Twenty years of *(London) Labour (Left) Briefing*

LABOUR LEFT
Briefing
20th anniversary SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Graham Bash, the only co-founder of *Briefing* who has served uninterruped on the Editorial Board since the start, surveys the highs and the lows of the last 20 years.

Briefing's first twenty years started with Ken Livingstone centre stage... and have ended the same way. Despite this superficial similarity, the political landscape has fundamentally and perhaps irrevocably changed and *Briefing* has changed too.

Twenty years ago, the Tories had just won the 1979 election and the Labour left, bitter at the betrayal of the Callaghan Government, was about to take off and assume a strength greater than at any time since the start of the 1970s. The Bennite challenge was beginning. The left was organising to take control of Labour local authorities from the moribund right – in an attempt to use them as bulwarks of defence and struggle against Thatcher's Government. And in London, we on the left were fighting for leadership of the Greater London Council.

In this context, *Briefing* began as *London Labour Briefing*. Our first editorial proclaimed:

"Your initial reaction may be that the left needs another newspaper like it needs another Reg Prentice. However, this is a bulletin with a difference. It is not produced or controlled by any one tendency or group...

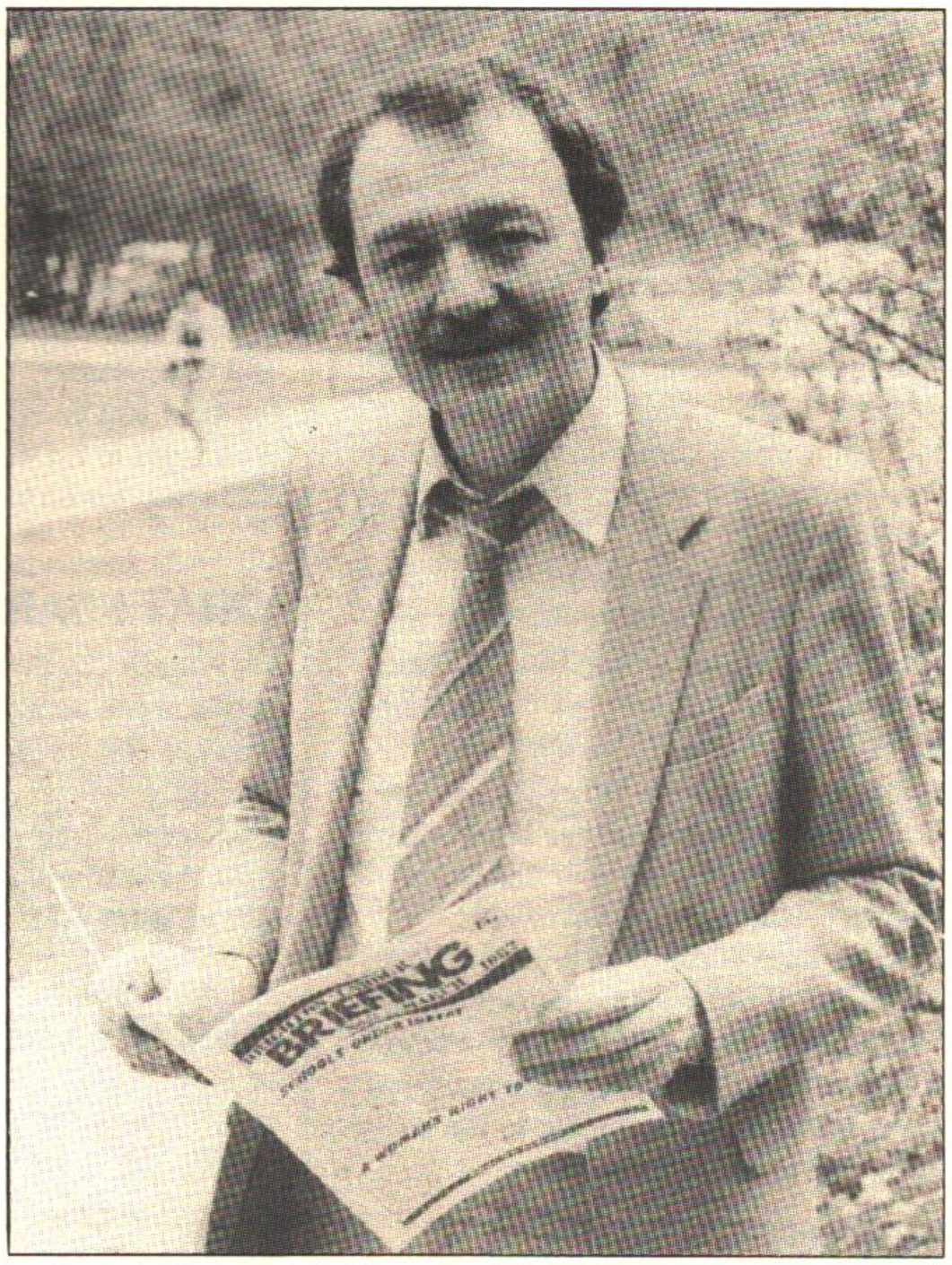
"We have set ourselves the task of keeping active militants inside the Labour Party and the unions in touch with each other and up to date on what is happening in the various battles across the capital... Organisation and information are the keys to success."

