LABOUR
BRIEFING
No. 99 March 22nd-April 4th 1990

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☆ NUS Conference: left student speak out
☆ NHS: Stangled by the Tories!
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40p

Put the Poll Tax to the test...

GENERAL ELECTION NOW!

Three cheers for the anti-Poll Tax movement!

In East Europe, people-power has crumbled walls, toppled dictators, and moved governments.

At last, people are spilling onto the streets in England and Wales too, inspired by the strength of the non-payment movement in Scotland, to show local government the dangers it runs by passing on the Tory Tax.

The government has been shaken to the core, as they sink lower and lower in the opinion polls.

Their attempts to blame Labour Councils for high Poll Tax levels have been shattered by Tory resignations in Oxfordshire and Humberside. It's hardly the best basis to fight the May Council elections on.

The Poll Tax figures have been explosive not just because they were way above government estimates, but because they came in the wake of rising inflation and huge increases in mortgage repayments.

After months of proof that the Tory "strategy" of high interest rates is having no effect on the economic crisis, the long awaited Budget is almost a Major irrelevance.

The bosses are getting uneasy: the City has been quick to criticise the "too little, too late" budget; the CBI has protested at the political role the government wants it to assume in collecting the Poll Tax for them through attachment of wages.

The Tory government have no mandate to implement the Poll Tax. They have no mandate to decimate the NHS as they did in the week just before the Budget. *They have no mandate to govern.*

But where are our leaders in this crisis? They are taking comfort from the polls, and hoping they can maintain their lead until Margaret Thatcher calls a General Election.

We cannot wait for the Tories to call the Election. They are running riot: we need a General Election *now* — before the Tories do any more damage.

Labour must lead the call for a General Election. Our leaders must put themselves at the head of the anti-Poll Tax Movement; they must stand with the people against the Tory mob.

It's a scandal that Heseltine can be more radical than Kinnock on the Poll Tax. His statement "people will pay a tax which they think is fair" is far nearer an incitement not to pay the Tax than anything Kinnock has ever said.

By the Labour Briefing Editorial Board

A General Election won't be the end to all our troubles. A Kinnock government, on the basis of Labour's already outdated Policy Review documents, would be a grave disappointment to all those who look to Labour to rescue them from the misery and poverty created by Thatcherism.

We socialists must be confident in what we stand for. We have the policies that can liberate prosperity from the City and the rich and use it to restore dignity and decency to the millions of working class people.

The Labour Party Socialists Conference on May 19-20th is the starting point for our campaign to defeat Thatcher; fight for a Labour victory; and fight to make Labour stand up for the working class.

No Poll Tax!

All-Britain Anti-Poll Tax demonstration

London, Saturday March 31st

12 noon, Kennington Park
March to Trafalgar Square
Contact 01-533 5551 for further details

Defeat the Poll Tax; defeat the government!



The anti-Poll Tax campaign is designed to defeat the Poll Tax, defeat the Prime Minister and the government, and people are responding to the challenge in many ways.

The most important thing is that the labour movement should give full support to those who cannot or will not pay.

I personally am not asking other people not to pay, nor do I think we should direct criticism to Local Authorities who have to protect jobs and provide services.

Labour should now be campaigning against the Poll Tax and be demanding a General Election.

Tony Benn

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

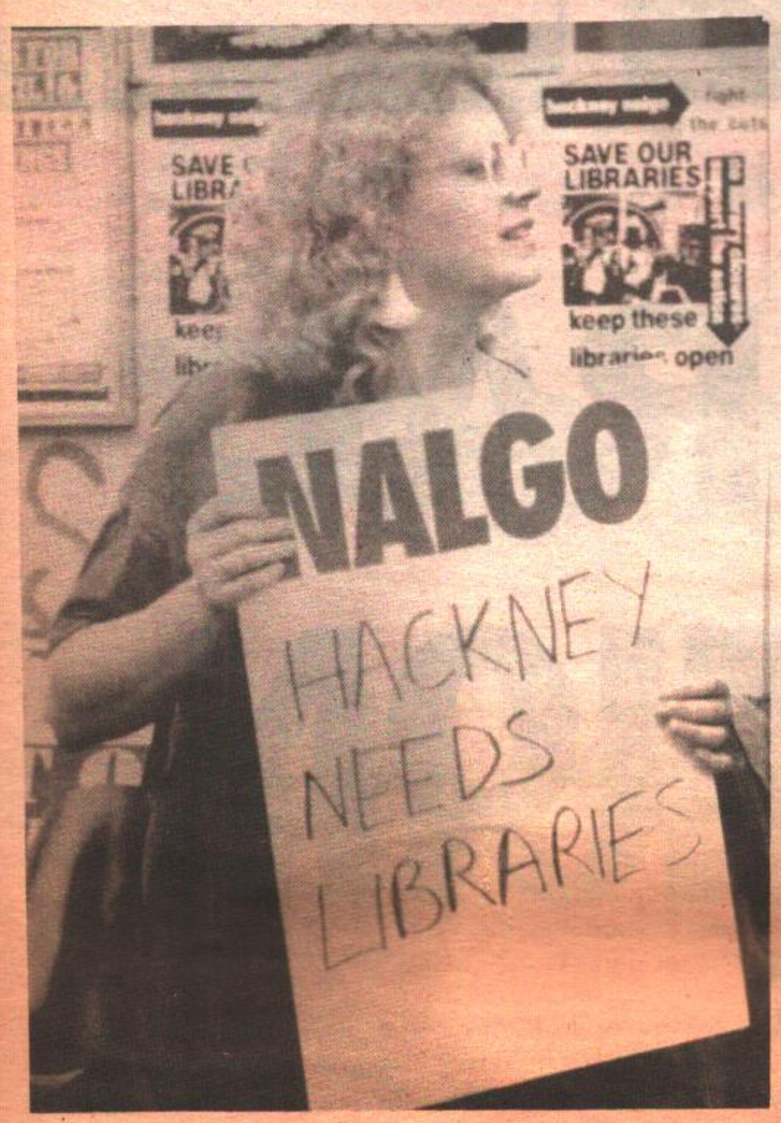


PHOTO: Martine Stead

The struggles in Hackney (above); Lambeth (below)

Let's move the Pole Ghosts!

Dear *Briefing*,

I was very pleased to read Martin Watson's article "Solidarity with new Soviet Unions" (*Briefing, no. 96*).

The emergence of SOTSPROF and other independent union movements in the USSR is indeed an important political event which demands ongoing support from socialists in the West.

I also agree with Martin that it is time that the left in Britain began to think about setting up a permanent solidarity movement with socialists in Eastern Europe and the USSR, so that we can make our efforts more effective.

Movement

Your readers may, therefore, like to know that a new movement along these lines has just recently been launched: the Campaign for Solidarity with Workers in the Eastern Block (CSWEB).

The campaign is still fairly small: its main affiliates are *Socialist Organiser*, Workers' Power, a number of trade union and Labour Party branches, the journal *Critique*, and independents like myself who for many years have been involved in solidarity work in support of the left in Eastern Europe.

Or aim, however, is to create a broad based campaign uniting all the forces on the British left in a common effort to support our sisters and brothers in Eastern Europe and the USSR.



Russian workers in 1917: now needing modern equipment!

Our first initiative is the "Support the Socialists Appeal".

For every £10 raised by CSWEB we sent £2 to each of the following organisations:

- Polish Socialist Party (Democratic Revolution);
- SOTSPROF;
- IFUG (the East German initiative for independent trade unions);
- the Left Alternative in Czechoslovakia;
- the East German United Left.

These organisations are all in desperate need of practical assistance.

Even a simple duplicator, not to mention computers, fax machines, and photocopiers, would greatly expand their ability to organise and establish contacts with like-minded groups in other Eastern European countries.

Readers can send donations to "Support the Socialists", c/o CSWEB, 56 Kevan House, Wyndham Road, London SE5, from where they can also get more information about CSWEB and how to affiliate.

Comradely greetings,
Don Filtzer
North London

Cut and thrust of debate

I am not entirely surprised that Steve French (*Briefing*, 98) thought my article was confusing; the columns had been pasted up in the wrong order! But I suppose it says something about the original article if nobody noticed...

I was not saying that Labour Councils should be making cuts; I was certainly not defending the "-dented shield".

But if left comrades take "control" of Local Authorities in the present climate, they will inevitably make cuts: either that or resign when faced with a confrontation with their own bureaucrats — a confrontation they could notpossibly win.

I should have thought Steve's own experiences in Lambeth would have taught him that.

When comrades Twelves, Tucker et al took "control" of Lambeth Council, I submitted an article to the Briefing editorial board condemning them for doing this, saying it was bound to fail and to split the left in Lambeth.

This was chucked out; we can't attack comrades, I was told.

Well, comrades, I don't like to say I told you so but: I told you so.

Steve was Chief Whip in that short-lived left administration — what did he expect to achieve? How did he expect to do anything except capitulate or resign?

The argument that we should seek to "control" localgovernment just because it's there is just plain daft — whatever local government is at the moment, it certainly isn't an "organisation of the working class".

Steve criticises me for stating that there is no clear and coherent strategy for running local government, but then rejects any kind of "broad frontism" to fight specific cuts or campaigns.

I am left wondering just what he wants to achieve, beyond an angry waving of fists on his self righteous sidelines.

Peter Chowney
Hackney, London

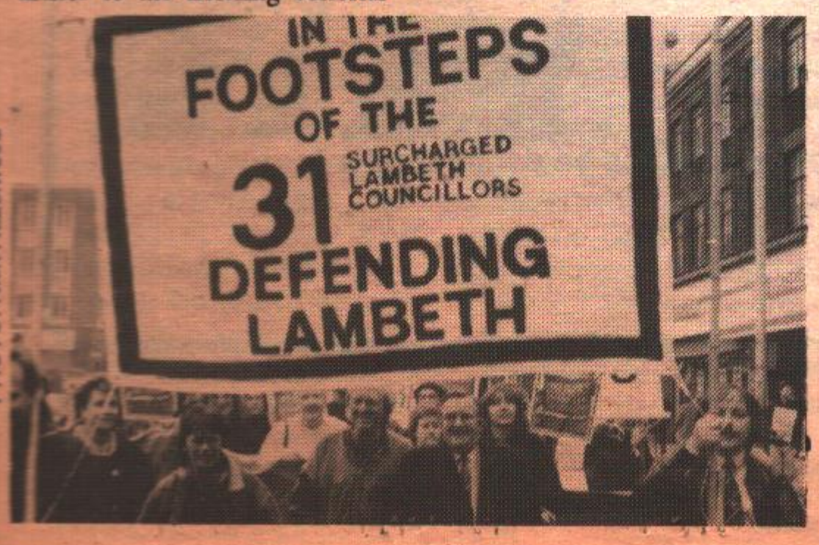


PHOTO: Nick Hazelwood

PERISCOPE



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

From Mandelson, with Venom

Congratulations to Dick Douglas, MP for Dunferline West, who has resigned from the PLP over Kinnock's pusillanimous stance on non-payment of the Poll Tax.

As usual when a Party member critical of the leadership is in the news, the *Guardian's* report quoted an anonymous Party "spokesman" slurring Douglas. The unnamed — thus unaccountable — Party official said the MP "had not been happy about his personal circumstances for a long time".

She or he praised Douglas's successor as Labour candidate for the seat.

Some questions. What is the quote supposed to mean? And what possible relevance can it have to Douglas's political criticism of Kinnochio? A reek here of what is being rooted out in the Soviet bloc.

The *Guardian* report bears the fingerprints of communications supremo Peter Mandelson — he who worships at the door of ad-land and believes the CLPs archaic irritants in these days of image making, should be left to rot.

Will party general secretary Larry Whitty, who loathes Mandelson, put a stop to slander from anonymous Party hacks?

A rosey path to the thorns?

Patrick Wintour's "Thorny path to the red rose" article in the *Guardian* was niggardly in its praise for the Labour leader — "systematically and emphatically correct", "unprecedented authority in the party", "the highly-polished policy review", and such.

What about "treasure of universal thinking", "the alert conscience of the contemporary world", "Danube of thought", and "the greatest Romanian in history"?

After all, Mr Kinnock has substituted a Shadow Communications Agency for grass roots activism, made a void of policy-making, and all but Stalinised opposition from the Party.

Kinnock: a thorn by any other name...

Who knows what he would do with the secret police?

Maxwell and Labour

Oxford East Labour Party GC has been trying to get a satisfactory answer from Robert Maxwell as regards his action in sacking the Pergamon strikers.

Because they have not received such an answer they are expected to set up a three-person Executive enquiry into him.

This is the procedure that Labour Parties have to adopt in order to discipline one of their members.

The results of such an enquiry are then, if they require action, sent to the National Constitutional Committee. Only a member's local Part can initiate such action.

But other GCs can send resolutions to the NEC calling for action to be taken or supporting Oxford East GC's stand.

Editorial

BRIEFING

LABOUR — TAKE THE POWER!

Non-payment starts here!

From April 1st the Poll Tax will be implemented in England and Wales.

Non-payment is no longer something that *will* happen sometime in the future but something that *is* happening now — as England and Wales face the test which has been going on in Scotland for the last year.

The level of non-payment in Glasgow, 41% of the adult population, is so high that Strathclyde Regional Council doesn't know what to do. It has not yet attempted to recover any money through wage arrestments or warrant sales.

The national demonstration in London on March 31st has been called to mark the advent of mass non-payment. A massive turnout will only serve to deepen the Tory crisis.

Further activity, such as Poll Tax payment book burnings, have been planned for the weeks immediately following implementation.

But whilst demonstrations, burnings and public meetings are an important way of drawing more people into the anti-Poll Tax movement, mass non-payment needs to be organised street by street in every village, town, and city.

Many local campaigns already have a network of street and block stewards prepared to deliver leaflets.

Over the next few weeks and months these networks need to be strengthened so that in their streets and Council blocks non-payers have a point of contact with the local campaign.

Where such structures don't exist they need to be set up. Mass non-payment will only be sustained if people believe that a viable campaign exists which can support and defend them when the bailiffs come.

Mass non-payment will not stand or fall on the numbers not paying from day one. The experience of Scotland shows that many people will reluctantly start off paying one, two, maybe three monthly instalments.

A false dividing line should not be set which excludes people from the campaign who have paid something towards their Poll Tax bills.

Over the next few months, as the economic noose tightens, many people can be convinced into not paying — many more will simply be unable to continue paying.

Whilst neighbourhood support networks are essential to building mass non-payment, workplace organisation has a key role to play. Many organised workers will turn first to their workplace trade unions for support for non-payment.

Although wage arrestments have only just begun in Scotland, Councils in England and Wales will attempt to use this method to recover money.

The call for a national trade union anti-Poll Tax conference, put out by the Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee, is to be welcomed and supported, as a major focus for organising trade union resistance to the Poll Tax.

We hope the All Britain Federation will support this call, and local anti-Poll Tax groups should be calling on the Federation to put their weight behind this conference.

The non-payment campaign in England and Wales is in a far stronger position than the Scottish campaign was a year ago. Let's not waste the opportunities offered by the last few weeks to *organise* ten million non-payers!

Strangled by their hands!

Late night news broadcasts had something to crow about after the first day of the parliamentary debate on the Tory government's National Health and Community Care Bill.

The government had suffered its first defeat this session.

The defeat (by three votes) was on the *principle* of a New Clause proposed by Labour that the benefits should cover the full price of charges for the elderly in residential homes.

By the time the technical vote was taken immediately afterwards, "that the Clause stand part of the Bill", ten of the 32 Tory rebels relented (no point going to the wall when Labour Whips had allowed Labour MPs to go home and the Clause would be lost from the Bill anyway).

It was certainly morale boosting to defeat the government. Labour backbenchers went on to use blocking tactics to lose a day's business (Skinner, a lone voice trying to move the writ for the Upper Bann by-election).

The government responded tetchily by guillotining the rest of the debate

But this concentration on parliamentary processes deflects attention from the seriousness of the passing of the Bill. This part of the welfare state has been well and truly dismantled, and replaced by an infrastructure of capitalist profiteering.

•Democracy: restructuring of Health Authorities removes Local Authority and trade union representation, handing it over to NHS managers.

•Individual hospitals will be allowed to opt out of the National Health Service. They will assume the role of individual employers; destroying the strength of Service-wide health unions to negotiate national agreements.

•All hospitals will now *compete* to sell services to Health Authorities which are shopping around to buy health care for their patients.

Hospitals which treat more patients will be bribed with extra cash for their "efficiency". Any notion that health care is provided on the basis of need is over.

Forty years on, the NHS has gone while the labour movement's been taking forty winks.

