am a member of the Socialist Movement Trade Union Steering Committee and support *Labour Briefing*.

Ambulance dispute

Strike action is the way to win!

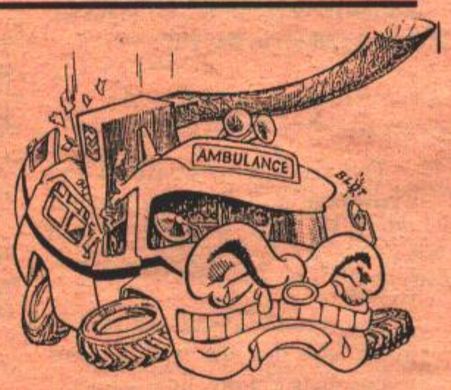
Briefing spoke to Brixton ambulance worker VINCE DRISCOL to find out if Roger Poole's deal now meant an end to the six month dispute, and if not what the way forward should be.

Ambulance crews are very angry with Roger Poole's attempt to settle the dispute.

After six months, the Poole deal has won nothing.

His strategy of holding ambulance workers back from escalating their action has failed.

His strategy led to the unions negotiating from a position of weakness with an intransigent NHS management under pressure from Clarke and Thatcher to concede nothing.



[illegible] gained: no enhanced overtime, no extra leave, no early retirement, no extra pay for long service and, most crucially, no pay formula.

There is talk of an extra 2%, but finding this money will inevitably mean cuts.

And the future is left dangerously uncertain, with an increased possibility of cuts, attempts to increase productivity, and privatisation.

Not surprisingly, there is a growing movement against the deal and this must be built on.

•In London there is strong feeling against the settlement.

•In Oxfordshire, a meeting of crews was 90% for rejection. Simililar views were expressed at meetings in Manchester and Glasgow.

•In the West Midlands and South Glamorgan, a majority are for rejection.

•Stewards in Leicester and Essex have called for a "no" vote in the ballot.

There is a real possibility that the deal will be chucked out in the coming ballot. But the result will depend on the crews' perception of how the vote will go.

If acceptance is seen as a forgone conclusion people will vote "yes". But if they think there is a chance of rejection, they will vote "no".

It is a completely awful deal, and so it is easy to argue against it.

The real job now ahead of us is to persaude crews that there is an alternative to Poole's failed strategy, which has left people in debt and tired after six months.

By going out on strike, Merseyside has shown the way forward. Many crews are actually on strike but nobody realises this.

Action is mainly in the metropolitan areas and the more militant shires. In South Yorkshire, for example, all crews are suspended but some are on strike as well.

Most of the North West London stations are out: St. John's Wood, Camden, Mill Hill, Kenton, Park Royal, Feltham and Isleworth.

This unofficial action must be extended. And it is essential that we say publicly that we are on station but on strike as well.

Strike action is the key to winning a "no" vote, and it is important that stations strike between now and the ballot. It is also the only way win win a just settlement to our dispute.