There have been enormous changes for *Briefing* as it attempted to move with the changing political situation. We have changed our name and format twice and our current glossy magazine would have been unrecognisable when we began.

Throughout all the changes there have been a number of unifying themes that have remained at the centre of *Briefing*.

- There was a recognition that our struggle was above all practical. In an echo of Karl Marx, we in effect proclaimed, "Previous journals have interpreted the world, our task is to change it." It would be no use preaching socialist ideas from outside the living movement. Our task was to unite as many forces as we could in struggle and try to undermine the ability of the right wing leadership of the labour movement to betray and sectionalise. Where the leadership divided, our task was to unite; where they withheld information, our task was to provide it; and when they tried to keep apart the industrial and political wings of the movement, our task was to attempt to bind them more closely together. In attempting these gigantic tasks, we recognised it was necessary to do so from positions of authority within the labour movement itself. We were engaged in a struggle for leadership.
- We recognised that information was power. We declared *Briefing* the noticeboard of the left, providing information that could not easily be obtained elsewhere. In our second issue, under the heading "ILEA surrenders", we printed a list of how Labour Inner London Education Authority members voted on cuts. To us, it was accountability. To the right, it was a "hit list". We continued to publish voting lists regularly and we reported what labour movement representatives had said at key meetings. This was not only politically important – it was also excellent for sales. The left had to buy *Briefing* to find out who to hold to account and who to deselect if necessary; the right had to buy it to see if their names were on the hit list.
- From the outset *Briefing* grew as a local journal, beginning in London and spreading to other areas throughout the country. *Briefing* began to challenge the left's habit of a lifetime by building on a

(continued on back page)




BRIGHTON LABOUR 30p

BRIEFING

No 16 NOVEMBER 1983

LABOUR AND IRELAND

WE WILL NEVER BE BEATEN

GERRY ADAMS

EX-SOLDIERS AGAINST THE BRITAIN IN IRELA

TIME TO GO

Brutality

Armagh

Cont P2

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

I blame it all on *Briefing*. In 1982, as a grassroots Labour Party activist in Nottingham, I was handed a copy of the (then) *London Labour Briefing*. It raised the same questions about the accountability of Labour local government that were being asked all across the country.

Briefing's heresy was to suggest that Labour should be permanently and openly accountable for decisions we took in office. Growing numbers of people were looking for a more open and inclusive politics, in which communities and constituencies had a bigger say in the policies affecting their lives.

For many of Labour's representatives – both councillors and MPs – the public, political accountability *Briefing* called for was anathema. So too was the open political debate about wider policy choices Labour often seemed to turn its back on.

We were so impressed by *Briefing's* approach to informing the Party and initiating political debate that a *Nottingham Labour Briefing* quickly followed. Even though I was a member of the founding editorial board in Nottingham, it wasn't until some years later that I was to meet those behind the original *Briefing*. If only I had known.

Had I realised how deeply, incorrigibly committed to democratic socialism they were, I would have understood the trouble which was to come. The political tides which have pushed Labour into the domains of corporate lobbyists and privatising entrepreneurs have been unable to drown *Briefing's* voice or distort its message. How we act as stewards for what we hold in common will be the central theme of the twenty-first century. My congratulations to *Briefing* for the courage in addressing this when so many others wished to consign socialism to the silent corners of an abandoned past.