Had the ambulance union leaderships called on workers to take solidarity action (which many workers had already shown they were prepared to do) in support of the ambulance workers *and* in defence of the NHS, both issues could have been won.

Behind the headlines

The Hackney Poll Tax Demo

Anarchy in the UK?

Hackney's Poll Tax lobby on March 8th really gave the press something to get their teeth into.

We had riots in the inner city; Kinnock on the defensive; the £ plummeting on the foreign exchanges; highly trained armies of *Militant* supporters zipping around the country in their thousands...

But while no one involved in organising the demonstration quite expected events to take the turn they did, desperate press attempts to discredit non-payment campaigns managed to obscure much of the truth.

The lobby was organised by Hackney Against the Poll Tax Federation.

HAPTF evolved from a loose anti-Poll Tax campaign, a group which included greens, communists, Labour Party members, and even Liberals.

The decision by *Militant* to get involved last summer resulted in a delegate conference which set up the now familiar structure of local anti-Poll Tax Unions organising on the estates, and a Borough wide body co-ordinating their activities.

The involvement of "Militant" in HAPTF is undeniable and undisguised. Most of the Borough-wide Executive Committee members are *Militant* supporters.

But *Militant* have organised here in a completely non-sectarian way, making monthly meetings of the Federation open to anyone who wishes to get involved — mostly on a delegate basis from Tenants' Associations and Labour Party branches.

The Thursday lobby had been organised for local people from the estates, but television reports of "violent" protests elsewhere had discouraged them.

By Peter Chowney
Hackney North CLP

Nevertheless, around 3-5,000 people turned up, most of them apparently responding to HAPTF's flyposting and leafletting.

The mass of demonstrators had assembled by around 7.00pm. Attempts by HAPT to address the crowd were chanted down by SWP, who had congregated at the foot of the Town Hall steps.

But the mood was largely good natured and as the numbers grew, so did a feeling of solidarity, echoed by passing vehicle drivers who sounded their horns in a crescendo of support. The "trouble" began at 7.40pm. A group of around 20 people, carrying SWP banners, moved in amongst the SWP supporters.

Their attack on the police, when it came a few minutes later, was co-ordinated and well planned.

Predictably, the police overreacted, with some officers piling into the fray and others hanging back, dashing forward to pick people out of the crowd at random. From here, the whole thing quickly deteriorated into an uncontrollable series of confrontations, with more demonstrators getting dragged in.

By now, news reports had appeared on television, and the nature of the crowd began to change, as people left and others arrived.

After about an hour, police split the demonstration and one group headed off towards the Mare Street shops, where windows were broken and shops looted, and a police car turned over.

Over 50 people were arrested — Hackney Community Defence Campaign is organising help for all those charged, and is appealing for witnesses to any of the arrests.

Next morning, bemused Mare Street shoppers were accosted by an army of reporters as they picked their way through the wreckage.

Dave Webb, HAPTF secretary, spent the morning being interviewed by reporters in Mare Street but only a few lines were used on Thames News.

Heavyweight

The press were much more interested in making up stories for the heavyweight Sundays on "how *Militant* organised the riots."

Despite HAPT press releases faxed to all and sundry, no one was interested in what HAPT was really about. Responsibility for the co-ordinated confrontation is difficult to pin down.

It seems likely that local anarchist groups, like Class War, were involved. Direct Action Movement, an internationally affiliated anarchist grouping, has also been active in Hackney.

Anarchist groups have not generally supported HAPT because of its (in their view) overstructured organisation, believing they can provoke spontaneous mass protest.

But the "Hackney Heckler", a well produced newsletter from the Hackney Solidarity Group (a local anarchist umbrella organisation), has indicated that they intend to step up their own anti-Poll Tax activities.

On the following Tuesday, HAPT held a packed meeting at Hackney Town Hall.

Around 400 local people, this time unperturbed by rumours of "violence", turned up to give local MPs Dianne Abbot and Brian Sedgemore a hard time: neither will commit themselves to non-payment.

Steve Nally from the National Federation also spoke, stressing the need for non-violent mass non-payment, and receiving thunderous applause. Around 300 people signed up to support HAPT and join their local anti-Poll Tax unions.

But the press, who had been so interested in the Hackney campaign the previous Thursday, were absent.

Enquiries to HAPT officers during the day had led them to believe that the evening would be far too positive. They already had their dirt; everything else they could make up.

What happened in Hackney is perhaps more extreme than what happened elsewhere. But it indicates the desire of the press to use all the familiar cliches and stereotypes at their disposal to discredit the campaign.

Mass non-payment will be built on the streets and estates, not in the pages of the *Guardian*.

Socialist Movement

Green and Socialist Conference

Grass roots talk networks

Five hundred participants are expected at the second Green and Socialist Conference.

It will provide a rare forum for Labour Party members and Greens to discuss and define areas of common action.

What unites us all will be determination to define an eco-socialist perspective, a much needed alternative to the policies promoted by party leaderships.

Chris Patten's "honeymoon" with the environmental lobby, such as it was, has evaporated since December's publication of the Government's Green Bill and his subsequent concessions to the Cabinet.

The Labour Party, following the Greens success in the Euro-elections, set itself to the target of being a Red-Green party by 1992.

Their first shot at the target was to pass an ultra-cautious policy on nuclear power at their October conference, which did not even meet the basic requirements of an anti-nuclear policy.

This timidity in formulating policy extends beyond energy matters — witness the toning down of John Prescott's proposals on transport policy — and despite Labour's high standing in the opinion polls, party membership has plummeted.

The Green Party, on the contrary, has doubled in membership, while its electoral support has levelled out at 5-6% in the polls.

But the Green Party has experienced serious problems at leadership level, where there is an ongoing struggle between decentralisers and centralisers. This debate will feature centrally in a constitutional conference later this year.

The situation of those in both parties fighting for eco-socialist policies is difficult.

By Steve Potter
Dulwich CLP

The Socialist Environment and Resources Association (SERA) is currently balloting members on affiliation to the Labour Party.

Most people assume that SERA is already in the Labour Party, but Green party members are also involved — a potentially fruitful collaboration that will end if the ballot results in affiliation.

Another area where there has been an ongoing discussion on eco-socialism has been the Association of Socialist Greens, a current on the left of the Green party.

However, hostility from the Party leadership led the organisation to embark on a discussion of its role, resulting in a ballot on a new name for the Association.

The new name — Socialist Green Forum — represents a victory for those who believe that an eco-socialist strategy is the way forward for their Party.

With these problems facing socialist greens, the Green and Socialist Conference will be an important opportunity for green socialists to exchange ideas.

Some of the most important issues will be economic strategy, international perspectives, the political forms an eco-socialist society should take, and political alliances.

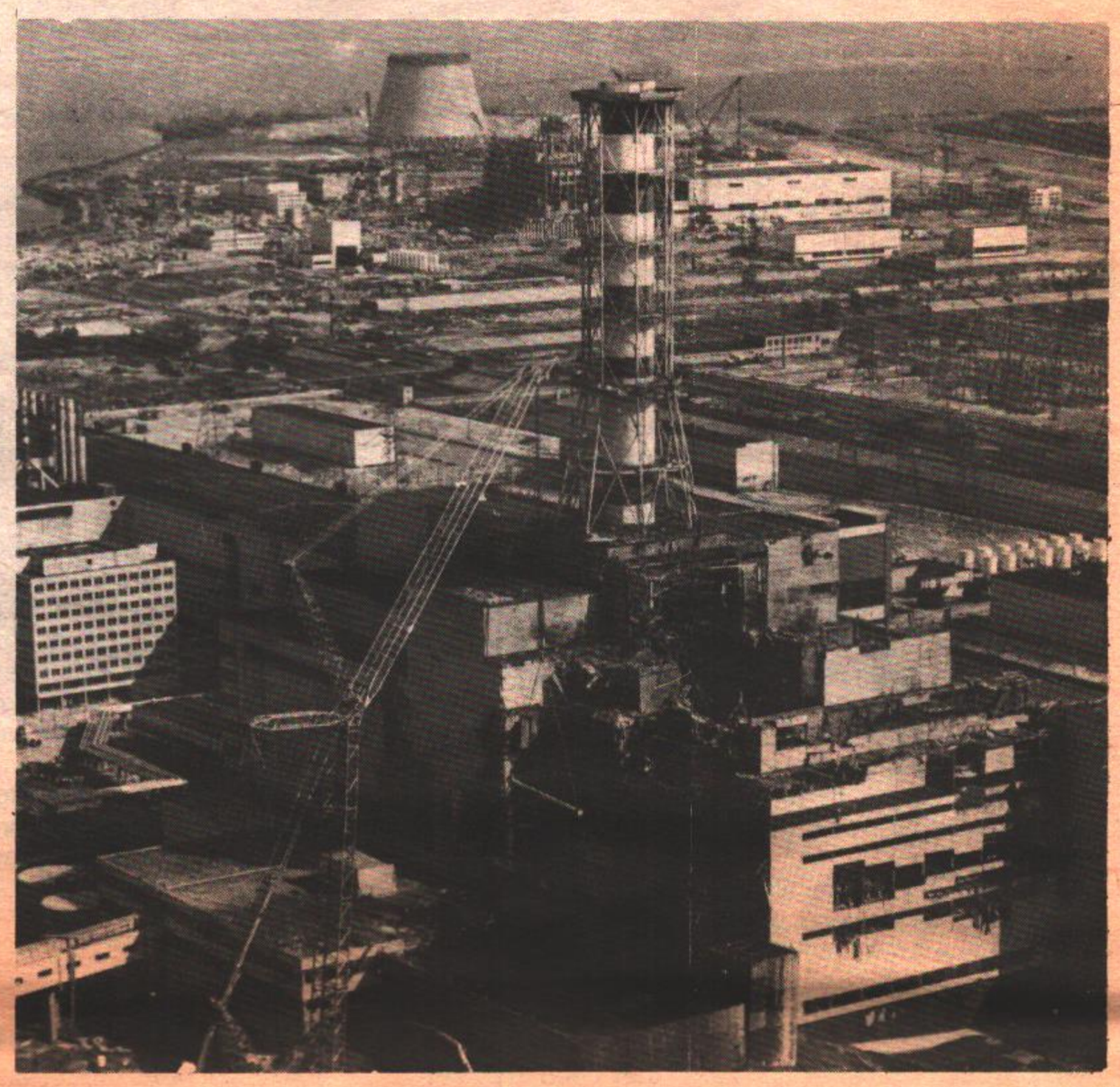
A theme running throughout the whole weekend will be the emergence of the ecological issue as a central thread of the mass movements in Eastern Europe.

We must face the challenge of developing a democratic socialist alternative to the failure of bureaucratic planning.

Discussion

The conference will end with a discussion on how to launch a Red-Green Network. The Network would be a current of individual members which would argue for eco-socialist policies not only through political parties, but also in the women's, black, student, and trade union movements.

Many on the left (even some of those supporting the Conference) would find the crystallisation of such a current threatening. But a Green and Socialist Network will be an important step out of an organisational *impasse* which has artificially divided eco-socialists and prevented them fulfilling their real potential.



The catastrophe at Chernobyl — the responsibility of bureaucratic planning

Women for Socialism

Pornography: no easy solution

Along with the more usual resolutions on equal opportunities, low pay, gender bias in education and women's health debated at this year's Women's TUC, (March 14-16th), Resolution 14 was on Pornography.

At first sight we might be pleased that this rather "conservative" body should take such issues seriously: perhaps feminist demands are at last finding a place among the discussions of the leadership of women's trade unionism.

At one level we would be right. That the Women's TUC is prepared to take on the debate about sexist images, long the bread and butter of feminism, must be a good thing — part of the same process that makes sexual harassment of women at work also a legitimate subject for trade union discussions.

The problem is the framework within which these issues are seen and discussed.

By Jane Kelly
Women for Socialism

It is no coincidence that Resolution 14 came immediately after a motion on Women and Violence; nor any coincidence that the unquestioned link between porn and violence is also made in the first paragraph of the resolution.

"...the movement is concerned that little attention has been given to the increasingly pervasive incidence of pornography and violence towards women in society today."

Stating that equal rights will never be attained by women whilst "we allow pornographers to portray women in a degrading, oppressive manner", the Resolution calls for support for any Parliamentary Bill which "aims to outlaw pornography in the media and in the workplace."

Lynne Segal, in her new book on masculinity (and how to change it!) *Slow Motion*, points to the reactionary alliances that have been made in the US between anti-porn campaigners like Andrea Dworkin and Catherin McKinnon and the "Moral Majority", Republican politicians and born-again christians.

These last are not only opposed to pornography but also to contraception, abortion rights, homosexuality and equal rights!

Connections

The easy connections made between violence and pornography and the easy solution of censorship offered by the anti-porn campaigners are just two instances of oversimplification in discussing the way sexually explicit images are produced, seen and used in our society.

Another is the slipping together of fantasy and reality; a fourth is the supposition that pornography is used exclusively by men; and a fifth that women who work in the sex industries do so because they are in some way depraved.

At *Women For Socialism*'s first national meeting last year, the session on pornography was one of the most interesting. We have therefore decided to look at these issues again.

On March 31st *Women For Socialism* is holding an open Steering Group (details below) where one main discussion will be on Pornography and Censorship. The other session will be on the Embryology Bill. All women will be welcome.

Women for Socialism Open Steering Group March 31st, 11-5pm The London Womens Centre Wesley House, 4 Wild Court, Kingsway London WC2

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

Model Resolution

This (...) notes that women's reproductive rights are again under attack from proposals in the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill and its amendments and from Lord Houghton's Abortion (Amendment) Bill.

This (...) believes that all women should have the right to control their own bodies and lives, that all women should have equal access to abortion, to the new reproductive technologies, and to donor insemination and that therefore:

(a) the attempt to restrict donor insemination to heterosexual couples thus excluding lesbians and single women; and

(b) the likely attempt to reduce the time limit within which women can obtain an abortion;

are both attacks on a woman's right to choose and to control her own body.

We therefore agree to support national and local campaigns by producing publicity, supporting meetings, lobbies and demonstrations and by affiliating to both STAC and CADI and to any local campaign. We also support the call for a national demonstration in the name of both campaigns and agree to sponsor and mobilise for such a demonstration and to call on the regional and national committees to do likewise.

Please send copies of resolutions passed to:
STAC: C/o NAC, 4 Wild Court, London WC2;
CADI: C/o 52-4 Featherstone Street, London EC1.

STAC/CADI

Women's Day shows strong campaign

International Women's Week this year was celebrated all across the country.

There were public meetings, lobbies, rallies, demonstrations, and pickets in defence of a woman's right to choose.

The largest protests were in London on March 8th.

There was a lobby of Parliament organised by the Campaign for Access to Donor Insmeination (CADI), the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) and the National Union of Students (NUS).

It attracted over 150 people, mainly lesbian activists and students, and made a considerable impact on MPs.

The Labour MPs lobbied included Harriet Harman and Jo Richardson who will be leading Labour's parliamentary work on the Embryo Bill.

Deplored

They said they deplored the attempt to discriminate against lesbians and single women and that the Party opposed it.

The few Tories who dared face their constituents were ambivalent and non-commital.

The Rally that followed filled Commons' Committee Room 16 to overflowing.

A series of speakers including Mildred Gordon and Chris Smith MP, Anne Clarke and Jill Radford from ROW Lesbian Custody Project, Chris Eades from NALGO and Tracey Lambert from COHSE.

By Rebecca Flemming Women for Socialism

They covered the many issues involved in the Bill and the amendments to it, stressing the need to take the campaign deep into the labour movement.

The links between the struggle for equal access to DI and infertiliy treatments and the struggle for abortion were also highlighted. Gill Butler from CADI, opened her speech with the statement that:

Campaigning

"I spent my 20s in NAC campaigning for the right of women not to have children. Now in my 30s I'm fighting for the right of women to have children and keep them. These are two sides of the same coin."

Over 300 people attended the Stop the Amendment Campaign (STAC) Rally in Central Hall Westminster.

They listened to Wendy Savage, Christine McAnea (NALGO), Jo Richardson MP, a speaker for Progress (the campaign for embryo research), Anna Raebum, speakers from STAC and CADI, Diane Abbott MP and Leonora Lloyd (NAC).

These speakers defended, in no uncertain terms, the right to abortion and women's right to control their own bodies.

Perhaps the loudest applause was reserved for Diane Abbott as she managed to denounce the "promotion of the Family... nauseating Royal Weddings... and all this support for foetuses," all in one breath.

Local groups also held public meetings in Brent, Camden, and 'Hackney, with an open air rally in Lambeth.

There were demonstrations as far afield as Canterbury, Glasgow, Bristol and Manchester.