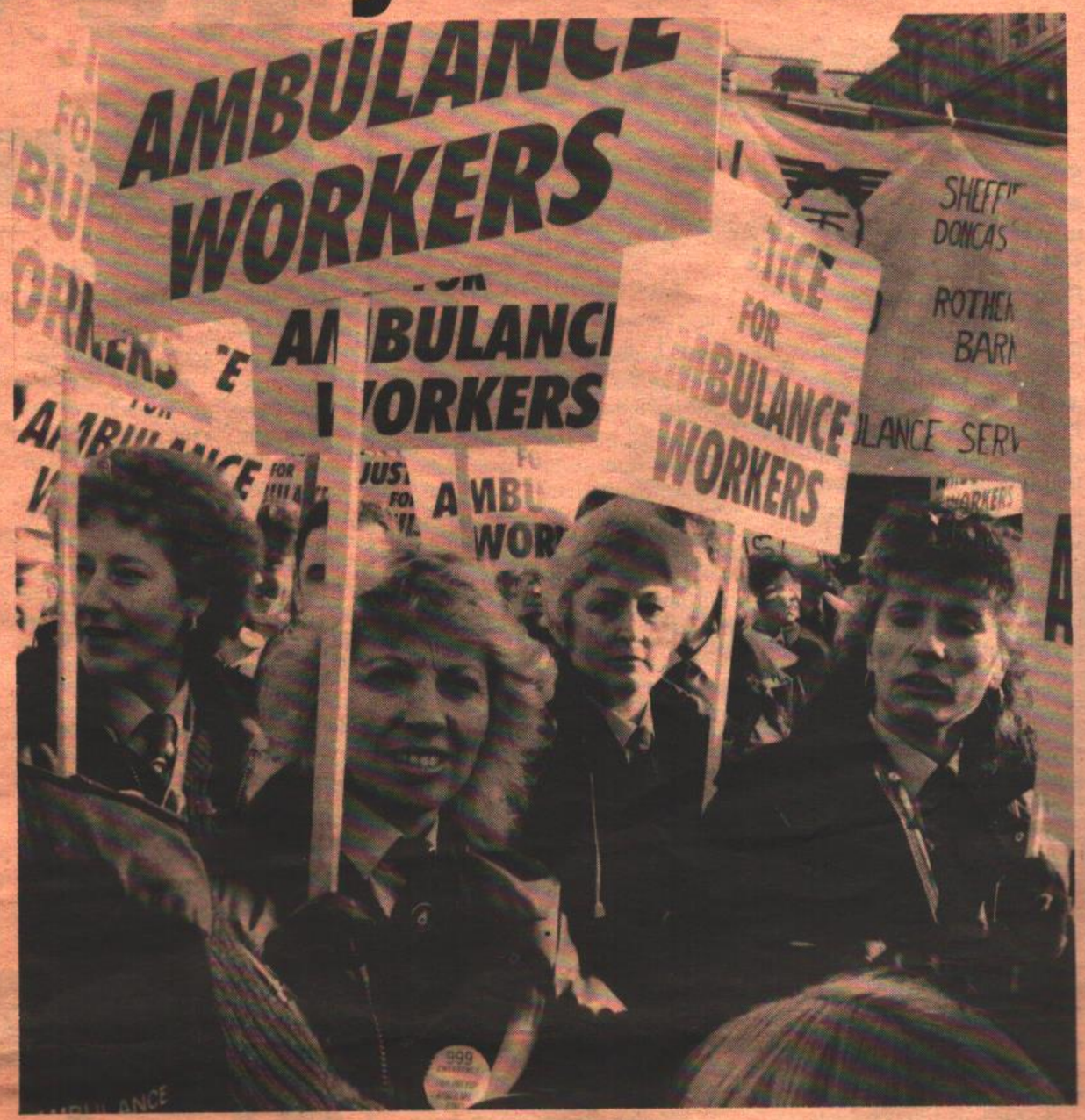


PHOTO: Tim Nolan

Solidarity on January 30th: but the TUC backed off from calling any follow-up action.

Trade unions and the law

The judges against the unions

After World War One—except for during the General Strike—the judiciary gave a series of judgments which amounted to an end to intervention in industrial disputes.

This was not, of course, because they now believed that the will of parliament should be obeyed.

It was because the state had developed a strategy of using the labour bureaucracy to control militancy while simultaneously introducing new measures which could be used selectively against militant sections of the working class, such as the Emergency Powers Act.

The judges were not to be permitted to upset the applecart.

This new strategy was most candidly explained by Winston Churchill: "It is not good for trades unions that they could be brought into contact with the courts... Where class issues are involved...a very large number of our population has been led to the opinion that they are, unconsciously no doubt, biased."

In other words, judicial intervention could increase class consciousness and prevent the development of the type of trade union organisation which could assist capital in combatting trade union militancy particularly on the part of the rank and file.

By Roger Welch
Chelmsford and District Trades Council

Again in the words of Churchill: "Trade union organisation was very important, and the more moderate its officials were, the less representative it was; but it was the only organisation with which the government could deal. The curse of trade unionism was that there was not enough of it, and it was not highly enough developed to make its branch secretaries fall into line with head office."

