CONFERENCE DELEGATES' BRIEFING

FRIDAY BRIGHTON 1989

WHOSE PARTY?

THIS year's Conference has been an exercise in stage-management aimed at pleasing Tory media and reassuring the ruling class. The unamendable, top-down Policy Review was motivated by an endless parade of front-benchers determined to damp down all expectations of the next Labour goverment.

The next step in the leadership's drive to make Labour a "safe bet" is to get rid of Conference altogether - and with it, the last shreds of Party democracy. The GMB's COMPOSITE 3, despite its democratic rhetoric, is nothing but a license to "Americanise" the Party - turning it into a vehicle for professional politicians, without active members, links with the unions, or any socialist principles.

This Composite instructs the NEC to come back next year with proposals for "policy commissions under the control of the NEC", "secret postal ballots" for the CLP (but no other) section of the NEC, and "alternative methods of dealing with resolutions". Anyone who believes this Orwellian rhetoric will result in greater accountability or participation is sadly deluded.

Our leaders want a passive, atomised membership, shielded from radical alternatives, excluded from policy-making.

Briefing wants to see a genuine mass membership party (unrestricted debate and collective decision-making at all levels) with *all* representatives held to account by an active, informed rank and file.

Above all, we want our Party to be a real **Party of Labour**. Any attempt to sever the historic link to the trade unions should be seen as an assault not only on the Party's bedrock identity, but also on its capacity to achieve socialist change. CLPs *should* have more say in Conference and the block vote *must* be democratised. But if our Party is to be the political voice of a *movement*, not just a gaggle of office-seekers it must maintain and strengthen its roots in the organised working class.

SOCIALIST MOVEMENT
LABOUR PARTY
MEMBERS MEETING
Rebuild the Left!
Educate, Agitate, Organise!
Saturday October 14th, 11.30-5pm
Key Books, 136 Digbeth, Birmingham
A day of discussion for socialists in the Labour Party

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

TODAY'S DEBATES

VOTING GUIDE

COMPOSITE 3: OPPOSE. See front page. Beware authoritarian wolf in democratic sheep's clothing.

COMPOSITE 4: SUPPORT. Affirms Party link to unions while calling for greater say for CLPs (in accordance with composite carried last year, and ignored by NEC).

COMPOSITE 5: OPPOSE. Abolition of block vote.

RESOLUTION 28: OPPOSE. "Conference believes that it is no longer appropriate in the late 20th century to make policy by passing resolutions." Better leave it to the Leadership?

LESBIAN & GAY COVER-UP

THIS morning should bring the announcement of a card vote victory for LCLGR on Comp. 32 (age of consent, etc). If the result had ben declared last night, it would have been blazoned on TV, radio & morning papers. As it is, it'll be played down in favour of "Kinnock's Conference" type stories. Clever chap, Peter Mandelson.

TWO FACES OF JACK CUNNINGHAM

ON Wednesday **Cunningham** promised Conference "tough environmental regulation" with effective enforcement of standards based on "the principle that the polluter pays" assuring us that under Labour there would be "none of the political posturing" of the Tory Conference on green issues. Yesterday in the national press it emerged that this same **Jack Cunningham** is the **paid parliamentary adviser** to **Albright & Wilson**, a chemical company who (according to Friends of the Earth) have dumped 11 million gallons of poisonous effluent into the sea off Whitehaven in his Cunningham's own constituency. As we said 3 years ago: Sack Jack!

MEMBERSHIP SHAM

LABOUR's press office announced yesterday that 42,000 "new members" had joined since January making the new membership campaign "a major achievement". However, buried in the NEC Report is the fact that total membership *dropped* last year by 22,884 (7.7% decrease). A secret NEC study made of 2 Southampton CLPs showed that while 400 new members had joined in the course of a membership drive, 400 old members had left.

Yesterday's Fringe

SOCIALIST MOVEMENT: OPEN DISCUSSION

TONY Benn's pungent remarks set the political scene at an open discussion for left delegates called by the Socialist Movement. "I'm afraid it's not in me to join in the Red Flag tomorrow, not when the Policy Review is the biggest White Flag ever hoisted. It breaks my heart to se good socialists leaving the Labour Party and I believe they're wrong. But the left should be clear. Our base is too narrow. We have to win the argument for socialism. There are no mechanistic answers to political problems."

The rest of the meeting was dominated (for once) by contributions from the floor (14 in all). Though there were differences in emphasis, most speakers agreed on the need to reorganise the left with greater attention to linking up with trad union and other struggles and less on "internal manipulation". Heartfelt pleas for an end to sectarianism were well received by all.