Successful public meetings in Nottingham and Coventry (where speakers included Dave Nellist MP!) helped to build a regional demo of over 150 in Birmingham.

The action was somewhat patchy, reflecting the fact that groups in some areas have not drawn in broad forces, and the unfortunate clash of many events with Poll Tax protests.

The absence, as yet, of any anti-abortion amendments, also affected attendances. But still, the Week of Action was a crucial step forward for the campaign against the current attacks on women's reproductive rights.

Awareness

The lack of awareness surrounding the issue of equal access to DI and infertility treatments has finally begun to crumble in the media, and the wider women's and labour movements.

Awareness is even growing among Labour MPs — though the question of a Whip remains unanswered.

Much of the groundwork has been laid for the hard campaigning that will need to be done when an amendment restricting abortion time limits is finally tabled.

Care must be taken that campaigns do not get drawn into the numbers game around time limts, nor the wheeling and dealing around parliamentary manoeuvre and political compromise.

In the week after all this activity the TUC Women's Conference passed a resolution condemning both attacks on the 1967 Abortion Act and attempts to restrict access to DI and infertility treatments.

It calls on the General Council "vigorously to support the campaign against any weakening of a woman's right to choose."

The Campaigns are planning a second Week of Action in May, to coincide with the Committee stage of the Bill, including a lobby of Parliament and local events.

There are also plans to organise a national demonstration in June, to be organised by the TUC Women's Committee on the basis of the resolution passed at Conference.

It is essential that STAC and CADI work jointly to build this demonstration for a woman's right to choose.

It must be built in the women's movement, the lesbian and gay movement, the student movement and the labour movement to make it the largest mobilisation possible!



Wendy Savage, longstanding campaigner for women's choice in childbearing, spoke at the rally.

Economic Notebook

German economic integration:

Hard choices for German capital

Reunification was the major issue in the East German elections.

But behind the nationalist flagwaving, the West German ruling class face delicate economic choices.

West German capitalists, along with their European counterparts, would like to create a low waged, super-exploited sector in the East.

But failure to take on at least some of the demands of the East German working class will mean continuing extensive migration — by the end of 1990, 800,000 will have moved from East to West, out of a population of 16 million.

Strain

This is putting massive strain on West German social security and housing and will create huge economic distortions in the run-up to final economic unification.

So, the immediate problems facing the Bonn Government are

By MARTIN ALLEN

about the cost of the operation.

Kohl claims that the immediate costs of reunification and revamping East Germany's economy will be as little as DM7 billion a year (some £2.5 billion), and are covered by his supplementary budget already approved by his Cabinet in February.

These claims have not won the confidence of the world money markets as West German interest rates rise in response to uncertainties about future economic performance.

In contrast, the HWWA Institute in Hamburg predict £340 billion over ten years.

While East Germany's economy is much more attractive to Western capitalists than Poland's or Hungary's, unemployment levels will rise markedly as firms prune labour and cut costs.

East German unemployment is already standing at 100,000 and is expected to surge to 1.8 million this year — resulting in 20% unemployment in the East and 11% across Germany.

Levels

Currently, East German wage levels are below West German social security levels and some estimates for the yearly outlay on unemployment and pensions have touched DM50 billion.

The costs to West German capital of economic stability in the East will have to be borne somewhere.

The options are increased taxation (a recent opinion poll shows over two-thirds of West Germans are against this), or extending huge credit facilities to West Germany.

But the latter will affect the DM's role as the leading European currency and possibly hold up the European integration prepared for 1992.

Currency convertability in the run-up to establishing a single German currency has yet to be sorted out.

While DM trade for Ostmarks at a rate of one to seven in Berlin at the moment, such a rate would be totally unacceptable to East Germans, who would see their savings and pension claims collapse.

Promised

On the other hand, the one-to-one rate that has been promised by some politicians, could lead to serious inflation, as a result of the 12% (DM50 million) increase in the money supply.

Even a five-to-one exchange would add 2% to total money stock without any increase in output of goods and services.

So despite the potential for Western capital, the outcome of economic integration will be unclear.

Although the East German left around New Forum have not made the impact that was hoped for, openings will continue to exist for the defence of the positive aspects of East Germany's centrally planned economy: its welfare, social security and health systems, along with the high levels of resources devoted to education and training.



Euphoria when the Wall comes down; is the cold dawn here now?

Students

National Union of Students

Can the hurricane dislodge the Twigg off the old tree?

NUS chose to prioritise the anti-loans and anti-Poll Tax campaigns this year.

And they were correct to do so.

But it is unfortunate — even disastrous — that these campaigns have not been waged with a real commitment to mass action.

Because of this, the potential of the new radicalisation within the student movement, a radicalisation born as a response to the general Tory attacks, has not been realised.

The NUS anti-Poll Tax campaign has completely ignored the non- implementation and non-payment policy, and has produced leaflets of the pro-payment Poll Tax Forum.

With an anti-loans campaign which threatened to get out of hand, NUS has continually sought to put the brakes on.

NUS refused at first to call a national demonstration. Under pressure, it eventually called one in Glasgow, before calling one in London.

By LOUISE HOLLOWAY

Considering how little publicity was available, the turnouts on both were very good.

On March 12th/13th we saw a national shut-down, which inspired some very successful occupations. At last NUS had called for mass action!

However, less than two weeks notice was given, so there was no chance to organise any joint action with education trade unions.

There would have been particularly great potential to do this in the Further Education (FE) sector, where students could have approached NATFHE, which is already in dispute.

Joint action had been very successfully tried on January 30th, when students and education staff took joint strike action in support of the ambulance workers.

It is to the credit of student union activists up and down the country that the loans campaign has mobilised thousands of students; the lack of a strong national lead from NUS may now demoralise many of these local and area activists.

We need a new leadership to revitalise NUS: a leadership committed to mass action.

Alas, the choice delegates at NUS Conference face in the leadership elections is a poor one, confined essentially to various individuals who are good at talking left at election times but have yet to live up to the promise of their rhetoric.

The NOLS candidate is S. Twigg (a twig off the old tree); a member of the now defunct DL, longstanding bureaucratic inhibitors of action from their leadership bunker.

He argued fiercely against a first term demo and non-payment of the Poll Tax.

But Twigg's opponent is far to his *right*!

A "Zionist Independent" (?), he has suggested students fight the loans scheme with Valentine Cards and Fun Runs.

In his hands, NUS would be reduced to a joke union — a disaster of the highest proportion.

The National Organisation of Labour Students (NOLS) does not represent the labour movement or the working class in the way the Labour Party does.

Therefore, in my opinion, we should vote for the left (first preference); then transfer to the Greens (second); and then transfer to NOLS.

At the last Conference, the hard left had 52% of the vote, and yet the SLD got elected. Unity on the left is vital if we are to salvage an NUS which is in a condition to fight for students' rights.

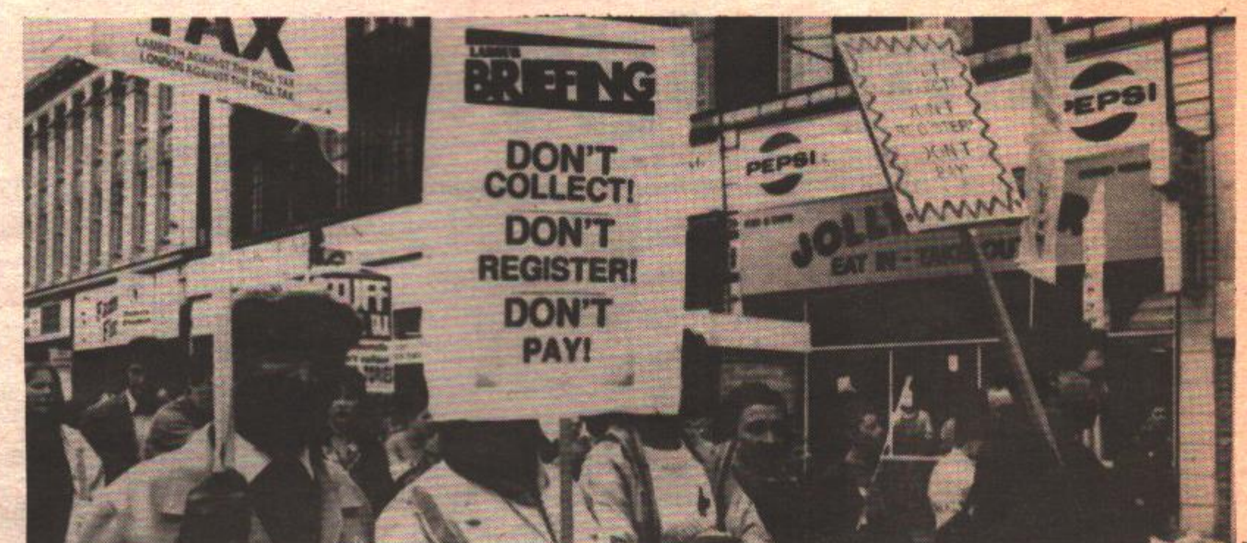


PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood

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

Embryo Bill

For a woman's right to choose?

Where is the student movement's response to the Embryo Bill?

You would have thought students would be inspired by the attacks on women's reproductive rights contained in the Embryo Bill and associated amendments.

But the student reaction has been fairly disappointing so far, particularly when compared to the massive student mobilisations around the Alton Bill and Section 28 only two years ago.

The arguments which have proved so divisive in the campaigns at a national and local level have all been heard in the colleges, with the added ferocity characteristic of the close and manic atmosphere in the student movement.

Some of the groups which have been set up have been established on a very narrow basis.

Some are aimed only at defending women's abortion rights, to the exclusion of all the other issues raised, such as the access of lesbians and single women to donor insemination and infertility treatments.

This has often led to groups being based almost completely on sections of the revolutionary left — other women, particularly lesbians, having been driven away by their refusal to defend all women's rights from attack.

This attitude also ignores the complex and wide-ranging nature of the assault this time around.

Some colleges have not yet got beyond the arguing stage.

The more successful groups, which have organised college meetings, put policies through unions and mobilised for the Week of Action, have been established on the basis of all the current attacks on women's ability to control our bodies.

This includes fighting attempts to reduce the abortion time limit *and* proposals to restrict access to DI and infertility treatments.

By Rebecca Flemming
Women for Socialism

Valuable alliances have been made between women's groups and lesbian and gay groups, and many women have become involved.

The issue also seems to have been submerged under all the other battles students are presently waging, against loans and the Poll Tax.

It has sometimes been neglected in favour of the NUS women's campaign's priorities, especially pornography.

The debates on women's reproductive rights at NUS Women's and NUS National Conferences are opportunities to turn this situation around, which is essential.

The proposals to reduce abortion time limits and introduce discriminatory restrictions on access to DI and infertility treatments will have real effects on all women's lives, whether students or not.

They deny women control over our own bodies and lives and will encourage further discrimination and prejudice by labelling some groups of women — lesbians and single women — as "unfit" to be mothers.

The Tory agenda of reinforcing the nuclear family which began with Section 28 continues today.

Nor should campaigning on these issues be counterposed in any way to all the other work that needs to be done. A defeat for the right on these issues will serve only to further weaken them on other fronts as well.

Questions

NUS should come out of these Conferences with clear policy on these questions.

It must adopt a clear commitment to working with both the Campaign for Access to Donor Insemination (CADI) and the Stop the Amendment Campaign (STAC) towards the week of action in May.

Most importantly, NUS must commit itself to the national demonstration on a woman's right to choose in June.

Activists should be going back to their colleges to build groups to defend *all* women's rights and unions should be getting involved in local activity at all levels.

The student movement has a crucial role to play in the ongoing struggle for women's reproductive freedom. It must not shirk it!

Students' finances

Students pay the price!

The twin spectres of Poll Tax and Loans now loom large over the student movement.

These are two of the biggest threats to befall us for many years.

That is why it is so important to defeat Zionist Independent Cosmo for the NUS President.

He could single handedly turn NUS into an apolitical, faceless, and, most importantly, powerless body even before the government launches its plans for voluntary membership.

Laying down and pretending not to be there is hardly going to stop the next steamroller the Tories try to drive over us.

However, the failure to defeat the systematic attack on students can be traced back to the DL-NOLS decision to treat every cut or change as a single issue campaign.

Conference agreed on a combined campaign for grants, benefits, and improved housing (to which could have been added a fight against the Poll Tax).

That the NUS leadership cynically and undemocratically ignored this decision is a mistake that the student movement has paid for heavily.

By IAN McLARTY

The arguments against loans have been well rehearsed by students but there is, finally, some useful data in the recently published *Opportunity Lost* report commissioned by NUS.

(Whether the "lost opportunity" is the government's attack or NUS's failure to fight it is a matter of conjecture.)

The class nature of the loans scheme is clearly exposed in the Report.

Only 13% of people in "Social Class IV" intending to enter Higher Education (HE) said they would not be affected by loans being introduced.

However, 86.3% of "Social Classes I and II" felt they would not be affected.

As for other under-represented groups, 74% of women in "Social Class IV" stated that loans would discourage them from going into HE.

Mature students were less likely to go to college than 16-18 year olds if a loans scheme was introduced, despite Tory claims of trying to increase the numbers from this group.

Perhaps the most worrying figure is that only 4% of potential black students said they would definitely go on to HE if they had to finance themselves — compared with 13% of potential white students.

The failure of the Executive to lead a campaign is clear in the light of these statistics.

Failed

They have particularly failed to encourage any links with college workers — at a time when many students are making just such links over the question of the Poll Tax.

Student militancy over the Poll Tax was shown last Conference when attempts by NOLS to throw out non-payment led to a position of non-payment *and* non-implementation being passed.

Given the timidity of the NUS leadership, it is difficult to see loans being defeated.

However, the Tories are on the ropes over the Poll Tax, and Labour (in spite of its leadership) is romping in the front of the Mid Staffordshire race.

Now is quite clearly the time to go for further action: not just against Thatcher's flagship, not just against the Tories' designs on education; but against the Tories' position in government.

Party Democracy

Kinnock's hidden agenda

Many on the left welcomed the reforms of the late 70s and early 80s.

Gains included mandatory reselection, and the election of the Leader and Deputy Leader by Conference.

All those who supported those advances should be alarmed by the appearance of the NEC's consultative document *Future of Labour Party Conference.*

By Angela Lockwood CLPD

Activists need to unravel from amongst these proposals Walworth Road's hidden agenda. Behind the camouflage of "reform and progress" the proposed changes are designed to destroy the powers of Conference and to stage-manage its procedures.

The leadership seems to be blaming Labour's failure at the last two General Elections on the advances made by the left, especially in between '79-'81.

This is no more than a smoke screen. Socialist policies which could find favour with working class voters are being jettisoned in the false belief that concessions to Thatcherism will make Labour electable.

The present surge in Labour's popularity has nothing to do with the leadership's constitutional changes, but is a reflection of the Government's poor record.

The leadership seems to have convinced itself that the further the Party is distanced from accountability and from its own active rank and file, the more favour it will curry with the electorate.

The hidden agenda coming from Walworth Road suggests that they are looking for a depoliticisation of local party organisation.

They want non-active members who identify broadly with Labour's aims but who have no political involvement.

The political thinking of Walworth Road sees more future in creating a base of shifting — if vaguely united — opinion than in maintaining a bedrock of active involvement.

The latest attempt to create a two-tier structure of powerful leaders resting on a layer of compliant supporters will be a process the leadership will want to see echoed in the unions.

The whittling away at the block vote will reduce the trade union membership to a supporters' club of the trade union and Labour hierarchy.

There seems to be some wishful thinking amongst the leadership that if we reduce our organisation to a media roadshow the press will cease hostilities and promote our cause.

The NEC's document also presses the case for decisions through individual ballots.

The notion of giving one member-one vote is no doubt superficially attractive, but from where would we get our information for debate? The end result would not be ordinary ward members deciding policy, but rather the centralisation of power at the top.

Local members would be invited to rubber stamp policy moves, and would be hard-pressed to express real dissent

One of the traditions built up in the local branch or GC is that of debate and compromise. How can informed and democratic decisions be reached through a system of postal representation?

At a time when Eastern Europeans are bringing their need of democratic debate into the open, the so-called moderates in the Labour Party are moving in the opposite direction.



Kinnock and Yorks NUM President Jack Taylor at Yorks Miners' Gala in 1987

NEC stitch-up!

The NEC's consultation process on "The Future of Labour Party Conference" is rapidly descending into farce.

Even before the formal deadline for CLPs and affiliated organisations to make their views known, the NEC has come forward with proposed rule changes.

CLPD has drawn up a model resolution for Greater London Labour Party Conference (see below).