Collaboration

The three decades of class collaboration, by the trade union bureaucracy, which followed the General Strike led to the situation where, by the 50s, legal controls on trade unions had either been dropped or fallen into disuse.

This meant that when the post-war boom began to fragment in the 60s, capital had no immediate weapons to use against the new and predominantly rank and file militancy which accompanied the growing economic crisis.

It did not take long for the judges to step in and fill the gap.

In the notorious case of Rookes v. Barnard in 1964, the Law Lords made the startling discovery that a threat to strike amounted to a tort — the tort of intimidation.

This was done to combat the "wildcat" strike.

How the Law Lords were able to impose this new form of liability is central to the argument that pro-union law should be put into the form of positive rights.

Designed

The Trades Dispute Act of 1906 was designed to end the use of the law of tort in industrial disputes. The Law Lords overcame this hurdle by simply pointing out that the 1906 Act gave immunity with respect to the act of *inducing* a breach of contract — the threat made no reference whatsoever to *threats* to break a contract.

This was not surprising as no-one dreamt in 1906 that such threats could amount to a tort. This illustrates one of the major problems with giving rights in the form of immunities. The latter will relate to what the judges have done in the past and may seek to anticipate their future feelings.

Liabilities

However, if the judges do create new liabilities, and they have always been very inventive where trades unions have been concerned, then the immunity is rendered at best limited and at worst worthless.

Moreover, having created a new tort the judges can then use the language of the law to distort an vilify the nature and aims of the industrial action involved.

For example, in the Rookes case, the Law Lords compared threats to strike with threats of violence and so were able to redefine a standard feature of an industrial dispute as intimidation.

At the same time, developments also led to the new tort of using illegal means to procure a breach of a commercial contract or interfere with trade.

This is what, in law, workers are doing when they succeed in obtaining solidarity action. It is this tort which is at the heart of the current anti-union laws.

Ideological

The ideological consequences of using this type of language to depict industrial action are clear —particularly when judges bandy around words like "unlawful" and "illegal" to disguise the fact that it is only the civil rather than the criminal law which is being invoked.

This mystification is intensified when they then castigate the organisers of industrial action as "law breakers" or refer to trade unions as having been given privileges to break the law.

In acting in this way, judges are able to justify their intervention and to create a climate where further judicial or state action seems to be of benefit to the "public".

This is precisely what the senior judges did in the last part of the 70s after the collapse of the Social Contract.

The system of immunities has thus permitted both the creation of new forms of liability and ideological attacks on trade unionism which the Tories have been able to use since 1979 to assist their anti-union offensive.

Embryology Bill

Hull Trades Council affiliates to CADI

By BRIAN ELKINGTON

Since the mid-70s, Hull Trades Council has consistently supported and fought for a woman's right to choose.

Its February meeting agreed to affiliate to STAC and to CADI. The reason for affiliation to STAC was obvious, but the motion from NUPE calling for affiliation to CADI was agreed in the belief that the Embryo Bill represents a wider attack on women's rights.

Far from confusing and excluding people these wider issues seem to be easily understood.

Differences over approach and tactics towards the Bill have led to some lively local STAC meetings, but so far these differences have been talked through, and their open discussion has led to a strengthening of the campaign.

Debate is positive but, of course, campaign supporters must be able to distinguish between it and argument for its own sake, which would only serve to drive people away from the campaign.

Campaign!

ITALY

Students in occupation!

Students have been occupying about 140 university faculties across Italy, some for as long as three months, in protest against the "Legge Ruberti" (Ruberti Bill).

Like the Education Reform Act (GERBILL), the proposed Bill will allow the encroachment of big business into college structures and course content and will attack student representation.

The occupations started in Palermo in Sicily and have spread Northwards, unlike previous waves of student unrest, which have traditionally started in the North.

The students have occupied key buildings, taking control of the telephones and, notably, the fax machines. Fax networks link the occupying students of different universities across Italy.