Mike Marqusee

SOLIDARITY: NICARAGUA, EL SALVADOR, CHILE

AN **FSLN** speaker warned that pending elections (costing £25m) would be rubbished by the Sandinistas' enemies. The world labour movement must counter this *and* raise money to fund the FSLN campaign. **EL Salvador Solidarity Campaign** spoke of the 9-year civil war which has caused 80,000 deaths. The US spends *$1½m a day* to shore up the murderous ARENA government and the 14 families who own most of the country. **Chile Solidarity Campaign** called for more *affiliations*, direct links, and money for the United Left to fight the December elections.

SOCIALIST CAMPAIGN GROUP: CONFERENCE ROUND-UP

AT a lively midday fringe **Tony Benn** urged us to "build the movement outside" and plugged the Socialist Movement. From the floor, **Mandy Moore** said we should *refuse* to unite behind the Policy Review (a response to Ken Livingstone) and Valerie Wise said the left concentrated too much on male figureheads and ignored women NEC candidates. Less helful contributions counterposed organisation in the Party to links with struggles outside and tried to scapegoat sections of the left working in the Socialist Movement for the week's setbacks. This sectarianism clashed with the fighting spirit of the meeting and was repudiated by a majority of those present, including Dennis Skinner, who ended the meeting with an invigorating speech.

Yesterday's Debates

MORNING SESSION

TORY attacks on **NHS** and **local government**, culminating in the **Poll Tax**, have sparked grass roots resistance all over the country, not that you'd know it from most of yesterday's debate. Some good resolutions and strong speeches (especially on Poll Tax non-payment, ambulance dispute, NHS) were flattened by Conference in its pliant "whatever the Front Bench wants" mood.

On NHS, **Robin Cook** turned up on TV (after Conference had finished debate) to explain that prescription charges would not only *not* be abolished but would stay well above 1979's 20p rate for a "long" time.

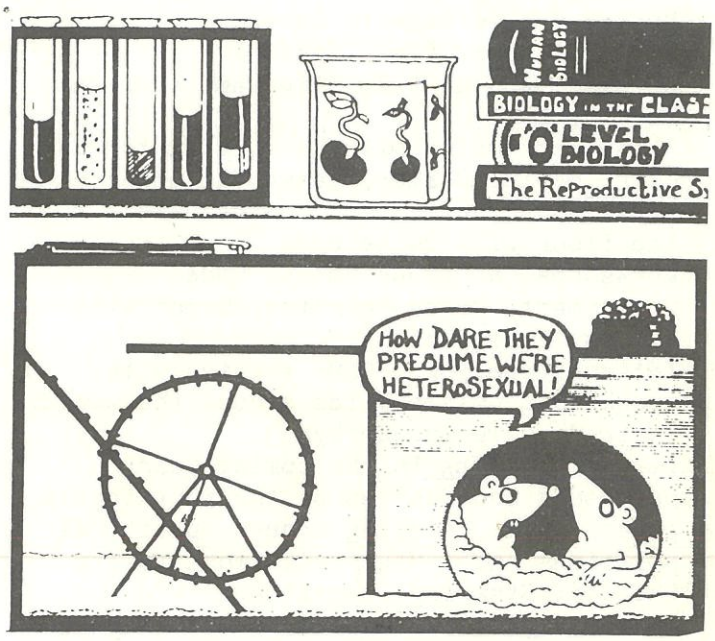
Blunkett did his bit for non-resistance to the Tories in front of Conference, announcing, "The Review accepts prudence and reality, spending wisely and choosing carefully... campaigning on health, water, Poll Tax is not dependent on martyrdom, particularly of those beleaguered and confused." He topped this off with the amazing assertion that Thatcher would "smile if the non-payment campaign were to succeed." PS: Sorry to see the excellent, radical Comp. 20 (grossly misrepresented by Blunkett) remitted under pressure.

AFTERNOON SESSION

HATTERSLEY kicked off with a speech of breath-taking hypocrisy, opposing **PR** because "we'd have to bargain away our manifesto to gain the supprt of small parties" (always the guardian of manifesto commitments, our Roy). "Liberty," he said, "is too important to be interpreted by judges": this from a man who thinks "special courts" should decide whether workers have the right to strike.

The hall was packed and delegates' hands waving for the PR debate. Suddenly "democracy" and "principle" were the order of the day. Hypocrisy from **Gavin Laird** (AEU) denouncing any attempts to "stifle debate" and demanding "how can this Party join with the Tories in defending the status quo?" and **Jeff Rooker** objecting to "white male dominated" House of Commons.

Scotland, the Lords, the media all got short shrift. But first class organising by **LCLGR** made the **lesbian and gay rights** debate a high point. **Debbie Epstein** (Birmingham Selly Oak) moving Comp. 32 exposed the double standards of both British society *and* the Policy Review. Seconding, **Peter Purton** (Southall) invoked Orwell's



"some animals are more equal than others" and said Labour's discriminatory policy made it "safer to come out as lesbian or gay in the Labour Party than as a Labour member in the lesbian and gay community."