Briefing readers are urged to put the resolution forward, whether to send to GLLP Conference or elsewhere.

By Bryn Griffiths Tottenham CLP

CLPD also reiterate their demand that there should be recorded votes at the NEC so representatives can be held accountable by the bodies that elected them.

In recent years there has been no recorded vote system and all voting records have only been produced thanks to the beady eyes of the left wingers on the Committee!

Model Resolution

This Annual Meeting noting:

a) That the closing date for submissions on the NEC's consultative document "The future of the Labour Party Conference" was April 5th 1990.

b) That the General Secretary assured Party members that the NEC would make its own recommendations only in the light of the responses to the document from CLPs and affiliated organisations; deplores the NEC's decision, more than a month before the closing date, to propose rule changes in the form of constitutional amendments for the election of the Constituency Section of the NEC. This makes a mockery of its expressed intention to seek to democratise Party procedures.

Annual Meeting takes the view that, should the NEC's proposals be accepted by 1990 Annual Conference, it is imperative that steps be taken that all members of the Greater London Labour Party are given full information about the voting record of all NEC members for whom constituent bodies of the GLLP are being asked to vote. Without knowledge of the voting record it is impossible to make an informed judgement about NEC members standing for re-election.

Annual Meeting therefore urges the NEC to introduce the practice of recording all NEC votes and instructs the Regional Executive to ensure that details of these votes reach all members of London CLPs and affiliated organisations.

Labour Party Socialists Model Resolution for Annual Conference

This Annual Conference notes the major changes which have taken place in European politics since the last Annual Conference of the Party. The political revolutions in Eastern Europe and the prospect of democratisation in the Soviet Union have fundamentally altered the political context in which the next General Election will take place, and the policies which an incoming Labour Government would have to introduce, especially with reference to defence and disarmament, economic policy and relations with the EC.

In the light of these fundamental changes, the most crucial for 40 years in international affairs, Conference recognises that the decisions made by the 1989 Annual Conference in respect of the Policy Review now need major revision. Accordingly Conference instructs the NEC to mount a consultation exercise with all affiliated organisations and CLPs and to organise a Policy Conference, with full powers in relation to policy-making, in the Spring of 1991, in order that the Party can fight the next General Election on forward-looking policies which reflect the reality of the new Europe and the world.

Labour Party Socialists

A left agenda for the 90s

The Labour left is regrouping under the auspices of the Labour Party Socialists, the Labour Party wing of the Socialist Movement.

A conference in Sheffield on 19th/20th May will launch this new movement, which already has more members than any other Labour left organisation.

The conference will be organised around 3 key themes: left Labour policies for the 90s, democratising the Labour Party, and LPS's own structure and campaigning priorities.

Conference will discuss the policies we believe can win the Labour Party the next general election. Recent international developments run through these discussions.

The defence and foreign policy section of the Labour Party's Policy Review remains stuck in the strategy of the Cold War, while the Berlin wall is being destroyed.

The collapse of the Eastern European economies raises the question: *is there an alternative to the market?*

Environmental policy must also be internationalist — how to achieve a cleaner world and redistribute resources fairly.

Similarly, as Europe is increasingly closing its doors to immigrants; the left should be arguing for freedom of movement as a right regardless of borders.

There will be motivated discussions on rights — democratic rights, workers' rights, and regional and national rights within Britain.

The Conference will produce a comprehensive modern, socialist response to the Policy Review.

The debate on democratising the Labour Party arises as a result of the Edmonds proposals, but raises far deeper questions.

By Liz Davies Islington North CLP

We want to be members of a party that involves all members in its decision-making, and holds its representatives accountable at every level.

Thus the leadership must be accountable to Conference, rather than manipulating it.

The trade union leadership should be accountable to and representative of its members.

The key to a strong Party is a membership fully involved in policy making and a leadership that implements those decisions.

Empowering the membership will make them more active and turn both national and local parties into vigorous campaigning bodies.

Abolition of the trade unions block vote at conference is clearly a topic for debate.

However Labour Party socialists believe that the LP has unique links with the TU movement, which give the Party its strength as the political wing of the labour movement.

Thus a series of options on how to democratise the block vote will be presented for discussion.

Key campaigns for LPS must include the Poll Tax, at a time when non-payment will begin to take effect.

Defending women's reproductive rights against the attacks around the Embryology Bill, will also be a priority. Equally important is linking up with industrial struggles and international struggles.

This Conference will set the agenda for the Labour Party left in the 90s. It aims to unite the disparate left organisations in the Labour Party, with all the thousands of left activists who are disillusioned with Kinnock and the Policy Review.

We will be discussing exciting new ideas for a dynamic new organisation.

If you want further information please write to:

PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire, S44 5UD,
or telephone:
01-992-0945.

Labour Party Socialists

Conference

The future of Socialism in the Labour Party

May 19th and 20th

Sheffield Poly, Pond Street

(opposite BR station)

Registration from 10am Saturday

Conference:

11am-5pm Saturday; 10am-2.30pm Sunday

Registration:

Delegates from Organisations: £10 each

Individuals: £6 (waged); £3 (unwaged)

For further details, contact:
LPS, PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UD.

Manchester

Beginning to organise

Fourteen Manchester councillors have defied the "soft left" leadership of the Labour Group by opposing implementation of the Poll Tax and refusing to vote for further cuts.

By Manchester *Briefing* supporters

The rebel group's decision to organise outside the Council Chambers has brought about the formation of Labour Against Cuts and Poll Tax (LACPT).

This new organisation has moved more and more towards establishing itself as a permanent structure, providing a focus for community and labour movement opposition to Council policy.

From a promising inaugural conference on 3rd February (over 100 people attended and 46 different organisations were represented), LACPT has sustained itself through regular open meetings.

At the same time, it has raised its campaigning profile by calling a successful lobby of the Council on 28th February. It has also supported existing anti-Poll Tax initiatives.

So far the new group has successfully worked with and involved other anti-Poll Tax organisations, in particular Council Workers Against the Poll Tax and the Manchester Federation.

One of the most positive aspects of LACPT has been its openness. This healthy organisational approach combined with the advantage of having a direct relationship with Councillors gives LACPT the potential to become a forum for a wide range of political forces.

Most of the Councillors are independent left wingers, guaranteeing LACPT a level of plurality which domination by any one political group would not allow.

Despite its promising beginnings LACPT is still only a small part of the anti-Poll Tax campaign in Manchester. Day-to-day Poll Tax campaigning is carried out by local anti-Poll Tax groups.

There are over 50 of these groups though they vary greatly; some are large (at least in paper membership) and active while others are still embryonic.

The campaigning is still dominated by a fairly basic set of activities (building membership, petitioning, holding public meetings etc), though in some places positive organisation for non-payment is beginning.

Campaigning amongst the Council workforce is less advanced.

However, the establishment of Council Workers Against the Poll Tax (CWAPT) — an initiative of the *SWP* and still largely sustained by their efforts — has done something to redress this imbalance.

Committed to campaigning for union non-implementation of the Poll Tax, CWAPT has played a constructive role in campaigning and in attempting to link up with the wider anti-Poll Tax movement.

Almost all of the local groups are affiliated to the Manchester Poll Tax Federation, the largest and most firmly established anti-Poll Tax organisation in the city.

The *Militant* dominated Federation has done a great deal of useful work and is the most important focus for city-wide opposition to the Poll Tax, as evidenced by the success of the 4th March demonstration it called.

Despite this the Federation does have major weaknesses. Above all, the undemocratic methods used by *Militant* to gain and maintain control have resulted in a rigid structure and the stranglehold of a single political current.

As a result the Federation cannot be the democratic forum needed for working out campaigining strategy. Consequently, much local activity takes place with little relation to the Federation.

Most negatively, much of the official Trade Union and Labour leadership in Manchester have been playing a pernicious role.

The rebel Councillors have already come under severe pressure from the leadership. Where possible they have been removed from positions of responsibility and excluded from Committees.

On the union side, NALGO's Regional Executive recently adopted an incredible policy of calling on the Council to raise the Poll Tax from £425 to £450.

There is obviously massive opposition to the Tax, much has been done by the anti-Poll Tax groups, awareness has been raised and a certain level of organisation achieved, but this organisation is not extensive enough or of the type necessary to guarantee success.

Campaign

Pretending this is not so and that simply "keeping up the good work" is enough will only act as an obstacle to developing the campaign.

To create the type of campaign needed local groups should attempt to involve larger numbers of people in regular activities.

They should work towards establishing a kind of street level organisation suited to building a mass non-payment campaign, for instance, by drawing-up lists of non-payers and building local support networks capable of large mobilisations in the event of warrant sales.

In terms of overall strategy, more attention needs to be given to non-implementation/non-collection.

Elections

The stand taken by the 14 Councillors and the subsequent development of LACPT gives a new importance to the 3rd May Council elections.

We should use these elections to take the battle into the Council Chambers and the Party into the community as well as using them to develop the relationship between the whole of the anti-Poll Tax movement and the rebel group.

Wales

Witch-hunts and non-payment

A witch hunt of one of Wales' leading anti-Poll Tax campaigners now seems inevitable.

By George Smiley Castle Anti-Poll Tax Union (Swansea)

Cath Harding, Chair of the Wales Federation of APTUs, is to be charged with "bringing the Party into disrepute".

The move by leaders of the Labour Group comes after Harding was selected as the council candidate for Castle Ward in place of sitting Councillor and present Lord Mayor, Lorna Alderen.

Harding, a supporter of *Militant*, was part of an occupation of Swansea City Council Chamber and leading speaker at the 1,000 strong demo in Cardiff in February.

Meanwhile the ward's other four Councillors have become the first in Wales to pledge not to pay.

There is enormous depth of opposition to the Tax in Wales — where 42% of households live on less than £4000 per year.

Combined with the recent rent rise and the already massively high level of deprivation, the Poll Tax will bring an untold level of poverty, homelessness and personal suffering.

Despite this, the campaign is still at a very early stage of development.

Leading the way in establishing non-payment groups in South Wales have been supporters of *Militant*. They have been criticised for their sectarian attitude to groups they do not control. This has gone as far as causing a split in the Cardiff APTU when they lost its leadership.

The chronic lack of bi-lingual publicity by the Wales Federation means they fail to respect the language rights of a significant proportion of its people.

Open

Also busy in setting up non-payment groups has been the Welsh socialist group *Cymru Goch*. They have produced an excellent video "Can't Pay Won't Pay" and seem far more prepared to build on an open and democratic basis.

The efforts of the labour bureaucracy on the other hand, have met with abject failure. Their attempt to build a national Poll Tax conference in Merthyr was attended by only 70 people. It made no decisions and proposed no specific activity — other than to recall itself at a future, unspecified date.



PHOTO: Leesa Herbert

Poll Tax campaigners selling Militant face a witch-hunt...

This state of affairs leaves an urgent and pressing need for a unified democratic All-Wales campaign that is based on non-payment and non-collection.

We need a campaign that does not allow either sectarianism or Labour's inertia to get in the way of building a genuine mass movement.

The primary task in the next months must be to turn all the anger into activity. Holding public meetings — however large — must not become a substitute for building active resistance in the community with labour movement support.

We should combine this with defence of any socialist victimised for their role in opposing the Tories' Tax.

Kinnock's strategy of waiting for a Labour Government to repeal it (within about two years of taking office) is no good to anyone. It is the Labour leadership, not Cath, who is bringing the Party into disrepute.

Around th



Protest in Haringey: Councillor Craig Brewin addresses demonstrato

The campa steps up

The massive mobilisations of the last few weeks have firmly put the anti-Poll Tax campaign on the map and deepened the crisis of the Government.

By our Poll Tax correspondent

No amount of press hysteria and "red baiting" can detract from the impact of the campaign which has proved its ability to involve hundreds of thousands of ordinary people. Kinnock's rantings have only served to make people angrier at Labour's capitulation to the hated tax.

The vast majority of the lobbies and demonstrations have been peaceful, and the responsibility for any violence lies firstly with the Tory government for introducing the tax and secondly with local authorities who attempted to exclude demonstrators from council chambers and allowed the police to run amok among protesters.

In **HARINGEY** the council's first attempt to set a Poll Tax was halted for two hours by the chanting of protesters, then when left councillors refused to vote for the tax the meeting was abandoned. As the peaceful lobby was dispersing the police sent in snatch squads and arrested 13 local people. On Friday 9th March a Poll Tax of £572 was finally set after the protest resignation of four left councillors. The remaining councillors who voted against now face expulsion from the Labour Group.

In **HACKNEY** a massive demonstration of over 3,000 people came up against "Fortress Hackney" — the Town Hall had been boarded-up and a private security firm had been called in. As frustration built up the police moved in, driving protesters into the main road. Behind closed doors the council set a Poll Tax of £499.

CAMDEN council set a Poll Tax of £534 to the background of a lively, 500-strong lobby which had been excluded from the council chamber. Euston Road was occupied for ten minutes in a short.

Hull

The fight steps up

By Paul Montero Convenor, Humberside Area NUS (personal capacity)

The fight against the Poll Tax in Hull gained increased momentum after an impressive rally organised by the Hull and District Anti-Poll Tax Federation was held in the city centre on March 1st.

About 400 people turned up to the lunchtime rally where speaker after speaker called for mass non-payment and non-implementation by the Labour-controlled Hull City Council.

A short march followed to Guild Hall where the Council was about to meet in full session. Despite the appalling weather, the crowd let the City Council know what it thought of its connivance with the Poll Tax, even though the rate was not actually being set that afternoon. The figure has now been confirmed at just over £300.

The Federation's campaign was given a significant boost when three City Councillors currently wavering on mass non-payment addressed the demonstrations.

Although the Federation is dominated by *Militant* supporters, it has generally adopted a non-sectarian approach to outside involvement. The fact that the Federation's petition calling for mass non-payment and non-implementation has now been signed by over 25,000 people clearly shows that support for it has a broad and deep base in the communities across Hull.

e country



PHOTOS: Glyn Rowlands

s [left]; and the local "Police Against the Poll Tax Group [right] we think...

aign

sharp shock tactic and there were no arrests. On the supposed threat of violence councillor Angie Birtill, who voted against levying the tax, told the crowd that she felt safer outside on the lobby than she did in the council chamber — a reference to the Labour Group's continuing witch-hunt against the left.

In **ISLINGTON** the lobby was so large it spilled out onto the main road. There were minor scuffles with the police as the council set a Poll Tax of £499, but reports of a "riot" were greatly exaggerated by the media. Cashiers in Neighbourhood Offices have voted overwhelmingly not to collect the Poll Tax until their claim for 70 extra staff has been met in full — the council has offered 15 temporary staff!

In **BRISTOL**, thousands rallied to show their opposition to the Labour Council's implementation of the tax. Police riot squads and horses were used to intimidate the crowd, forcing the demonstration away from the town hall. The noise of the council's tannoy, relaying the council meeting, made it impossible for the lobby organisers to steward the demonstration. As protesters took over the city centre the council set a Poll Tax of £490. Two left councillors have resigned, and one may stand as an anti-Poll Tax candidate in the forthcoming local elections.

Lobbies

In the rest of the **SOUTH WEST** large lobbies were organised in Stroud, Bath and Western-Super-Mare where the council chamber was successfully occupied and the meeting halted.

In **OXFORD** no mass lobby was called but a public meeting was held which attracted hundreds of people. Unfortunately, the meeting was completely dominated by supporters of *Militant* who used the event to win support for their paper. On Saturday 24th March the Oxford Labour Party has called an anti-Poll Tax demonstration, but is excluding non-payment speakers from the platform.

READING and **SWINDON** also saw large demonstrations and in Swindon an effigy of Thatcher was burnt. The Swindon Labour council leader seemed more concerned with rubbishing the protesters than the Tory tax. There will be a Thames Valley anti-Poll Tax conference on Saturday 24th March.

In **BIRMINGHAM** 500 protesters lobbied the council as it set a Poll Tax of £406 based on a 19% growth budget. Forty protesters attempted to get inside the civic centre but were repulsed by Tory councillors throwing punches at anything in their way. Birmingham City Council has banned anyone advocating non-payment from holding meetings in council premises, although council leader Dick Knowles has been condemned by the District Labour Party for his clumsy denial of this policy.

Policy

The policy on lettings adopted by Birmingham City Council is not an isolated example and many anti-Poll Tax campaigns have reported increasing difficulty in booking premises for meetings. In Bristol, Badger Line buses attempted to un-book the 30 coaches that had been booked for the national demonstration, but under pressure from the TGWU branch and the anti-Poll Tax campaign have put the coaches back on.