Commissions of occupying students have been drawing up demands on the government and discussing how students want their education run. Assemblies of occupying students meet regularly and two national assemblies of 6,000 people have been held.

A march of 150,000 students was held on February 3rd in Rome. A demo took place outside the British Embassy on February 15th in solidarity with the NUS demo against loans.

By Tash Shifrin
NUS London
Development Officer

Action in solidarity with the Italian students has taken place in Athens, Barcelona, Paris and Berlin. A national demonstration of Italian students *against* the occupations mobilised a massive turnout of 20 students!

Occupations

There are plans to end the occupations and switch to other forms of action soon. The students, who do not have any formal student union structure, will need offices and permanent use of photocopiers, fax machines, etc.

They therefore plan to occupy rooms with the relevant facilities and seize them as permanent office space. It is thought unlikely that the university authorities will be in a position to object.

Such gains show the strong foundations being laid by the Italian student movement for the future.

Week of Action against the Embryology Bill

Round-up of events

Birmingham

Demonstration: Saturday March 10th. Assemble 11am, Chamberlain Square.

Bristol

Demonstration. Saturday March 10th. Assemble 11.30am, College Green.

Canterbury

Demonstration. Saturday March 10th. Assemble 2pm, Westgate Gardens.

Edinburgh

Contact Edinburgh Campaign for Choice, 031-556 7318.

Glasgow

Demonstration. Thursday March 8th. Assemble 6.30pm, Blytheswood Square. March to rally in George Square.

Manchester

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

Scotland

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

LONDON

Brent NAC Public Meeting, 7.30pm, the Irish Centre.
North West London Action at the Marie Stopes Clinic on Saturday March 10th.
South London: Lambeth STAC open air rally on Saturday March 10th. 12 noon onwards, outside Tate library.

CADI:

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

STAC:

Rally March 8th, in Central Hall, Westminster, 7pm. Doors open 6.30pm. Stalls. Speakers include Jo Richardson MP, Wendy Savage, Diane Abbott MP.

Students fight back!

We will never stand a-loan!

The campaign against student loans has been rumbling on since 1965!

The most recent round of the campaign — against the so-called "Top-up" loans has been spluttering on for two years.

"Spluttering" because massive student anger has been continually demobilised and cynically manipulated by the NUS leadership.

Most of the time, for them, "extra-parliamentary pressure" is useful so long as it is under their control. But the anger is so great they cannot even control a demonstration called with hardly any notice, and even less publicity, that starts at 11am in Glasgow!

But now something interesting is happening. Every two years NUS gets gripped by election fever. It has annual elections, but those who "play the game" agree peaceful co-existence for the national President's second year.

By Alistair Chisholm
NUS London
(personal capacity)

All of a sudden the "silent majority" and "consensus politics" are out of fashion. An emergency NEC on 27th February voted for a national shutdown, occupations and regional demonstrations on 13th March!

This is a very important breakthrough — official backing from the national union, with the NEC taking a more active role than usual, means that last month's demonstration and occupations will not be the end of the campaign and we can look forward to a successful wave of occupations, shutdowns and local demonstrations.

Activists have two important battles to wage in the colleges as they build up to the 13th.

Cynicism

The first is to confront the cynicism and demoralisation which the NEC's failure to lead has created amongst many activists.

The second is to do our best to make sure that the NEC's short notice does not preclude joint activity and co-operation with education workers.

There is generally a high level of combativity amongst students at the moment. Student mobilisations for the ambulance workers on January 30th were very high — and student involvement in Poll Tax campaigns is escalating.

A key factor in the battle remains linking loans to Poll Tax and cuts, and convincing students that we can still stop loans.

The next phase of the Tories' plan to privatise education is shifting into gear. Home fees have gone up in most colleges by about 1,000 as central grants to colleges are cut and "competition" for student numbers increases.

London University — 46 million in debt — is discussing imposing a "top-up" fee of 230 on its students next year.