Delegates from **Sheffield Hillsborough** and **Preston** spelt out the arguments for British withdrawal from **Ireland**. Front bench spokesperson on Ireland **Kevin McNamara** replied with mindless anti-Irish, anti-left vitriol... Lebanon/Beirut/murderous gangs vs. freedom, justice, "socialism" (courtesy HM Armed Forces). Richly deserved heckling, booing.

CHILD ABUSE: Good debate around good motion recommending child-centred approach, making family & men's power within family central to this question. One speech condemned **Stuart Bell's** role in "Cleveland" (though the delegate politely referred to "some people" the message was clear).

Liz Davies

RETRACTION: The delegate who received a letter from Kinnock referred to in yesterday's bulletin has never been a member of the Tory Party.

LABOUR BRIEFING AGM

Fed up with New Realism, Kinnockism, Post-Fordism, and Why-botherism? Wanna talk about it? Make a date now for the<193>

Labour Briefing Annual General Meeting 1989

Saturday, October 28th

11am-5pm (Registration at 10:30)

Durham Road Community Centre
(near Finsbury Park, London)

Opening Debate: Priorities and prospect for the Left

Panel discussion with Ken Livingstone MP, Cllr. Martha Osamor, Tessa Van Gelderen (NUR) and Graham Bash. Contributions from the floor will be welcome.

Workshops on Labour Party, Local Government, Green Politics, Democratic Rights, Trade Unions.

Internationalism, 1989: session with speakers from struggles around the world, chaired by Jeremy Corbyn

Labour Briefing in the coming year: proposals and debates on the fortnightly paper, local Briefing Groups, political positions, etc. Plus: elections to new National Steering Committee.

Finale: **Rally for Socialism** with Reg Race and Mandy Mudd.

PLUS: *Briefing* Raffle Prize Draw!

Creche, food, stalls.

For more information call the Briefing office (01-809 3927)

VICIOUS RUMOUR: Labour Leader in drunken brawl

STEVE Bassam, Labour Leader of Brighton Council, was thrown out of the Grand Hotel late on Wednesday night for being "drunk and disorderly" according to stewards. It is not thought this will help his quest for a safe parliamentary seat, assiduously purused all this week.

STAY IN TOUCH!

Labour Briefing
PO Box 1235, London N4 2UY

Socialist Movement
PO Box 118, Chesterfield, Derbyshire S44 5UT

Women for Socialism
c/o 7 Cumberland Park, London W3 6SY

Labour Campaign for Lesbian & Gay Rights
PO Box 306, London N5

Labour Party Black Sections
c/o Narendra Makanji, 41 Darwin Road, London N22

Voices for Rushdie
c/o BM Box 2706, London WC1N 3XX

CLPs Conference
11 Egremont Prom, Wallasey, Merseyside L44 8BG

LABOUR BRIEFING-SONG SHEET

Red Flag ©1989

The people's flag is palest pink,
It's not as red as you may think.
While Kinnock's yuppies stand and cheer,
The working class is nowhere near.
We'll change the country bit by bit,
So nobody will notice it.
And just to show we're still sincere,
We'll sing the "Red Flag" once a year.

[Can anyone remember the words to "It's our Party, and we'll cry if we want to,,,?]

LABOUR CAREERISTS COMMITTEE

The hypocrisy of the LCC call for *quotas for women* was exposed this week by their failure to support Alice Mahon, Diane Abbott, or Audrey Wise for the NEC. Kinnock's hit-squad preferred smart-suited men, including outrageous sexist John Prescott. Only one woman for 7 places: a quota of 14%!

FACTS

61 CLPs (10% of the total) failed to cast any votes in the NEC elections. Last year 48 members were expelled. This total is thought to be on the low side due to gross inefficiency of the NCC.

BRIEFING PRODUCTION TEAM ALTERNATIVE MERIT AWARDS for...

HEROISM BEYOND THE CALL OF DUTY: to Kathy, Ridwan, Steve, Paul, Mick & Terry for getting us full printing equipment at 12 hours notice.

NOBEL PRIZE FOR PHYSICS: to all at Herbie's Bistro, Waterloo St., for the invention of nuclear fusion (how else do they get fresh food piping hot so quickly?); also winners of THREE BRIEFING STARS for superlative food served in the homely atmosphere of Acorn Antiques.

DOUBLE-BOOKING AT SHORT NOTICE: to Fitzherbert Flatlet House, 23 Brunswick Place, for telling us at 2pm last Saturday they'd booked us in for *next* week though our 2 letters had said *this* week.

ACCOMMODATION TO THE MARKET: ISB of 21B Bedford Place, for finding us a house for 20 at an hour's notice on Saturday afternoon at double the price (with special distinction for not delivering the beds or bedding the next day as promised).

BREAKING WITH TRADITION: Piers Corbyn.