ALAN SIMPSON MP

RFMC LAUNCHED

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy rally at the Special Conference had over 500 people inside the hall and many more outside who couldn't get in – an encouraging way to launch the new Rank and File Mobilising Committee for Labour Democracy. Several organisations – CLPD, Clause IV, Independent Labour Publications, Institute for Workers' Control, Labour Co-ordinating Committee, National Organisation of Labour Students and Socialist Campaign for Labour Victory – came together on a common platform to mobilise and fight for the preservation of the Labour Party as an instrument of the working class.

JON LANSMAN, CLPD Executive Committee, June 1980

LONDON'S OURS!

After the most vicious GLC election campaign of all time, Labour has won a working majority on a radical socialist programme. The torrent of Macarthy-style red-baiting and gross distortion of the cost of Labour's programme – coupled with extensive media coverage – left no-one in any doubt that this GLC election was the trial run for the next general election campaign. The GLC is now a campaigning organ and a bastion of power for the labour movement within a national context.

KEN LIVINGSTONE, GLC Leader, June 1981

BENN CAN WIN

Despite some setbacks the deputy leadership campaign continues to grow from strength to strength. Tony Benn is picking up strong support in all three sections of the electoral college which has his opponents seriously worried.

NIGEL WILLIAMSON, Deputy Leadership Campaign Committee, August 1981

THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL!

Intimate family and personal relationships aren't easy to write about in *Briefing*. Most people don't think they're anything to do with politics, but in this issue we are publishing some articles which attempt to assert the right for all of us to express whatever forms of oppression we feel and to use the resources of the labour movement to help our own liberation.

ANN BLISS, writing in *Briefing*'s first *Streetlife Supplement* on Personal Politics, March 1982

STOP THIS SENSELESS WAR

The Labour Party leadership over the last few weeks of the Malvinas crisis has revealed itself to be totally bankrupt. Not a single voice in the Shadow Cabinet has been raised against Thatcher's war. Those who now call for negotiations but supported the sending of the fleet are hypocrites. Britain holds the Malvinas as a colonial possession. Of course Argentina is governed by a corrupt fascist junta – many of us have not just suddenly discovered that but have been saying so for years to British governments which continued to sell arms to them. But that cannot alter the fact that this war is senseless and unnecessary. Only when the labour movement is united in calling for the return of the fleet and an end to the war will we be in a position to aid the Argentinian workers in their fight to rid themselves of the junta and build socialism.

Editorial, June 1982

WHAT I SAID IN BELFAST

On August 7th this year I visited Belfast with a Troops Out delegation and subsequently spoke at the annual internment rally organised by Sinn Fein. My speech was a straightforward call for British withdrawal and an end to partition.

The only way to end the war is to allow the Irish people as a whole to determine their own future, free of British military, political or economic intervention. Until that happens the war will continue.

STEVE BUNDRED, GLC Councillor, October 1982

BRIEFING INTERVIEWS MARGARET HODGE

"I was delighted by the Conference decision on unilateralism after so many years. However the most controversial issue at Conference was obviously the register. The idea of any witch hunt is abhorrent and I wait with interest to see how the NEC believe they can implement this retrograde decision."

November 1982

THE TASKS AHEAD

Do we attempt to prop up capitalism by demanding useless sacrifices from working people as we have done so often in the past, or do we use the crisis to set our society firmly on the road to socialism? Labour cannot run capitalism more efficiently than the capitalists nor can there ever be a convenient time to introduce socialism within a capitalist society. The struggle for fundamental change in society must involve far more than MPs alone.

TONY BANKS, February 1983

FIGHTING FOR US ALL!

"What is different about the miners' strike? What is different is that now we know it's for real. There's been many speeches made when people didn't realise their relevance – now we're fighting for our lives, on the same cause all over the country. We know the miners are fighting for all of us. Everyone else who is fighting for survival is shielding behind the miners – the NHS workers fighting cuts and privatisation, the women of Greenham Common, the trade unionists at GCHQ – they're all on the same side."