Mobilised

Thirty thousand students mobilised for the demo last month, despite the fact that the NEC, as usual, only gave a minimum of notice and produced a tiny amount of publicity — with some colleges getting fewer posters than they have sites!

The demo was the tip of an iceberg — we can still sink the Tories before it melts.

NUS and Ireland

Students say time to go!

NUS has official policy of unconditional and immediate withdrawal from Ireland.

However, this policy has always been carried out with lacklustre support from the NEC.

Therefore, the first national Students Say Time To Go (SSTTG) conference on February 17th was to be welcomed.

But the success of the meeting needs to be realistically assessed, false claims do nothing to build a mass fight for withdrawal.

By LOUISE HOLLOWAY and IAN McLARTY

The organisers have claimed the event showed a major breakthrough had been achieved within the union. At the LCI AGM, SSTTG's praises were sung interminably. Unfortunately, such claims were not borne out.

Only 38 people registered for the morning session out of a union of 1.25 million members. The conference was poorly publicised and its platform and the majority of speakers were to the right of NUS policy.

Otherwise there would have been a real prospect for building a conference of 400 plus.

One plenary located the problem not with British occupation but with the unhappy marriage of feminism and militarism in the North of Ireland!

The plenary ended without any chance for contributions and questions, supposedly because the conference was running late. At this point some of the 38 delegates left.

Claims that the even drew in students new to the issue were cast into doubt when no one attended the "Ireland for Beginners" workshop.

The session with Frank Holroyd, an ex-M16 officer, was fascinating but marred by the continual theme that the problems were caused by rogue elements in the British army and secret service and not by their very presence in Ireland.

At the last NUS London conference — the largest area organisation of the NUS which incorporates a third of its membership — a policy of self-determination and unconditional, immediate withdrawal was passed, calling on NUS London to work with all groups calling for troops out, including the IBRG, TOM and TTG.

The debate centred on immediate withdrawal and calls for phased withdrawal were roundly rejected. NUS London is attempting to actively work around its policy and supported the Bloody Sunday demo. It is in the process of organising a large meeting with Sinn Fein.

Now, with the release of the Guildford Four and Colin Wallace's exposé of British state black propaganda in Ireland, students see no value in claims for a progressive role for British troops in Ireland, even in the short term.

Once students have been won to a troops out position, TTG is to the right of them. Yet more debate on Ireland in the student movement is urgently needed. Especially as Unionists have been elected as next year's Sabbaticals in three important student unions.

Clearly this is not the time to move NUS policy to the right by a sleight-of-hand substitution of NUS's policy for that of TTG's.

We should be upfront and argue for self-determination for the Irish and troops out now.

This is the way to win students to the cause of Ireland and actively join in the fight for free the Birmingham Six and end the media ban.

Public Meeting (Women Only)
WOMEN AGAINST FUNDAMENTALISM
Women's Struggles Against Religious Fundamentalism Across the World
Speakers:
EFUA GRAHAM
(Member of "Forward", Africa Centre)
Speaker from Bangladeshi Womens Organisation
LEONARA LLOYD
(National Abortion Campaign)
Speaker from Iranian Womens Organisation
HILARY ROSE
(Science, Religious Fundamentalism and the New Right)
NIRA YUVAL-DAVIS
(Jewish Fundamentalism, member of Women in Black)
Speaker from Women Against Fundamentalism
Speaker from Eastern Europe invited
Friday, 23 March, 1990
LONDON WOMENS CENTRE
Wesley House, 4 Wild Court
London WC1 3XX
(nearest tube Holborn)
Tickets: £1.00 & 50p (unwaged)
CRECHE AND REFRESHMENTS PROVIDED
Organised by Women Against Fundamentalism
BM Box 2706, London WC1 3XX, Tel. 571-9595

SOTSPROF

"We will grow tenfold..."

OLEG VORONIN is a leading member of SOTSPROF, the newly formed independent Soviet trade union movement, from Irkutsk in Siberia. Towards the end of a first successful speaking tour here, he spoke and answered questions at a meeting in South London.

Real trade unions have never existed in the Soviet Union.