In **SCOTLAND**, Lothian Regional Council has started freezing bank accounts and deducting money from non-payer's wages, although for every five accounts they try to freeze they are successful with only one. However Strathclyde Regional Council, the largest in Europe, has been paralysed and rather than take any action against non-payers has sent out a further warning letter. Activity in Scotland is focusing on building the Glasgow demonstration on March 31st and "harassing" sheriff officers to stop poindings.

Finally, in **PARLIAMENT** the Labour Whips have been running round like headless chickens trying to whip the non-payment MPs into line.

Boost

The stand taken by Tony Benn and the other MPs has provided a big boost to the non-payment campaign. Dick Douglas should be congratulated on his opposition to the tax, but perhaps it is Kinnock who should be resigning, not the non-payers.

Vigil against the Tax

A week of warning

Four London women are organising a 24 hour-a-day vigil outside the Houses of Parliament in the week before the Poll Tax is implemented (26th-31st March). *BRIEFING* spoke to AILEEN RYDER to ask why the vigil was taking place.

***Briefing*: "Why are you organising this vigil?"**

Aileen: "To show the strength of feeling of ordinary people in the most dramatic way possible — and to show our frustration at the way the Government is ignoring the protests that are taking place".

***Briefing*: "How long have you been involved in the anti-Poll Tax campaign?"**

Aileen: "I have been involved in the Lewisham Anti-Poll Tax Union for 18 months, mainly through my local group in Ladywell. One other woman is involved in Lewisham and the other two in Greenwich Against the Poll Tax".

People

***Briefing*: "What are you going to do outside Parliament?"**

Aileen: "Get publicity for the campaign by petitioning and getting people from all over the country to sign up in support.

We're going to speak to MPs and go into the House of Commons whenever possible. By camping out 24 hours-a-day, we are acting as a symbol of those who will be made homeless by not being able to pay the Poll Tax."

***Briefing*: "What can other people do to support you?"**

Aileen: "Join us, for anything from an hour to a whole day or night. Bring food and encouragement; tell other people to bring messages of support; we will be joining the march on the 31st to show our support for the mass resistance campaign."

South London

We are revolting!

Mass action by Poll Tax protesters in Lewisham and Southwark stopped Council Poll Tax setting meetings.

By DAN CARTER

In SOUTHWARK, 500 protesters — the largest mobilisation in the Borough so far — forced the Council to call off its meeting.

Two days later when it met to set a Tax, the decision was only passed by four votes.

In **LEWISHAM**, 100 protesters occupied the Council Chamber and forced the Councillors to set a Tax behind police lines in a private meeting.

Cllr Ron Stockbridge led a walkout by six Councillors protesting at the undemocratic nature of the meeting.

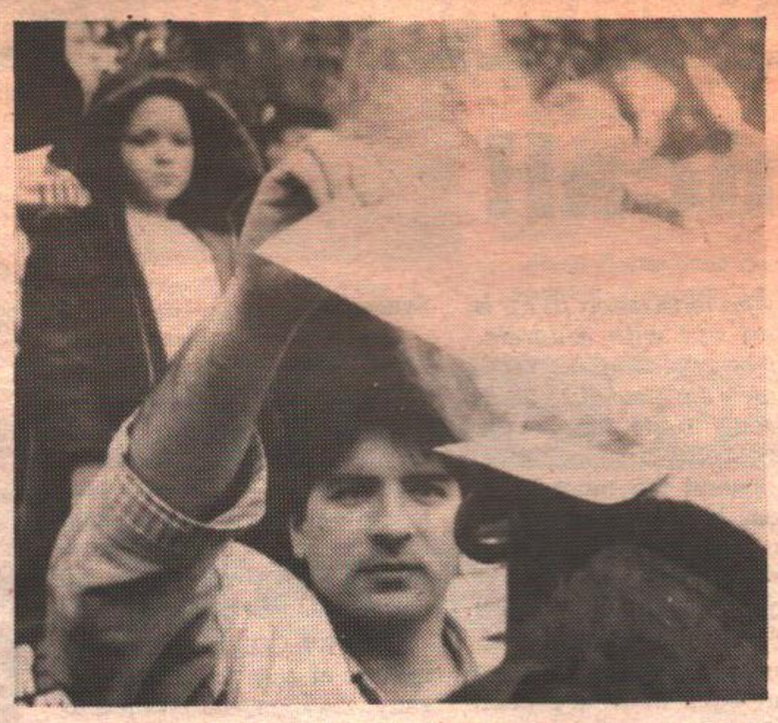
In both Boroughs, the hard work carried out by the local campaigns has finally paid off with effective actions carried out by local people disgusted at Labour Councils doing the Tories' dirty work for them.

The South London Trade Union Conference is now producing a second bulletin directed at Town Hall workers, stressing that the campaign can only be won by those arguing that non-collection and non-implementation is as important as the mass non-payment campaigns.

With weekly street stalls, a further round of public meetings, and the production of non-payment leaflets, the South East London Boroughs are ensuring the maximum support for the demonstration on 31st March and the ongoing campaign that can defeat the Tax in London.

LONDON BOROUGH OF LEWISHAM

Lambeth





Protest in Lambeth: on the left, Councillor Steve French [PHOTO: Nick Hazlewood]; on the right, Council Leader Joan Twelves.

All out for March 29th!

Lambeth will set its Poll Tax on the evening of Thursday 29th March.

By Cllr Steve French

Only one member of Labour Group was tempted by Joan Twelves' suggestion of an afternoon meeting!

Lambeth Against the Poll Tax has called a lobby at 6pm and has issued the following statement:

"LAPT calls on the people of Lambeth to turn up in their thousands for a peaceful mass protest against the Poll Tax. We reject the media scare campaign over organised violence which is trying to divert attention from the real issues."

The lobby will be addressed by local campaigners, trade unionists, and the "28" non-paying MPs will be invited. This is likely to be the last major Poll Tax setting meeting, so a massive turn out is vital. Bring your banners!

The Council "leadership" is now deeply divided: the right want more cuts and Twelves is prepared to set the highest level of Poll Tax yet.

We say don't do either. No Poll Tax! No cuts!

Lambeth Against the Poll Tax Public Meeting

Thursday 22nd March, 7.30pm
Lambeth Town Hall

Speakers
Tommy Sheridan, Paul Foot, Steve French.

The Women's Page

Embryo Bill Debate

A contradictory Bill

We publish the article below by Valerie Coultas as a welcome contribution to the debate on the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Bill. We encourage other readers to send in their views and join this wide-ranging debate!

There is a lot of confusion on the left about the nature of the Embryo Bill.

This is not surprising as this is one of the first pieces of government legislation dealing with the New Reproductive Technologies and donor insemination.

Briefing has, up until now, failed to draw out the contradictory nature of the legisation. All the articles have characterised the Bill (rather than the amendments) as a uniformly reactionary attack on women's rights.

The central issue is embryo experimentation and research.

The far right are against the entire Bill, not because it is uniformly reactionary (!), but because if passed (as amended in the Lords) it would allow scientists to continue to experiment on the human embryo, developing research into contraception, genetic disease, continuing to prevent miscarriages and improve IVF treatment.

All this is anathema to the far right because they see the embryo as a human being and wish to stop all forms of experimentation, even though they have been forced to concede that IVF treatment should continue.

A 14 day limit was set on experimentation in Clause 11 of the Bill in the House of Lords. This is an arbitrary limit with little scientific basis and it suggests that the foetus should have a different status than other forms of human tissue.

This potentially gives some ground to the anti-abortionists and we would argue that there should be no difference in status.

Reality

In reality, however, no scientist is experimenting later than 14 days and in the vote on this matter (Clause 11) socialists must vote for research to continue, even if we think the limit is an arbitrary one and would like to see this Clause amended.

A lot of the coverage in *Briefing* has focused (to the exclusion of the central issue being discussed by the world at large, embryo research and experimentation) on access to IVF treatment and DI and the Statutory Licensing Authority proposed in the Bill.

First, we are not against a Licensing Authority *per se* because infertile women and women wishing to have children through DI do need protection as consumers and there is a lot of potential for commercial exploitation of these new techniques.

Second, as the speaker from CADI at the 8th March rally stressed, the Bill itself is not explicitly discriminatory to single women or lesbians.

Lady Saltoun's amendments, were clearly discriminatory, specifying that unmarried women, single women and lesbians had no right to IVF treatment or DI.

Similar

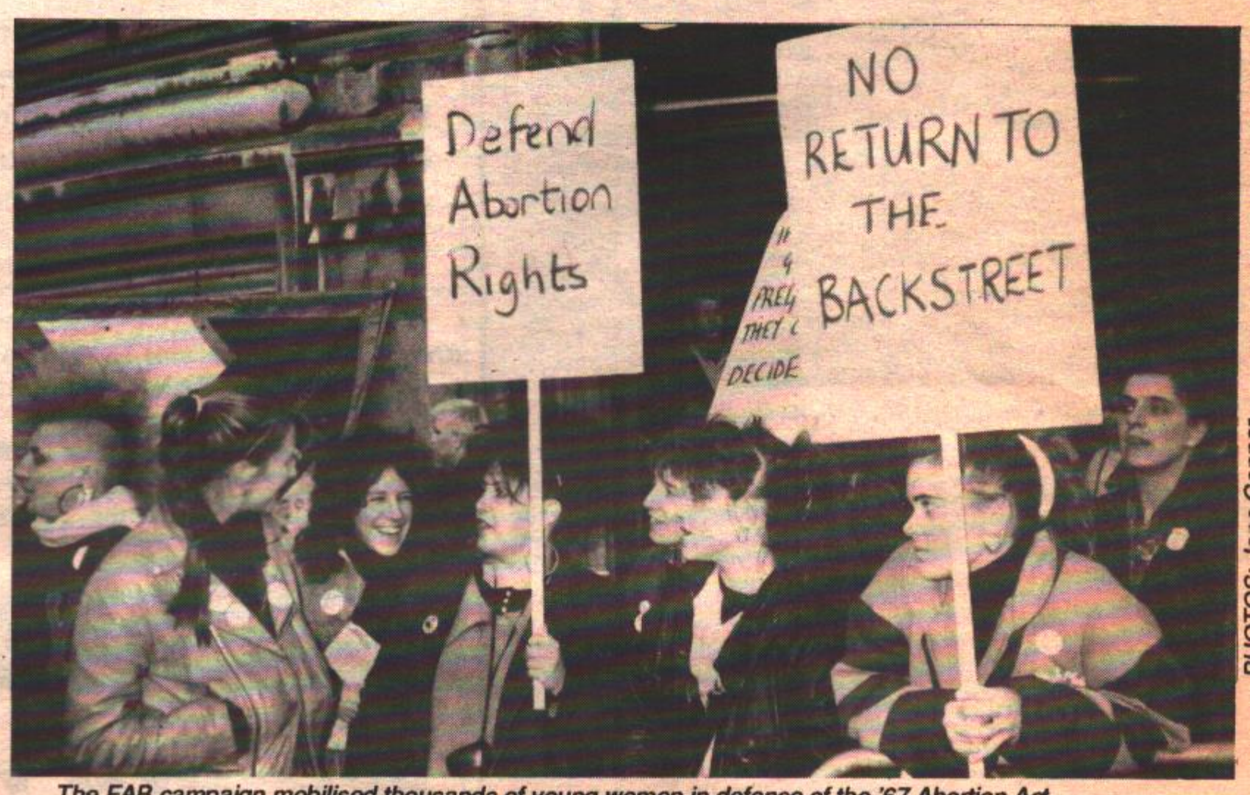
If the House of Commons votes down similar amendments it is less likely that the Licensing Authority will have discriminatory terms of reference.

The Voluntary Licensing Authority that exists at the moment does not exclude any groups of women. It is the doctors that discriminate, as with abortion, and this means that access for all women will be an ongoing struggle even if the law excludes discrimination.

Panic

But we should not spread panic about the Bill when it does not discriminate. Nor should we expect defeat when the evidence suggests that a majority of Labour MP's are opposed to the "sexual fundamentalists" and MP's in other parties, who are not directly organised by the far right, have not yet made up their minds.

CADI is therefore correct to focus its campaigning on the amendments and point out that these attack lesbians, single women and so the rights of women in general. If the Winterton/Greenaway amendments are passed then the Code of Practice will be discriminatory.



The FAB campaign mobilised thousands of young women in defence of the '67 Abortion Act

Briefing coverage has failed to place this Bill in context and look at it alongside other Bills, such as the one to outlaw rape in marriage and Tory initiatives such as tax relief for nurseries.

There has been no real debate on the overall policy of the ruling class in relation to women. Ruling class policy is not as coherent as some of our articles have suggested. It is influenced by several different economic and social objectives — some of which are contradictory.

There is no doubt about the Tories' value system (and some policy initiatives like Clause 28): defending the family and the individual against the idea of society.

But we need to make a more careful distinction between Tory ideology and every aspect of Tory policy. The *Briefing Women's* page should debate these questions.

Publicity

It would also be good if *Briefing* could give publicity to the views of the National Abortion Campaign, an organisation with some expertise on this question, which has not rushed to characterise the Bill as reactionary.

The debate on the Bill should of course continue because a critical stance needs to be adopted. There is a lot of pressure on women to have children in our society and in the debate on IVF and DI socialists must stress that motherhood is not the only way in which women can have fulfilling lives.

But to argue the Bill is the main plank of the reactionaries, when it is clear that it is the amendments that are, is to fall into the trap of being to the left of the left just for the sake of it.

It reflects a failure to listen to those with more knowledge about the scientifc and medical benefits of embryo research.

Finally, if the Bill is so clearly reactionary why is *Briefing* not launching a campaign against it as the RCP suggests we should?

Human Embryo

Getting technical!

The fundamentalist right has made TV appearances recently on *Wogan* and *Right to Reply* to argue their case against any research on the human embryo.

By GILL LEE

In doing so they have been confronted by a vociferous scientific lobby which defends research into the human embryo.
Here we look at some of the scientific arguments for embryo research as they have appeared in the science press:

***Nature*, an international weekly journal of science editorialised on the human embryology bill in its February 15th edition.**

According to *Nature* many in the scientific establishment are relieved that a bill is about to hit the statute books and so bring to an end a period in which research has been regulated by voluntary compliance to regulations drawn up by the Medical Research Council and the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists.

While there is little push at present for research which would go beyond the 14-day limit for research put forward in the bill, *Nature* notes problems with this limit.

It describes the 14-day limit as "arbitrary" and says that the time will come when valuable research may have been prevented by limiting research to the stage before the "primitive streak" appears.

The editorial also draws attention to the dangers a 14-day limit poses for abortion rights:

"If embryos are protected after 14 days, why should it be permissible to abort foetuses after 28 weeks of gestation?... the 14-day limit is a dangerous hostage given to fortune."

The Royal Society has put out a leaflet asking people to write to their MPs arguing for research to be allowed. It argues for research as follows:

Much embryological research, including that related to *in vitro fertilization (IVF), is carried out with animals. However, one cannot extrapolate safely the results of studies in animals to the human context.*

All except the most trivial changes in procedure will require research on human embryological material. It would be irresponsible and clinically unacceptable to replace in the womb fertilized human eggs that have been subjected to novel procedures or tests. Only as a result of research can new procedures be declared safe.

Medical research involving early human conceptuses

Medical treatment of infertility and disorders of development can expect to benefit from research at each stage of human development as follows:

Day 1: Fertilized egg. Improvement of IVF techniques and in the survival and growth of fertilized eggs. More information on the origin of genetic (chromosomal) abnormalities (eg. Down's Syndrome).

Days 3-6: 4 cell to blastocyst (4-120 cells). Improved methods of checking on the success of IVF techniques. Development of methods for detecting genetic abnormalities before the conceptus begins to attach itself to the womb, to try to ensure that only those without such abnormalities are transferred to the mother.

Days 1-9: Cell culture. A small number of cells taken from the early conceptus will continue to divide, but will not develop as an organized mass of cells. Human cell cultures are widely used in medical research and those from early conceptuses can be used to study the genetic constitution and growth requirements of embryonic cells and therby improve the conditions for IVF techniques and the treatment of infertility.

Similiarities of these cells with certain cancer cells make it likely that improved recognition and treatment of cancer will result.

Days 7-14 (approx): Implantation in the womb. Better understanding of the interactions between the conceptus and the womb during implantation should reduce the failure rate at this crucial period in both natural and IVF pregnancies.



SPUC lobby in 1989

Day 15: Appearance of primitive streak. Improved treatment of infertility from fuller knowledge of the nutritional processes at this and subsequent stages; greater understanding of how the precursor cells of the brain and spinal cord develop may disclose causes of spina bifida and anencephaly.

End of third week. Enhanced understanding of how oxygen and nutrients pass from the mother to the conceptus is especially important in improving the survival of conceptuses.