TONY BENN MP, June 1984

ROUGH JUSTICE

Many innocent people were killed or scarred for life as a result of the Birmingham Pub Bombings in November 1974. What is less widely recognised is that victims of that tragic event include the six innocent men convicted wrongly of planting the bombs.

The case of the six men convicted in 1975 for the Birmingham pub bombings raised many questions which have never been answered. ROUGH JUSTICE – an independent Relatives Support Committee – urges concerned individuals and organisations to support their campaign to have these questions explored publicly.

November 1984

DON'T LEAVE US TO FIGHT ALONE!

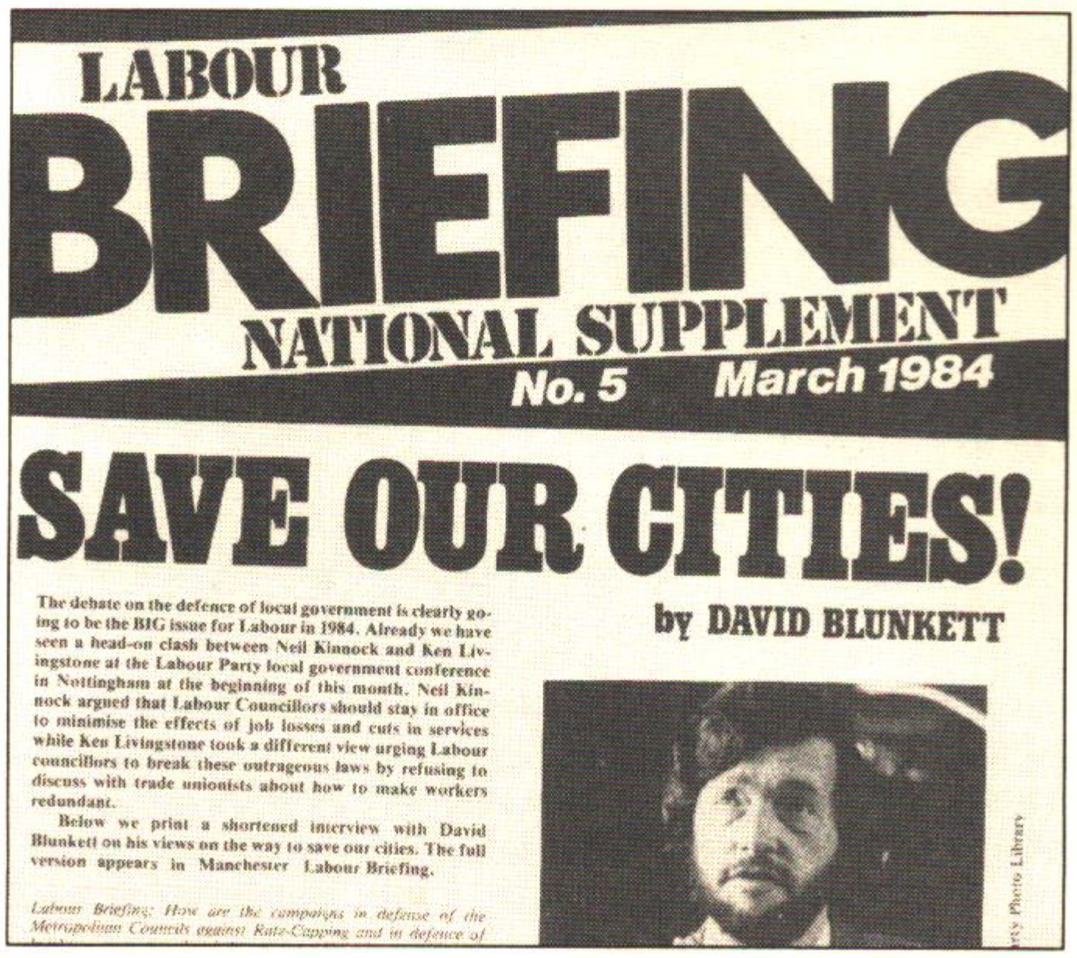
Lambeth councillors are facing possible surcharge and disqualification from office. Because they have consistently refused to comply with ratecapping, 32 of Lambeth's Labour councillors have received letters from the District Auditor stating he is "calculating the losses consequent upon the Council's delay in making a rate."