Since the famous debate on trade unions between Lenin and Trotsky, they have been tied to the state. As part of the state structure, the unions cannot defend their members' interests.

The demand for independent unions has always existed because there have always been workers' uprisings and strikes. All attempts to set up unions in the 1960s, 70s, and 80s failed — they were smashed and the organisers perished in camps or were exiled.

In 1987 and 1988 — even under Gorbachev — there were strikes and [illegible] workers in central Russia. Shops, official institutions and houses of the rich were attacked.

The state, terrified by these uprisings, allowed three people to come together in Moscow to form a trade union co-ordinating centre: SOTSPROF.

These were an academic, an engineer, and a worker in a footwear factory.

SOTSPROF was formed in the opposite way to how trade unions are normally formed, where the rank and file set up a union and choose a leadership.

But SOTSPROF did little more than stamp the papers of organisations around the country.

This came about because of a loophole in Brezhnev's constitution which said that a new trade union did not need to register with the state — only with a higher union body. So SOTSPROF itself could legalise other union bodies!

When the state tried to prevent this, SOTSPROF hired solicitors to travel around the country to take the state to court for breaching the constitution.

Among the first organisations to join SOTSPROF were clothing and footwear workers in Moscow — mainly women — a students union in Moscow, and a union of writers and academics, including me.

In early 1989 SOTSPROF had only 6,000 members. But during the big miners' strike last summer, SOTSPROF activists helped the miners formulate their demands and set up SOTSPROF in the Donbas, Kuzbas, and elsewhere.

Now there are about 30 organisations with 60,000 members in SOTSPROF.

Recently truckdrivers in Moscow and a union of railway refrigeration workers joined and we managed to win a lowering of the pension age to 50, higher wages and other Health and Safety measures.

Also a union of officers in the Soviet army has joined.

Our main economic demands are for better wages and conditions for all workers.

Our main political demands are workers' self-management, collective ownership of the means of production, and democratic planning from below.

With this we can establish a socialist market in the Soviet Union.

We are opposed to Gorbachev's reforms which will introduce a western capitalist market and maintain the position of privileged layers in society. The parliamentary opposition such as Yeltsin want the same as Gorbachev, but disagree over the speed of change.

Candidates

SOTSPROF wanted to take part in the March 4th local council elections, but the state's Electoral Commission refused to register our candidates, saying a trade union body should stick to economic questions.

Still, many SOTSPROF candidates were nominated by factories and will take part.

SOTSPROf has a good base in other republics such as the Ukraine, Kazakhstan and white Russia.

We have very good relations with workers in the Baltic states, but we don't want them to join SOTSPROF as we support their national demands for independence — as long as they respect the national rights of all minorities in these states.



Oleg Voronin

Given that the Soviet working class is 60 million, 60,000 is a very small membership. But our activists will take part in the future mass strikes which are inevitable, and we will grow tenfold.

How do you organise in the workplace and what relation do you have to the official unions? What about the need to organise politically, as a socialist movement?

We do have workplace organisations, but not one single structure: sometimes we organise by sector, like the truckdrivers, or on a regional basis, if workers are scattered over an area.

In several towns, SOTSPROF members still fight in the official unions against the bureaucracy.

I agree with the need for political organisation. This exists in the Committees for a new socialist party which have sprung up in Moscow, Leningrad, Irkutsk and elsewhere.

How are conditions under perestroika? Are they as bad as in Poland? Isn't there a danger of a right wing backlash?

In some Russian towns, people live in worse conditions than in Poland.

The right is growing, but the western press overestimates this. The far right can mobilise two or three thousand people, but up to half a million demonstrated last month on the democratic forces' march in Moscow, which Pamyat boycotted.

Can you tell us about the demands of women, particularly on issues like abortion?

Under Stalin, there was no right to abortion and women who had backstreet abortions were sent to the camps. Abortions are now available, but I would never let my wife have an abortion in a state hospital where there is a 20% fatality rate for women having abortions.