End of fourth week. Improved prevention or treatment of problems in the early development of organs (eg. heart, lungs), for example congenital heart disease.

Thanks to TIM MOHUN for his help in compiling this information.

BOOK REVIEW



PHOTO: Martine Stead

The black cab, as much a part of London as Soho

So long Soho?

***Soho* by Judith Summers, *Bloomsbury Press*, £15.95**

Most of the British left make a visit at least once a year to Collett's bookshop.

A good number of us also make the trip to nearby 28 Dean Street to look at Karl Marx's old lodgings.

Anybody who likes good food can finish off the visit with a trip around Berwick and Brewer Street. After a few pints, and if you can ignore the hideous "sex shops", you can almost imagine yourself in a Mediterranean market.

With a read of a *Briefing* editorial you can imagine a good Mediterranean revolution!

Judith Summers' *Soho* gives nearly all of the information needed to go beyond the surface of the area. Apart from the fascinating historical detail, it describes how commercial pressures have re-organised London's urban space. The simple profit benefits of renting to the sex industry threatened to destroy the quarter in the 60s.

As a student at Westminster College in Peter Street, I can remember the ugly growth of peep-show boutiques, the hassling of female students — even the brothels next to Raymond's Revue Bar.

The Soho Society, attacked initially for being "prudes", successfully organised the local people in opposition to this invasion.

As an insider Judith Summers gives a full account of the community campaign, and the financial pressures that created the situation in the first place.

On the historical side *Soho* informs us that one can still visit Marx's flat (above Leoni's Quo Vadis restaurant). Summers is less strong on another left institution: she manages to list all of the varied establishments of Poland Street without mentioning the all-important Number 9!

By ANDREW COATES

On a plus, by contrast, she does tell us William Blake's birthplace: 2 Broadwick Street (just next to Carnaby Street). A useful map helps you identify sites of interest.

If Soho suffered from the "porn boom" can it escape the effects of its new found popularity? The place seems at the moment to resemble a permanent builder's yard.

The spectre of Covent Garden looms large on its borders: the gentrification of one of London's last redoubts of non-conformity. The "French" is overcrowded with advertising poseurs. The "Coach and Horses" manages to keep them out only at the expense of being filled up with bores of the Jeffry Bernard ilk.

Summers is justifiably proud of having helped save the area from becoming another Piggale where the pimps literally drag you off the street into their tawdry video shows.

But can community politics alone deal with the new pressures of high rent paying media businesses? Educated, though not born, inside Soho's borders, I can only hope that they are able to put up stiff resistance.

VIDEO REVIEW

"We are our own liberators"

***Conference for a Democratic Future*, price £25, from *Deep Focus*, 123 Brook Drive, London SE1. Cheques payable to *Deep Focus*.**

In December 1989 over 400 delegates attended a Conference For a Democratic Future in Johannesburg.

The Conference debated the way forward for the anti-apartheid forces on the eve of De Klerk's reforms.

This conference brought together the main strands of the liberation movement — the Charterists around the ANC and UDF — and the supporters of Black Consciousness around AZAPO.

Negotiations

In their first production, *Deep Focus*, a new group of filmmakers based in Johannesburg, have made a unique one hour video of the conference.

It opens with keynote speeches from the main conference including the recently-released Walter Sisulu of the ANC declaring, *"Our unity today is more important than our differences."*

Jerry Mosala of the *Black Consciousness Movement of Azania* immediately raises the question of negotiations that was set to dominate the conference.



Bishop Tutu — one of the conference's organisers

By Mike Phipps Greenwich & Bexley A-AG

Quoting Malcolm X, he says *"I am not going to sit at your table and watch you eat with nothing on my plate and call myself a diner.*

"The aim of the struggle [...] is to eradicate apartheid... It is a struggle for a democratic anti-racist, anti-sexist, socialist Azania."

The bulk of the floor discussion centres on the OAU Declarations on negotiations, which the UDF wants the Conference to endorse.

There is considerable opposition to this among delegates. One youth speaker declares, *"we have not struggled in order to negotiate, but to seize power."*

This theme is taken up by other speakers who argue that negotiations are a ploy by the regime to split the liberation movements just when they are starting to work together.

In a lively discussion, a white UDF member completely rejects the need for consensus.

This is firmly rejected by a Cape Action League supporter. She argues it is wrong to steamroller delegates into taking a position before their constituent organisations and the people of South Africa have a chance to consider it.

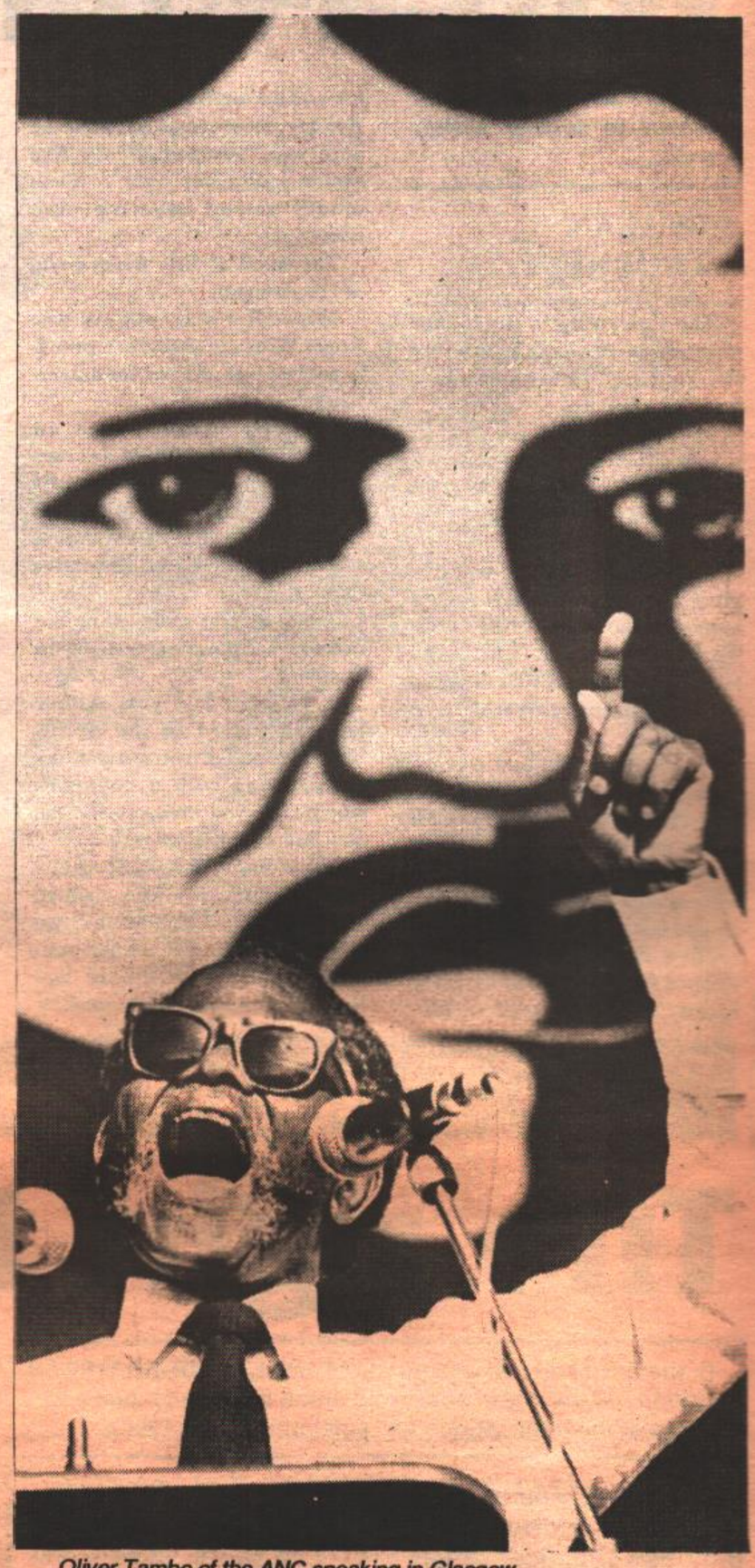
She points out the weaknesses of the Declaration, particularly on proposals for a transitional government.

"Who will elect it?" she asks. *"We the South African people, we are our own liberators!"*

Delegates represent a wide range of national and local groupings in South Africa. Many union speakers also take part in the debate.

Deep Focus have done a real service to those who want to experience the debates of the liberation forces first-hand. The video also captures the very upbeat atmosphere of the Conference.

This Conference showed the breadth of anti-apartheid forces in South Africa. In reflecting this, the video dispels the myth that there is only one political line in the South African revolution.



Oliver Tambo of the ANC speaking in Glasgow

BOOK REVIEW

Frenetic resistance

***The Unseen*, by Nanni Balestrini (translated by Liz Heron), *Verso Press*, £12.95**

***The Unseen* is a lyrical, moving and often brutal depiction of Italy in the mid-1970s.**

This was a time when the Autonomy movement, comprised of young workers, the unemployed and the homeless, bypassed the traditional left to engage in the "politics of refusal".

This was the era of the Red Brigade and widescale state repression. It is a fictional account based on real events and the author, charged with being a member of an armed organisation, escaped imprisonment by skiing to the French border.

Balestrini recaptures that expressive and repressive era when public spaces were taken over and socialised, schools and factories occupied, the streets the scene of violent confrontations with the police, prisons the site of riots, and shops invaded by organised shoplifters.

Punctuation

Using the innovations of Italy's *Gruppo 63*, Balestrini forsakes punctuation and employs a semi-stream of consciousness to construct a political prose poem whose urgency makes it unlike anything ever written.

Surprisingly easy to read, the lack of punctuation adds to the feeling of that era's freneticism.

Balestrini powers the novel by interweaving two narratives — one which explains the events leading to his imprisonment, the other about what happens once he's in prison.

By Woody Haut Hampstead & Highgate CLP

The Unseen is a document of resistance. It describes how the Autonomy movement, by adopting new social patterns and opening itself to the women's movement, attempted to challenge the way institutional life replicates itself at every level.

Inevitably the state would resort to the use of force to crush the movement. As the title suggests, groups that had once functioned openly were soon forced underground, their protests pushed to the margins, behind bars and out of public's sight.

The Unseen is more about action than ideology and Balestrini openly discusses the way in which paranoia, disillusionment and exhaustion affected the movement.

Verso should be congratulated on publishing this important novel. It should take its place alongside a handful of classics that convey what it's like to take part in a movement of collective action.

•Trade Union Briefing

NUM

Witch-hunt against Scargill

They have all been waiting for a chance to destroy Arthur Scargill.

By ALAN THORNETT

The right-wing in the labour movement, the employers and the Thatcher government have been queuing up.

They all hate him for what he represents: uncompromising class struggle trade unionism and the defence of the interests of the working class.

The Miners' Strike was the great battleground which set the scene for the second half of the Thatcher years and the strengthened grip of New Realism on the labour movement in Britain.

Now we are told that it is the likes of Roger Poole who represents the way forward for the trade union movement, and is able to lead us to great victories. Scargill represents a by-gone age and we should forget all he stood for.

Now Robert Maxwell has stepped forward to lead the pack. Maxwell has used the *Daily Mirror* and his multi-millions to run a five day smear campaign which he says was "researched" by five senior journalists over a seven month period covering nine countries.

The smell of dirty tricks could not be stronger.

Maxwell's star witness was Roger Windsor who was reputedly paid a huge retainer for his services.

He only taken on as an employee of the NUM (an unelected member of staff) shortly before the strike and was soon elevated to the top of the unions administration: Chief Executive Officer.

Some several years after the strike he left the country to live in France.

In October last year Arthur Scargill called in the South Yorkshire police to investigate his connections with a company which received contacts for the new Notts area NUM offices.

It was Jim Parker — Scargill's personal driver — who claimed that Scargill had paid off his own mortgage, and that loans had been made to Peter Heathfield and Roger Windsor with money received from Libya.

Parker resigned his NUM job last year and has since co-operated with the *Mirror* "inquiry".

The NUM disputes this in the case of Scargill and Heathfield.

Sums of money owed by them to the NUM were paid off, when the union was faced with sequestration, from a trust fund and subsequently, in Scargill's case, repaid from his own funds.

Peter Heathfield's house is now owned by the National Union.

Windsor, however, has never repaid the £329,000 lent to him when the NUM office moved from London and is presently facing legal proceedings for its recovery.

Whatever the exact circumstances of the loans or their repayment, however, one thing is clear. The motivation for the transactions was not personal gain (and there is no evidence that either Scargill or Heathfield gained anything) but an attempt to stop the sequestrators from seizing the houses at a crucial stage of the strike.

Hundreds of transactions had to be made at that time in an attempt to keep the union functioning. It was Scargill's strength that he was prepared to defy the law if necessary — and those are the kind of measures which are then necessary.

Most of the right wing of the trade union movement have kept silent on the matter — which clearly showed where they stood.

Some, however, were more vocal. Kinnock called for an "independent inquiry". Eric Hammond has denounced Scargill and supported Maxwell as could be expected.

But the most vicious comments came from Kim Howells — who was also an unelected employee of the NUM (in South Wales) and who assumed great prominence and influence during the strike. Like Windsor, he stabbed the Scargill leadership in the back and he helped engineer the end of the strike.

He went into the newpapers to denounce Scargill as guilty as charged: "there will be tears in the valleys but the *Daily Mirror* has done a tremendous service to the NUM".

Scargill is right when he says that what is involved is attempted character assassination.



PHOTO: Wayne Edginton

Scargill: solid leadership during the Miners' Strike.

The issue is not whether the NUM took money from Libya or the Soviet Union or anywhere else to finance the greatest battle against the Thatcher Government. The issue is that is that they all want Scargill and what he represents out of the way.

They don't want him as leader of the NUM or as a Labour MP leading a fight against Kinnock in the Commons. The prospect of a Labour Government makes this all the more urgent in some quarters.

Militants in the trade unions must defend Scargill and the fighting tradition he represents.

Trade Unions and the Law

The right to strike

In the third and last of a series of articles, ROGER WELCH brings his history of anti-trade union laws up to date and looks at the implications for legislation in the 1990s.

The legal mystification of industrial relations not only has practical repercussions for trade union activists in their struggles but has also affected left thinking on what the relationship between TUs and the law *should* be.

For whilst all militants would argue that the current laws should be repealed, they are not able to repudiate directly the argument that trade unions should not be above the law.

This is the argument used by Kinnock rightwards to justify retaining some or all of the existing legal controls.

However, if we unravel the whole process by which giving immunity from liability in the civil law has become giving privileges to act illegally, then we can begin to remind ourselves, and in particular our misleaders, that the immunities were intended to be rights, and indeed rights that at various times in history even sections of the ruling class have conceded trade unionists should possess.

It is then worth examining how trade unions could be given positive rights to take industrial action, and what rights should be included.

The best method was proposed by the Haldane Society in a document called *The Workers' Charter*. This would establish that trade unions and their members have the right ot organise and participate in industrial action, and that the exercise of this right would be a defence in any legal proceedings.

The parties to an industrial dispute should be defined as including any employer, the government and government agencies.

The Case for Positive Trade Union Rights. **Anyone interested in considering the arguments in greater depth can obtain a copy from Roger Welch, Anglia Higher Education College, Victoria Road South, SM1 1LL at a cost of £3 (inc. p&p). Cheques should be made payable to R D Welch.**

This would render irrelevant any new torts discovered by the judges unless it was successfully argued that the rights were being exceeded.

Furthermore, the major torts could be excluded by providing that the exercising of this right would suspend the operation of, rather than break, the contract of employment.

It should, of course, be provided that employers should have no rights of dismissal in the context of industrial disputes.

The biggest practical problem would be picketing. However extensive the legal right, it would be impossible to prevent police-assisted, strike-busting scab operations.

Therefore, it will always be necessary for militants to argue the need for workers defence squads to defend picket lines.

The repeal of the Public Order Act and of those sections of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act which relate to picketing should be demanded.