Lambeth has stood by the policy of the London Labour Party – overwhelmingly agreed at two conferences. Now individual councillors who have accepted the Party's mandate are at risk. They could be declared bankrupt and disqualified from holding office.

JOAN TWELVES, Secretary, Vauxhall CLP and
GREG TUCKER, Chair, Lambeth Local Govt Cttee, July 1985

WE WILL DEFEND OUR COMMUNITIES!

The events at Tottenham are a direct result of the feeling of hopelessness felt by local people, especially the youth on the estates. They face unemployment, bad housing and lack of opportunity. The Government must accept the blame for what has happened. And the labour movement – both in the unions and constituency parties – must stand four square with those youth, especially black youth, who are at the sharp edge of the class struggle.


LABOUR
BRIEFING
NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT
No. 5 March 1984

SAVE OUR CITIES!

by DAVID BLUNKETT

The debate on the defence of local government is clearly going to be the BIG issue for Labour in 1984. Already we have seen a head-on clash between Neil Kinnock and Ken Livingstone at the Labour Party local government conference in Nottingham at the beginning of this month. Neil Kinnock argued that Labour Councillors should stay in office to minimise the effects of job losses and cuts in services while Ken Livingstone took a different view urging Labour councillors to break these outrageous laws by refusing to discuss with trade unionists about how to make workers redundant.

Below we print a shortened interview with David Blunkett on his views on the way to save our cities. The full version appears in Manchester Labour Briefing.

Labour Briefing: How are the campaigns in defense of the Metropolitan Councils against Rate-Capping and in defence of

BERNIE GRANT, Leader, Haringey Council, November 1985


LONDON LABOUR 20p
BRIEFING
No 11 JUNE 1981
SPECIAL VICTORY ISSUE!

LONDON'S OURS!

Ken Livingstone
GLC Leader

After the most vicious GLC election campaign of all time, Labour has won a working majority on a radical socialist programme. The spectre of Macarthy-style red-baiting and gross distortion of the cost of Labour's programme – coupled with extensive media coverage – left no one in any doubt that the GLC election was the trial run for the next general election campaign. The results need to be seen in this light.

We are not just talking about another mid-term Council election showing the normal anti-government swing. Voters in Paddington, where I was the candidate, responded to the campaign on firm class lines. The Social Democratic candidate was crushed, with under 7 per cent of the vote. His only triumph was in the safe Tory areas of Hyde Park and Lancaster Gate. In Islington South we won our third highest swing to Labour – clear proof that the SDP took its vote from the Tories.

Rates

The only precedent in the campaign was the difficult round of rates. The manifesto we played up the need to increase rates and honestly got, but we failed to go on to the attack against the Government on this issue. Our central demand should have been for the restoration of the £300 million Rate Support Grant which Heseltine took from London. From now on, this demand will be at the centre of our ongoing campaign against the Government.

We will go into the next Parliament with Tory MPs and lead the demand that they vote in Parliament to restore our Rate Support Grant and housing programme cuts. Where they refuse, we shall publish their voting records and demand their removal.

We will be working with the NEC's Home Policy Committee to prepare detailed legislation for the next Labour Government. No one will be left in any doubt that the GLC is now a campaigning organ and a bastion of power for the labour movement within a national context.

Now for the Government

The Regional Executive, London Labour MPs and Local Government Committees will be drawn into the picture for the first phase. There is no doubt that the party was damaged in Lambeth and Camden by the supplementary rates which were forced on those councils by the Auditor and Heseltine. We must avoid being trapped in the same way. We must insure that we plan the way ahead rather than just respond to the Government's attacks as they arrive. Part of our task will be to sustain a holding operation until such time as the Tory Government can be brought down and replaced by a left-wing Labour

Continued next page

Labour—Take the Power!

Briefing for me was the seminal left paper of the 1980s bringing together the widest range of independent minded socialists in the labour movement. Devoid of the dead weight of Stalinism or obsessive sectarianism, it reflected a period of radicalism and innovation in local government. The previously taboo agenda of racism, sexism and homophobia was tackled for the first time in mainstream British politics.