How many women are there in SOTSPROF, including in leading positions? What demands of the union relate to women?

About 30% of SOTSPROF are women. The co-ordinating committee of three are all men, but this month the first congress of SOTSPROF is taking place so maybe some women will be elected. The Secretariat of SOTSPROF is ten people: six are women.

We have many demands relating to women, like exempting women from certain kinds of work, such as carrying coal.

Women should also be free to bring up children until they are seven years old, on an average worker's wage.

What kind of a base has SOTSPROF among students?

Moscow University has 20,000 students. We have only 320 members, but we have already had some students reinstated after they were suspended for political activities.

Learning from Britain, we have also formed a kind of Red Wedge.

I believe, with Marcuse, that students play an important role but cannot win completely on their own.

How do you view the events in Armenia and Azerbaijan?

I have taped eye-witness accounts from Baku in Azerbaijan and Armenia that indicate that the pogroms against the Armenians were organised by the KGB.

This was a pretext to send in the troops to smash the Azerbaijan Popular Front which would have swept the board in the March 4th local elections.

The state also arrested leaders of the Armenian nationalist movement in Nagorno-Karabakh.

What kind of help do you need?

I came here to break the information blackout and tell workers what is happening. We need your moral and material support.

We need the kind of equipment needed by a mass movement: fax machines to link up the local committees, radios to listen in on the police, and a printing press.

NATO and the Warsaw Pact

Armaments and the changing world map

The recent talks between the 23 NATO and Warsaw Pact Foreign Ministers went way beyond their original remit.

This was to discuss Bush's "open skies" proposals.

Instead, they discussed an agreement on undisturbed aerial surveillance of military installations and movements.

This in itself would have been unthinkable two or three years ago, but political developments are moving so rapidly that the 23 Ministers were forced to redefine the map of East-West relations.

There are three fundamental and interlinked changes taking place at the same time and all coming to a head in 1990.

First, there is the question of a reunited Germany: talks will begin after the East German elections on March 18th.

The USSR has accepted that reunification is inevitable, but will the new Germany be neutral or part of NATO?

The Polish, Czech, and Hungarian governments apparently are opposed to a neutral Germany, and are demanding a say in the discussions.

Second, there is the question of the USSR's declining influence.

In particular, if the Soviet Communist Party accepts political pluralism and national independence, who will control the nuclear weapons and conventional forces in the newly free republics?

By Dave Spencer
Coventry Labour Briefing

And in which direction will the guns be pointing?

Third, the US government seems determined to pull out of Europe and to try to cut back on arms spending to help its budget deficit.

This questions the role of NATO, particularly with its enemy evaporating into thin air.

On arms, historic agreements are expected nearly every month this year, which reflect this changing map.

The "open skies" proposals will be ratified in Budapest in April or May.

In June Bush and Gorbachev meet in Washington where a START 2 Treaty is expected to be signed.

Drastic cuts in strategic weapons are planned: with most chemical weapons destroyed, and bans on whole categories of missiles, including mobilise and multi-warhead weapons.

The new thinking is "low intensity deterrence" where an equal number of weapons are held by both sides and nobody has a first strike capacity.

In the autumn, the 35 Helsinki signatories are expected to agree a reduction in conventional arms, in particular both USSR and USA limiting their numbers of troops in East and West Europe respectively to 225,000 each side.

This of course takes account of the reality of the USSR being kicked out anyway and the USA wanting to pull out.

Nevertheless these developments have to be seen as major and historic.

Socialists must welcome any steps which mean less risk of nuclear war and less money spent on arms. It is quite incredible in this context that Gerald Kaufman recently stated that Conference resolution 47 on reducing British arms expenditure to the EC average will not be part of the Labour manifesto for the General Election.

We should increase our demands for cuts in arms spending and an end to the 30,000 US troops and 1000 US bases in this country.

We should also raise the question of the role of NATO as an imperialist alliance and its connection with the foreign policy of the EC.

Let us also remember that both Bush and Gorbachev are reacting more to economic crises than love of humanity.