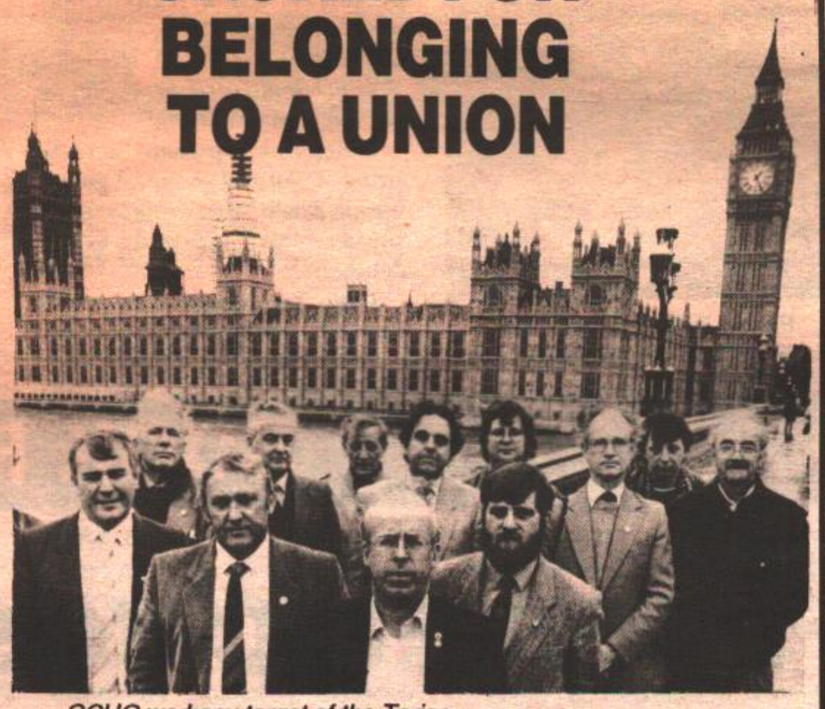
Peaceful picketing should be permitted at any workplace, in any numbers.

There should be an express right to stop vehicles each and every time they enter and/or leave a workplace to permit the pickets to speak to the occupants.

None of the above, amounts to a panacea to prevent state intervention, and there are other matters such as keeping the traditional judiciary out of industrial disputes which must be addressed.

However, the system of immunities has presented its own distinct problems for the labour movement, and there are consequently clear advantages in demanding rights to strike and picket, rather than the restoration of the immunities.

SACKED FOR BELONGING TO A UNION



GCHQ workers: target of the Tories.

AUSTIN ROVER

37 hour sell out

A "breakthrough" and a "step forward".

That is how various trade union leaders, as well as the *Morning Star*, have described the "Agreement in Principle" for a 37 hr week at Rover.

By a Rover worker

The reality is rather different. Rover wanted to introduce a variety of new shifts at Longbridge — 24 hr, 7 day working in some sections, a nine-day fortnight in others. They are seeking to utilise the workforce in any way they wish.

They approached the unions and workforce, who said "no"! The national unions involved said they would support resistance by their members!

The union officials led by Jack Adams of the T&GWU then said to the company that we would look at their proposed shifts in exchange for a shorter working week.

The company immediately offered a phased reduction from 39 to 37 hours as long as it was "self-financing".

This the national negotiating committee agreed to "in principle". The details are to be sorted out locally and then reported back by March 15th in preparation for a national ballot.

This is a further sell-out of Rover workers, coming after their last wages review which gave 4% each year for 2 years.

The present position in the Rover national agreement is that anybody on "continental" 24 hr shifts is on a 37 hour week already.

So the company gets the "continental" and the shift working. In exchange for reducing the total hours worked each week by a further hour, it gets two hours extra production.

Workers at both Longbridge and Swindon have been offered the choice; they can give up 2 hours of their tea breaks, or the tracks and other places of production will be simply speeded up.

As the total time for tea breaks in a week is only 3 hours, the proposed reduction would mean only 10 minutes break in the morning and afternoon! A speed up to fit 39 hours of work would mean working to 105 B.S.I.

Car workers and others have been told for years that 100 B.S.I is a "scientifically" calculated comfortable working arrangement. They have also been told that the breaks they need have been "scientifically" worked out.

Yet now the company and union leaders are saying this should be broken.

Most production workers feel that they would rather stay as they are than be speeded up in order to attain a 37 hr week.

This deal is a "breakthrough" for the company. No wonder they made the offer outside of a wage review which isn't due until November.

Ambulance Dispute

Returning workers face new threat

Roger Poole is hailing the ambulance workers return to work as a big success.

But now a clearer picture is emerging of a new wave of management attacks on the ambulance workers conditions.

Even while the ballot on the settlement was taking place, managers in London attempted to impose new rotas for qualified personnel, including some weekend and night work.

Many convenors saw this as a cynical effort by management to delay a return to work and so avoid handing out £850 backpay to each worker, which was conditional on an orderly re-start.

Hard talks have forced management to withdraw these rotas for the time being. But there remains a host of unsolved issues, including backpay, leave and pensions, on which there is nothing in the national deal.

With the vote to return, the national officials have vanished, leaving a long list of issues to be sorted locally.

Local stewards feel left high and dry by Poole's threadbare deal, and betrayed by the way he sold it over their heads to more passive sections of the membership.

Poole was quick to dub the four to one vote "overwhelming". But given the absence of any alternative and the six-month duration of the dispute, it is significant that 20% of workers were still demanding the full claim.

By Mike Phipps, Woolwich CLP

Winning the full claim would have needed the kind of escalation begun by Liverpool last month.

It would have needed solidarity strike action in the NHS and across the public sector — action workers were ready to offer.

It was precisely this kind of action that the union and TUC were keen to avoid. Poole was told to get the best deal he could and sell it hard.

The Labour leaders joined Poole — presenting his cave-in as a great achievement. Having milked the dispute to improve their own ratings, Kinnock and Cook were quite happy to see it quickly wound up.

Ambulance workers will need to be vigilant to fend off the next cost-cutting offensive by health managers.

The fact that Poole's deal leaves so many issues unresolved makes this all the more difficult.

The six-month dispute has clearly helped weaken the government. If this gives other workers the confidence to press their claims, then the ambulance workers' long fight will not have been in vain.



PHOTO: Tim Nolan

Ambulance workers in determined mood on January 30th: but union leaders would go no further than that day's action.

National Health Service

Tories go for broke

Old Bureaucratic regimes have been falling like ninepins in Eastern Europe.

But the British NHS remains a bastion of Stalinist methods.

While vanquished "Communists" submit to humiliating electoral defeats, NHS chiefs, following Kenneth Clarke's lead, are refusing to recognise the outcome of ballots which overwhelmingly reject the NHS Bill's proposals for major hospitals to "opt out" of local control and become self-contained public corporations' (NHS Trusts).

Many of the hospitals on Clarke's 79-strong hit-list of units to opt out in the first round have now had ballots of staff — mostly unofficial ones organised by trade unions and campaigners.

All of them have returned massive "no" votes — generally 90% — against management proposals.

But the most damaging of all for management and government was the hefty 82% "no" to opting out at St Thomas's Hospital, where managers were *instructed* by West Lambeth Health Authority to run an *official* ballot.

Ballot forms were distributed with pay slips, then counted by the Electoral Reform Society.

Management pulled out all the stops but produced less than 20% of staff for opting out.

Flouting the views of their workforce, management decided to proceed with a modified opt-out bid, which now drops the pretence of including community services.

Other health chiefs, alarmed at the humiliating result at St Thomas's, have become even more determined to resist ballots.

However pleased Clarke may now be to see West Lambeth bosses follow his line and cock a snook at public opposition, he will be less pleased with embarassingly poor performance at managing the Health Authority.

They have run West Lambeth into a monumental cash crisis that threatens the viability of an opted out St Thomas's.

By HARRY SLOAN

An internal inquiry has been launched to discover just how the Health Authority's deficit rose from £534,000 to £1.5m in the month October -November 1989, and then to a projected deficit of £5m in 1989-90 and £8.9m by April 1991.

The Regional Health Authority has agreed that West Lambeth can carry forward a £1.5m debt into the next financial year, and has promised there will be no service reductions up to 1st April.

However a massive package of cuts is already being proposed to slash spending in the new financial year, including closure of 73 more beds (on top of 100-plus already "temporarily" closed, and the axing of 13 doctors, 68 nurses and 53 other jobs at St Thomas's Hospital). Another £3.7m of cuts hangs over the "Priority Services Unit".

At the DHA's December meeting ther were calls for general manager Dr Stephen Jenkins and Director of Finance Chris Savory to resign. These were rejected, but it was later agreed in private to hold an internal inquiry into the financial running of the authority.

Members heard that under Savory the DHA had spent £500,000 in six months on financial consultants — allegedly because of a shortage of qualified staff in its central finance office.

Payments have included £500 a day for a financial controller, £800 a day for a computer expert and £800 a week for an accountant.

Many NHS ancillary staff don't earn £800 in two months. £200,000 a year for screwing up the finances of a major Health District sounds like a nice little earner.

In early January, Savory was allowed to resign with six months pay and a gift of a car, believed to be a Rover 820 fastback (a new Rover 820 ranges in price from £14,395 to £22,390).

Savory had been in post for less than a year on a salary of at least £35,000 after an abrupt departure from Bloomsbury DHA, where he also ran up huge bills for financial consultants, and which subsequently discovered itself to be £7m in the red.

Somebody in the NHS must really like him: despite his abysmal record, Savory has now been guaranteed further work at exorbitant rates as a financial consultant for SE Thames region.

St Thomas's is not the only leading opt-out contender to be in deep water financially. Others, including The London and Harefields, are massively overspent.

For Clarke to waive his criterion that opt-out hospitals need to be financially viable and equipped with competent managers would get the NHS Bill off to the rockiest possible start.

SOCIALIST MOVEMENT PAMPHLET

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Foreword by Tony Benn

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South Africa

Mount a real challenge for power!

Some of what is happening in South Africa is almost a mirror of what is happening in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

By CHARLIE VAN GELDEREN

In Eastern Europe and in the various republics within the Soviet Union there are mass movements for separation from the Soviet state.

In South Africa, in the so-called homelands or bantustans, there is increasing demand for the reincorporation of these territories within the Republic.

Crown

The creation of the bantustans, the crown jewels in Verwoerd's apartheid policies, was to reinforce the existing Land Acts — the *Native Land Act of 1913* and the *Development Trust and Land Act of 1936*.

As a consequence of these laws, the majority of South Africans — nearly 75% of the population — has been allowed to occupy only 13% of the land.

The principal aim of the Land Acts and the creation of the bantustans was to destroy the peasantry and provide a pool of cheap labour for the mines, factories and white-owned farms.

Within the homelands, under the aegis of Pretoria, tyrannical regimes have introduced vicious anti-trade union legislation and attempted to crush all opposition.

Impetus

The de Klerk promise of reforms has given an impetus to the opposition movement and in one after another of the bantustans — Transkei, Ciskei, Venda, and Bothusthatswana the demand for reincorporation into the Republic has grown and assumed violent proportions.

According to a report in the Johannesburg *Weekly Mail* (March 2-8th), the Government is now considering the repeal of these two Acts.

This is one of the demands put forward by Nelson Mandela and the ANC as a pre-condition for opening negotiations with the Government. But, in itself, the promise of a repeal has not invoked an over-enthusiastic response from the liberation movement within South Africa.

"The mere repeal [of these Acts] can only be the first steps towards solving the problem of land hunger among black people", says UDF publicity secretary Patrick "Terror" Lekota.

Academic and author Colin Bundy points out that "this will only change things marginally." He points out that a repeal of the Land Acts would, in effect, create a free market in land but would not result in a transfer of the land to the majority.

One of the aims of the de Klerk Government in proposing the repeal of the Land Acts is to anticipate and frustrate demands from the liberation movement for the nationalisation of land.

Repealing the Act would mean that blacks could legally buy land in what is now "white" South Africa. But it would also mean that whites could buy land in the non-independent homelands.

Land

As the Pan African Movement general secretary put it "...as Africans lack resources, whites with financial power could actually buy them out of the 13% of the land allocated to them. Merely repealing the Acts could worsen the land problem.

"It is part of their deregulation and privatisation programme to divest themselves of all responsibility for the system of exploitation and dispossession."

The problem of landlessness among blacks is only one of the pressing problems which the ANC will have to address when negotiations get under way.

At present there is hiatus in the South African political climate. Both the government and the liberation movement seem to be marking time, awaiting the return of Nelson Mandela from his world tour.

The movement is still waiting for the result of the meeting of the NEC in Lusaka which Mandela attended. There is a desperate need for decisive leadership inside the country.

Despite Mandela's efforts, the fratricidal killings between UDR supporters and Inkatha in Natal continue.

The gangster war between two rival mafia-type taxi organisations in Germiston and the increasing unrest in Baphutsaswan and the Ciskei is giving the regime an excuse to delay the lifting of the state of emergency.

There is some fear that the ANC has missed the opportunity opened up by the euphoria which greeted de Klerk's speech and the release of Nelson Mandela and the other political leaders.



Nelson Mandela

The umbrella organisation, the National Democratic Movement is very good at organising huge mass demonstrations. They have not yet showed that they can turn this massive show of support into a real challenge for power. That is a test which has yet to come.

El Salvador

Major setback or minor disturbance for FMLN?

How did the FMLN members in Managua react to the FSLN election defeat?

It appears as though they continued to swing calmly in their hammocks. There was no panic or hasty retreat from the country. Surprisingly the FMLN characterised it as a tactical rather than a strategic defeat.

The FMLN have maintained the political and military initiative since their major offensive in El Salvador last November.

Their present tactic is to try to force the ARENA government to accept the active mediation of the UN in discussions between the two forces.

As well as winning international support for themselves, this proposal has caused splits in the ARENA party.

The present situation may well help create a more united vision of the process in Central America. There are now two powerful revolutionary movements side by side facing their respective governments, one very weak, the other very isolated.

The FMLN view the FSLN as still the strongest political/military force in Latin America. Crisis-ridden Latin American capitalism will not solve Nicaragua's problems.

What then has the left in El Salvador or Nicaragua gained from this defeat?

The first gain is one of moral authority. The FMLN in El Salvador is putting immense pressure on the ARENA government to negotiate.

By GARETH MOSTYN

They believe that their image as serious politicians is improved by their comrades in the FSLN accepting the decision of the Nicaraguan electorate.

The reality for Latin Americans is that organisations dedicated to democracy are few and far between.

The second gain is the view that the authoritarian model is the only revolutionary or socialist one has been defeated.

The idea of socialism being progressive and democratic is getting a severe beating in Eastern Europe. The same cannot be said in relation to Nicaragua.

The FSLN can walk with their heads held high following their major political defeat, and so can the rest of the left in Latin America as a consequence.

The third gain is the added pressure on the US Congress to reduce the huge amount of military aid to the Salvadorean government. The old battle-cry about exporting revolution and "commies" never being defeated by popular vote have gone.

The Bush administration will quickly think of other battle-cries, and they will try to go on the offensive. However their political stance is weaker and it will show.

Winchester Three Appeal

Will justice finally be done?

In October 1988 three young Irish people were found guilty of "conspiracy to murder the Northern Ireland Secretary Tom King.

There are a number of disturbing elements about this case. The three defendants were virtually tried and convicted by the British Press within 48 hours of their arrest, whilst the time and place of the trial seemed prejudicial to the defence.

Furthermore the trial was subject to blatant political interference, overshadowing the fact that the evidence offered against the three was inconclusive and was very slender in the case of John McCann. The Winchester three were sentenced to 25 years imprisonment.

The Winchester Three, Finbar Cullen, Martina Shanahan and John McCann, were arrested on 30th August 1987. That morning Tom King's daughter had seen two people sitting on the wall, and greeted them. They did not respond. Suspicious, she alerted her father's security staff.

The local police arrested two people who they had found sitting on this wall. They gave false names though said truthfully that they were camping at Wookey Hole in Somerset, some 30 miles away.

The police visited the campsite and arrested a third man, who correctly identified himself as John McCann.

The press broke the news on 1st September. It seems that the police had leaked information before the three had been properly charged, and the prosecution was thus given a headstart.

On 7th September, they were charged.

The trial was not to be heard until October '88. In the meantime Cullen and McCann were remanded at Brixton Prison.

Shanahan was held at Risley. She was held in isolation for two hundred days, was strip-searched regularly, and her mental condition was undermined by the nature of her stay on remand.

Relatives coming from Ireland to visit her were detained under the PTA and her sister was banned from entering Britain.

The trial was timed to coincide with Conservative Party Conference, held in Brighton for the first time since the IRA bombing. Retrospective reporting of the bombing, reporting of the current conference, and accounts of the trial proceedings appeared next to each other.

By a *Conviction* Activist

This was bound to have an adverse effect on the defence case — the media were assuming that conspiracy had already been established as having taken place.

The trial was heard in Winchester, a garrison town of seven regiments, many who have served in Northern Ireland, including the regiment who had lost eight young soldiers in the Ballygawtry bus bombing that summer.

This was one town where anyone facing a charge related to IRA activity would face a certain amount of prejudice.

The evidence against the three was inconclusive. Finbar Cullen had things in his rucksack the prosecution maintained could have been used for surveillance. Yet none of the items were out of place on a long camping holiday.