Almost alone amongst the left press *Briefing* stood by me as I became embroiled in the issue of Britain's relationship to Ireland. Who would have thought when *Briefing* published the photographs of my first meeting with Gerry Adams that we would eventually see a Labour Prime Minister and Peter Mandelson warmly welcoming Sinn Fein to Number Ten Downing St and the Loyalist stronghold of Stormont?

Because *Briefing* remained open to all currents of opinion on the left the British media developed an obsessive interest in its outpourings. I suspect that there are probably more references to *Briefing* in British newspapers over the last twenty years than any other left journal.

Like most extended families I have had my rows with *Briefing*. But the magazine has always seen that that long-term interests are more important than any temporary issue and it has always been possible to come back to work on issues where there is agreement. For example, we profoundly disagreed with each other during the Kosovo war but that has not prevented *Briefing* from supporting my campaign for mayor and working for its victory.

KEN LIVINGSTONE MP

CHRIS KNIGHT INTERVIEWS KEN LIVINGSTONE

Chris: I think Briefing supporters would like to know how long you intend straddling the fence, and which side you will come down on if it becomes impossible to bridge the divide any longer.
Ken: If you have any doubts on that, you're mad. Jesus Christ! I mean, how easy it would be for me to sell out! Think how much would be on offer! Think of my value to my opponents! If I wanted to sell out, I would have done it long before now.
October 1987

BANKS ON BENN

Tony Benn is one of those rare politicians who understands how capitalism works to maintain the power of the ruling class whichever political party is in office. The Party needs Benn's ability to combine vision with experience and theory with practice.
TONY BANKS MP, April 1988

THE HILLSBOROUGH STADIUM DISASTER

Hillsborough was a working class tragedy. Our aim should be to smash the dictatorship of the Football Association and Football League and strip the arrogant and incompetent bourgeoisie who own our football clubs of their unaccountable power.
Editorial, May 1989

FREE THE TOTTENHAM THREE!

The Tottenham Three Families Campaign for Justice has recently been formed by the families and supporters of Mark Braithwaite, Engin Raghip and Winston Silcott.
Its aim is to secure the release of the three innocent men who were framed for the 1985 killing of PC Keith Blakelock in the Broadwater Farm uprisings.
October 1990

BRITAIN OUT OF THE GULF!

It was not Labour's left which sold arms to Saddam, organised arms trade fairs and turned a blind eye to the use of chemical weapons against the Kurds. It was the Western capitalist powers who cashed in.
ERIC HEFFER MP, October 1990

In the Shadow Cabinet Kinnock came down heavily against any idea that Labour should put forward an amendment to the Government's line on the Gulf, refused to respond to backbench demands for an emergency meeting of the PLP and rejected out of hand pleas from a delegation of Labour MPs to back a last minute peace initiative. Meanwhile, he has been attending private briefings with Defence Secretary Tom King on a Privy Council basis – something even Michael Foot refused to do during the Falklands War.
In his speech to the Commons, Kinnock disparaged peace conferences, negotiations, "linkages". He argued that Saddam represented a "perpetual threat to the security of the region and the wider world". Edward Heath pointed out the logic of this position: the conquest of Iraq itself.
RICHARD HEFFERNAN and MIKE MARQUSEE, February 1991

THE DAY THE SIX WALKED FREE

Suddenly the men themselves appeared. Immediately they went down to the waiting crowd and the press. For the first time I saw them outside prison visiting rooms. Their daughters pushed their way past the police cordon and rushed into their arms. For the families the nightmare was over! Their hard and consistent campaigning had made this come about. And make no mistake: it was their struggle that made all the other support possible. This is a victory for "little people". It was isolated groups, families, friends and supporters coming together, that defeated the establishment and eventually wrung justice out of a corrupt system.
VALERIE VENESS, April 1991

THE MASTER OF MENDACITY

Mandelson increasingly came to believe his own propaganda. In mid-1988 he reported to the Campaigns Strategy Committee that "the launch of the Party's NHS Bedwatch campaign" had "succeeded in making the NHS the dominant issue for the nation". Apparently, the extraordinary strike action by nurses had nothing to do with it.
October 1991

"NO TRIUMPH OF DEMOCRACY IN RUSSIA"