Within their respective states the army generals are very unhappy with their loss of power. For example, the Pentagon recently made a "Cold War" attack on the USSR as a threat to peace in the Third World and demanded a 22% increase in spending on SDI or "Star Wars".

Spending of $7 billion on new generations of land-based strategic nuclear weapons is also going ahead, backed by US Congress.

It also remains to be seen whether and/or how the economic powers of Germany and Japan are reflected in a military way and in new imperialist alliances.

As long as imperialism exists, there is always a likelihood of war and nuclear catastrophe.

LABOUR BRIEFING

SUBSCRIBE TO BRIEFING

Make sure of your copy of the fortnightly *Labour Briefing*. Annual subscriptions are £12 (individuals), £24 (institutions). Write to PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY (cheques, etc., payable to *Labour Briefing*).

Name.....

Address.....

.....

...../98

International Women's Day sets the scene:

FIGHT FOR A WOMAN'S RIGHT TO CHOOSE!



PHOTO: Grame Cooks

Women in Britain will be celebrating International Women's Day this year by fighting the attacks on women's reproductive rights threatened by the Embryology Bill.

Up and down Britain, women will be demonstrating against the Bill's attacks on abortion rights.

They will be protesting against the threat it makes further to restrict the right of all women to have access to donor insemination and to the New Reproductive Technologies (NRTs), regardless of marital status or sexuality.

Biology is not destiny. Women's oppression has not always existed. It is rooted in the social and economic organisation of society and is not a "natural" product of women's biology.

Women's fight to control their own bodies is a crucial part of the struggle for women's liberation.

The capitalist state has never granted women the right to decide if and when to have children. Abortion has never been granted to women as a right. Instead, women have had repeatedly to take to the streets and demand control of their own bodies.

Women's demands to control their own fertility have been fought for historically by the women's movement in this country and around the world.

By GILL LEE

With the break up of the Stalinist monopoly of power we have seen women in Eastern European countries begin to make their demands on reproductive rights known.

In countries like Romania, abortion has long been outlawed and women have been forced to bear children they did not want or to take to the backstreets for dangerous illegal abortions.

In other countries, such as the Soviet Union itself, abortion has often replaced proper provision of contraceptives; so women have again been denied choice.

In Britain, the 1967 Abortion Act decriminalised abortion in certain circumstances — if two doctors gave their consent. It did not grant women the unconditional right to have an abortion.

However, even the limited benefits it did grant women have been under continued attack since the Act was passed.

The attempt to reduce the time limits for abortions through amending the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill is the 16th attempt to restrict the 67 Act.

Women must again take to the streets to defend abortion rights. In this struggle they must be joined by the working class as a whole which has a class interest in defending and extending women's control over their bodies.

In the debates around the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill we have seen the attitudes of the hard right to women's control over their own bodies.

They argue that women do not have the right to benefit from scientific research into foetal tissue.

They believe a fertilised egg has an inalienable right to life — superior to that of the women who will risk their health and lives undergoing backstreet abortions if the right has its way.

They argue that donor insemination should be restricted to married women.

They want to restrict access to the New Reproductive Technologies to those in steady (preferably married) heterosexual relationships. They are terrified of the effects of legitimising in any way the "pretended family relationships" condemned by "Section 28".

Women and the working class must join together to reject the right's veto on who can benefit from donor insemination and the NRTs.

We must demand that all women — regardless of race, sex, or marital status — have the right to control their own bodies.

Fight for a woman's right to choose!

Stop the Amendment Campaign!

National Organising Committee

Saturday March 17th

Wesley House
Wild Court, London

Thursday March 8th

Campaign for Access to Donor Insemination

Mass lobby of parliament for equal access to DI, 2pm onwards

CAD\LCLGR\NUS Rally, 6pm, House of Commons

STAC Rally, Central Hall Westminster

(Doors open 6.30pm)

Stalls, Speakers include Jo Richardson MP, Wendy Savage, Diane Abbott MP

INSIDE:

•Reproductive rights international feature
•Embryology Bill: debate