A copy of the survivalist magazine *Combat* was found. A piece of flattened grass was found 165 yards from Tom King's home. The prosecution claimed this could have been used as a sniper's position though it could not prove a connection to the defendants.

A notebook was found amongst Cullen's possessions which had the imprint of car registration numbers of vehicles which had been seen near the house and some cigarette papers with the names and addresses of well-known political figures.

Before the case had come to court, a charge of "conspiracy with persons unknown to murder persons unknown " had been added, withdrawn and then later brought back. A hotel booking in a false name for Blackpool, for a period before the Conservative Party Conference was discovered.

The fact that Cullen and Shanahan had used false names and were in possession of driving licences in false names was stressed by the prosecution. None of this evidence proves that a conspiracy to kill Tom King or anyone else actually took place.

Neither the police in Britain or Ireland could produce any evidence against the defendants to suggest a link with any paramilitary organisation.

The defence advised the three to remain silent, saying that it should be up to the prosecution to prove guilt.

At this point some blatant political interference occurred. On 20th October Tom King's office announced that the traditional right to silence was to be abolished for terrorist suspects.

A press conference implied that silence from such suspects must suggest guilt. Whilst the trial was still taking place, the government announced the broadcasting ban on Sinn Fein. The case was being used to great political advantage by the Conservatives.

The jury took two days to reach a majority verdict. Several times they went back to the court for advice, but eventually a "guilty" verdict was reached. All three were sentenced to 25 years imprisonment.

Though the case against all three of the accused did not prove that a conspiracy had taken place, the case against John McCann deserves more comment.

McCann had told the police his real name as soon as he was arrested. He did have a driving licence in a false name in his wallet, yet his claim to have picked this up and "what looked like a credit card" from outside the tent where the three were staying is plausible.

At first the prosecution claimed that he was one of the people King's daughter had noticed that morning. McCann was seen by a witness as having been at the campsite in the late morning. It is apparent that the prosecution could not prove that McCann was anywhere near Tom King's house, and was arrested later in the day, thirty miles away and in a different county.

The case against McCann rests on the fact that he could be associated with two people who were arrested outside Tom King's house.

The Winchester Three's case will soon be going to appeal.

More information can be obtained from *Conviction*, PO Box 522, Sheffield, S1 3FF or *Grassroots Books, 1 Newton Street, Manchester 1.*

Soviet Union

The big gamble

Soviet Reform Communism has placed its last chip on the table.

A strong Executive Presidency has been created and Mr Gorbachev was elected to it on 15th March.

But the chances of this last great gamble succeeding are frighteningly slim.

When they were put into power in 1985, the Gorbachev team wanted to replace the old Stalinist political order and economic system with a new, more liberal, more dynamic regime.

They shared a vision of post-war East European communism with such historical figures as Alexander Dubcek in Czechoslovakia, Imre Nagy in Hungary or Polish Party liberals like Morawski and Ochab of the 1950s and 60s.

Like the Czechoslovak Dubcekites, they were determined to bring about change through the established, monopolist Party itself. Breaking with the Stalinist apparatus and constructing a new political force in a multi-party democracy was not for them.

After five years in power, Gorbachev has been very successful in one respect: the old political apparatus and its economic mechanism — massively weakened, no longer fuctioning effectively — are disintegrating.

But Gorbachev has so far failed to put any new political force or any new mechanism in place of the old one — and this is a gigantic problem.

After five years of effort, reform communism is still not an effective political movement with a will to win and a mass following.

On the contrary, Gorbachev's own popularity and popular authority has been massively eroded — a process aided by his lack of a coherent and workable economic strategy, and by mass dissatisfaction at the terrible erosion in living standards.

By OLIVER MACDONALD

Gorbachev's refusal to break with the past has not stopped the bulk of the population breaking with it quite openly, declaring in favour of the huge national movements in the Republics and falling behind Left, Right and Centre oppositions in the Russian Federation.

Despite its own flux, the population increasingly identifies Gorbachev with the Stalinist apparatus itself — weakening his position today, whatever the new powers formally granted to him as Executive President.

The new Presidency gives Gorbachev the legal basis for ruling through the state apparatus and for down-grading the importance of the CPSU's leading bodies in determining government policy.

It also means that Gorbachev can no longer make any pretence at having his aims sabotaged by Party conservatives: He is out on his own now, in front of the Soviet people.

There is only one way Gorbachev can respond: with a drive for a deep going marketisation of the Soviet economy.

Only with such a system, regulated by law and policed not by the party machine but by the state administration can a Presidency without the party apparatus be effective.

But this orientation is likely to bring Gorbachev into head-on confrontation with the existing Ryzhkov government.

The government has been trying to use the old command mechanism and the central ministerial bureaucracies to revive production — a policy which has failed.

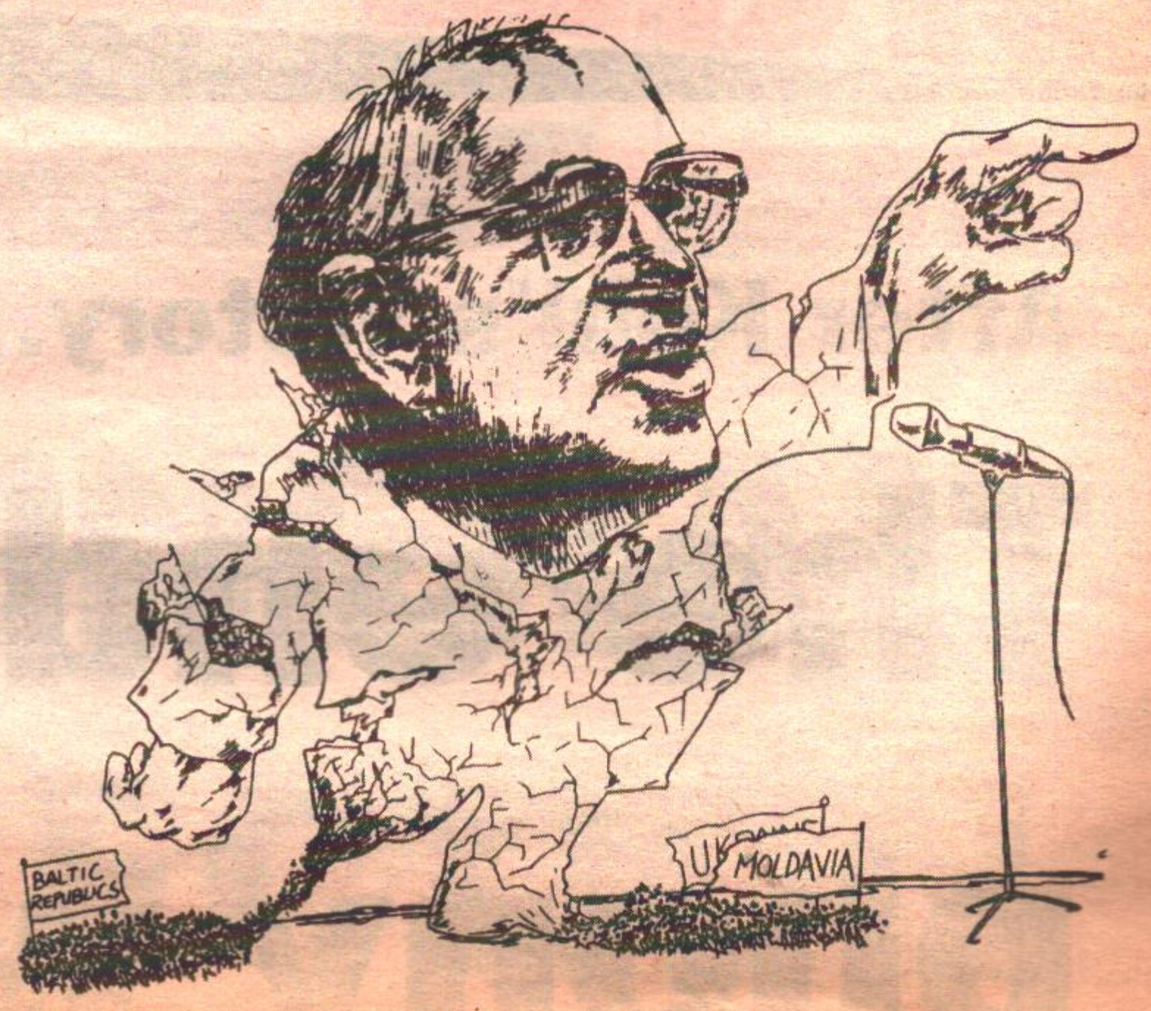
Marketisation will also involve Gorbachev trying to rely on a motley crew of social groups interested not just in market socialism but in full-blooded capitalist restoration.

Ranged against him could be the immensely powerful social weight of the Russian workers.

Zig-zag

In these circumstances, Gorbachev may well continue with an unstable, zig-zag policy against a background of savage austerity. He may swing between anything from capitalist restoration to desperate attempts to re-impose the old planning-rationing system.

Meanwhile, the new President must grapple with the disintegration of the Soviet Union itself. If he fails to take a principled stand on national self-determination, seeking instead to manoeuvre and delay while using the big stick against the Asian and Caucasian Republics, his Presidency will be unlikely to last out its five year term.



Gorbachev: the chips are down...

It would be wonderful to be able to report that a powerful, coherent, left alternative to Gorbachev is gaining strength in Russia. Unfortunately this is not yet the case.

The forces around Boris Yeltsin are certainly electorally strong in the Russian Federation. Their stand against Moscow's administrative repression and violence against the national movements has also been of great importance.

But they do not present a positive, coherent programme, a stable organised base, or a clear strategy for change.

On the vital question of which social/economic mechanism they are fighting for, they are as divided as the Party establishment.

The socialist left, though organising hard, remains small. Crucial to its future growth will be its links with the reviving trade union movement and with left forces in the non-Russian Republics.

It faces the crucial challenge of rallying the working class to fight for a socialist alternative to the capitalist leanings in Gorbachev's marketisation policies and preventing the slide into bloody conflict between the nationalities.

Democratic Platform in CPSU

What Yeltsin's group is saying

The radical pro-reform group in the Soviet Communist Party is now calling itself the Democratic Platform Group.

At the end of January, it issued a declaration (printed below) setting our the main principles of its campaign for the election of delegates to the special Party Congress in June.

The short manifesto, published as a leaflet, was issued in the name of Party clubs and organisations "in 103 cities and 13 republics."

The Democratic Platform Groups participation in the wave of demonstrations that took place across the Soviet Union before the elections indicates that it is a very large independent movement.

Like the grassroots democracy movement inside the Polish CP in 1980, the groups describes itself as "horizontal".

As far as I know, the manifesto has not yet been published by the official Soviet newspapers, although the official draft programme for the Party Congress was published in *Pravda* on 13th February.

This is undoubtedly a very important group within Soviet politics.

By GUS FAGAN

Democratic

A mark of their democratic credentials is their support for the right of self-determination for the republics in the union and their opposition to any kind of repression or military intervention against the popular independentist movements.

Among the well-known members of this group are Boris Yeltsin, the historian Yuri Afanasiev, and the economist Gavril Popov, a leading defender of the market economy.

A Declaration of the Democratic Platform Group Issued by the All-Union Conference of Party Clubs and Party Organisations, Moscow, 20-21st January, 1990

We, Communists, representatives of Party clubs and Party organisations of 103 cities from 13 union republics, announce the creation within the framework of the CPSU of the association of Communists' Democratic Platform standing for radical reform of the CPSU in the direction of a genuinely democratic parliamentary party, acting in the conditions of a multi-party system.

In the situation of the profound ideological division that has already take place, we propose a democratic platform, in which we call upon the progressive forces in the CPSU to unite. This platform includes the following basic principles and demands:

1. The transfer of all power from the Party apparatus to democratically elected soviets.

2. The introduction by the CPSU of a legislative initiative for the revocation of Article 6 of the constitution of the USSR and the preparation of a draft law about political parties.

3. The adoption of the concept of democratic socialism, meaning the priority of human over class values, pluralism of forms of ownership and a market economy regulated by society instead of command planning, social solidarity and nonviolence instead of class struggle, political pluralism and the granting of equal rights to all political parties and organisations instead of the party-state apparatus's monopoly on power, the guarantee of political rights and freedom of the individual instead of total state control, establishment of norms of morality and social justice instead of a system of privileges for the *nomenklatura*.

4. The transition from the principle of a unitary state and Communist party structure party control and Party mass toward a voluntary union of peoples and a union of Communist parties of the republics, including the Russian Federation.

5. The renunciation of the principle of democratic centralism and the substitution of universal democratic principles, ensuring genuine pluralism in the Party, guarantees for rights of the minority, broad autonomy of Party organisations, and freedom of platforms and groups.

6. The creation of horizontal structures in the Party, ie. the association of Communists based on specific goals, functions, territories, and other principles.

7. The introduction of direct and equal elections with several candidates and platforms, with secret balloting according to Party districts and free nomination and self-nomination of candidates for secretaries of Party committees and delegates to Party forums.

8. The release of organs of media from subordination to executive organs of the party, their transformation so that they are accountable only to a congress or conference.

9. The abolition of political organs within the armed forces, the KGB, the Ministry of the Interior, and other state organisations.

Conference participants call on like-minded people in various corners of the country to joint the Democratic Platform and to nominate to the Twenty-Eighth Congress of the Party those delegates who share the views of this platform.

Communists, create Party clubs and other horizontal structures!

Read our publication!

The way out of this crisis is through the unity of all democratic forces and the creation of an all-union democratic movement!

If we unite our efforts, we will overcome! If we allow ourselves to be separated, we will lose the historic chance that has been given us.

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East Germany

After Kohl's victory...

The end of the phony war

This was the one result which nobody had predicted.

The Christian Democrats (CDU), with their junior partners in the "Alliance for Germany" were way ahead of everybody else.

By GÜNTER MINNERUP

In many urban areas the communist PDS were neck-to-neck with the social-democratic SPD, until recently the odds-on favourites for an absolute majority in the first democratically elected *Volkskammer* of the German Democratic Republic.

The road is now clear for an early economic and monetary union between both German states.

The way is open for complete reunification as soon as the international obstacles have been removed in negotiations with the US, Britain, France and the Soviet Union.

The right-wing CDU had swamped the GDR with campaign organisers, money and propaganda material.

West German Chancellor Kohl alone spoke to 1.6 million people in a series of six open-air rallies, usually a sea of black-red-and-gold flags hurriedly imported from the Federal Republic.

But the cries of "foul" from the SPD camp immediately after the first results carried little conviction. After all, the West German SPD had muscled its way into the East German elections in much the same way as Kohl's Christian Democrats.

The real reason for the SPD's crushing defeat at the polls was its political confusion: it promised both speedy unification and social security when the truth of the matter was this campaign was all about either one or the other.

The electorate was not fooled.



Roots

Until recently, and especially given the historically strong roots of Social Democracy in East Germany, the SPD's vague "we'll please everyone" rhetoric appeared to carry the majority with it.

But the closer the day of reckoning came, the deeper the polarisation.

Increasingly convinced that the GDR had no future, people deserted the SPD for the party which promised quick incorporation into West Germany, with all the attendant rewards and risks.

On the other hand, many of those coming to realise the inevitable mass redundancies, attacks on social gains and other costs of an *Anschluss* switched to the PDS.

The PDS had conducted a very effective campaign around its popular Prime Minister Hans Modrow and new Party Leader Gregor Gysi.

While accepting the inevitability of eventual unification, it stressed the need to defend the social gains of the past 40 years.

If the SPD had put forward its own plan for a confederation between the two Germanies rather than aping the CDU's reunification demagogy, it may well have stemmed the tide and even taken a large slice of the PDS vote.

The resistance against the capitalist offensive will now be further weakened by the SPD's avowed refusal to enter into an opposition alliance with the PDS. It may even yet be persuaded to join the CDU as the junior partner in a "grand coalition" government.

The other big losers were the figureheads of the large mobilisations of October last year and veterans of the East German democratic opposition, the New Forum and other, smaller groups such as Democracy Now, the Peace and Human Rights Initiative and the Greens.

With less than 5% of the vote, they were completely trampled underfoot by "the elephants".

Truth

In truth, they were never really in the race, because even at the height of their popularity, they never actually had an organised base. Indeed some of their leaders acted as though they did not really want one.

If their handful of parliamentary seats are going to serve any political purpose they will have to turn towards joint opposition with the PDS and left forces in the SPD.

An important battle for a democratic socialist GDR has been lost. But in many ways, this has been a phony war anyway.

The big issue to be resolved is the future of Germany, and it is in this context that the coming defensive struggles over what remains of 40 years of Stalinism may assume a new dimension.

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