What is happening in the country can be characterised as the formation of a populist right wing dictatorship with growing fascist tendencies. Clearly there can't be any relations with a government which we consider to be a real disaster for the country and probably even for humankind.
BORIS KAGARLITKSY, October 1991

TWISTED LOGIC OF POLL TAX JAILINGS

Islington Council, Kinnock's flagship, has become the twenty-seventh Labour council to seek to jail non-payers. I was telephoned early in the morning by a court official who informed me that a warrant had been issued for my arrest for non-payment. Others have been visited by police. Many more have received letters to the same effect. We are told that the warrants were issued after a court hearing which took place in September. No one attended the hearing because, it appears, no one was summonsed to it.
LIZ DAVIES, November 1991

HAS THE LEFT GOT IT RIGHT ON YUGOSLAVIA?

The longer the war goes on, the worse future relations between Serbs and Croats will be. And if it engulfs Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, then all hell will break loose in south-eastern and central Europe.
JOHN TURKIE, December 1991

CLASSLESS SOCIETY?

WHEN PEOPLE say there are no classes in society they should come to Parliament and see the lobby at work. Big business walks straight into every cabinet office while pensioners coming to lobby their MPs queue up outside in the rain.
DENNIS SKINNER MP, December 1991

CLASS TRAITOR OF THE MONTH

Short is easily manipulated by the leadership who consider her a useful idiot. She is notorious for getting the wrong end of the stick in argument. One associate commented, "If the NEC were debating a nuclear attack Clare would want assurances that the bomber crew were all union members."
March 1992

ROY PLAYS THE RACE CARD

To grasp just how obnoxious Hattersley's abortive deal with the Tories on the Asylum Bill was you have to remember that the campaign against the Bill waged by refugee groups and their supporters had already won.
As Labour activists, we ought not to relate to refugees as victims, but as people with whom we can share our experiences of struggle, victory and defeat. Make contact with your local refugee community groups. Invite them to your

branch meetings. Find out about the background to the war or repression that drove them here. Learn from them. Learn about their approach to politics, their understanding of the world, their view of Britain and its problems.
You will find you have more in common with them than with Hattersley.
SUE LUKES, April 1992

BRITISH POLITICIANS AND IRISH REALITIES

IT IS NOT that the Irish issue has been relegated to the sidelines: it has been dragged away to some secret burial site, dumped, covered over, and written out of the political agenda. The indispensable first step towards an eventual settlement has to involve starting meaningful talks with Sinn Fein. On the agenda would have to be a British commitment to withdrawal and a bilateral ceasefire.
RONAN BENNETT, March 1992

CLASS TRAITOR

Neil Kinnock was nothing but a small-time hustler, a nervous opportunist with a big chip on his shoulder: forever insecure, forever apprehensive of the stab in the back. His selling point to the Party in 1983 was that he was "good on telly" but his appearances on TV in the following years were a source of perpetual embarrassment to Party members. He was the classic case of a small man in a big job – fearful of all potential rivals, intolerant of criticism from any quarter, thriving on the phoney praise of sycophants and protected from all contact with reality by a small circle of cynical courtiers.

Anyone with an independent mind or a personal commitment to any vestige of socialist principles was weeded out, often subject to derisive abuse via the media. Under Kinnock Labour became an ugly party very few people wanted to join. His "tough guy" routine with the Labour left, the "enemy within" was in stark contrast to his abject submissiveness in the face of any and all the institutions of the ruling class.

In creating a Party in his own image, Kinnock opened Labour up to an influx of corrupt and usually talentless self-seekers alien to the movement but keen to exploit it for personal advancement.
May 1992


LONDON LABOUR 30p
BRIEFING
No 26 FEBRUARY 1983

ALL OUT FOR BERMONDSEY!

by Peter Tatchell

Unlike existing Labour MPs, on Sunday 9th January, I was re-selected as the Labour PPC for Bermondsey without even having set in the House of Commons.

When I do take my seat on behalf of the local Party and community, I am pledged to work together with others to create a new style of MP and Labour politics which will break down the widespread public cynicism that 'politicians are all the same' and 'only in it for themselves'. Labour MPs should be different from the rest. But often they are not.

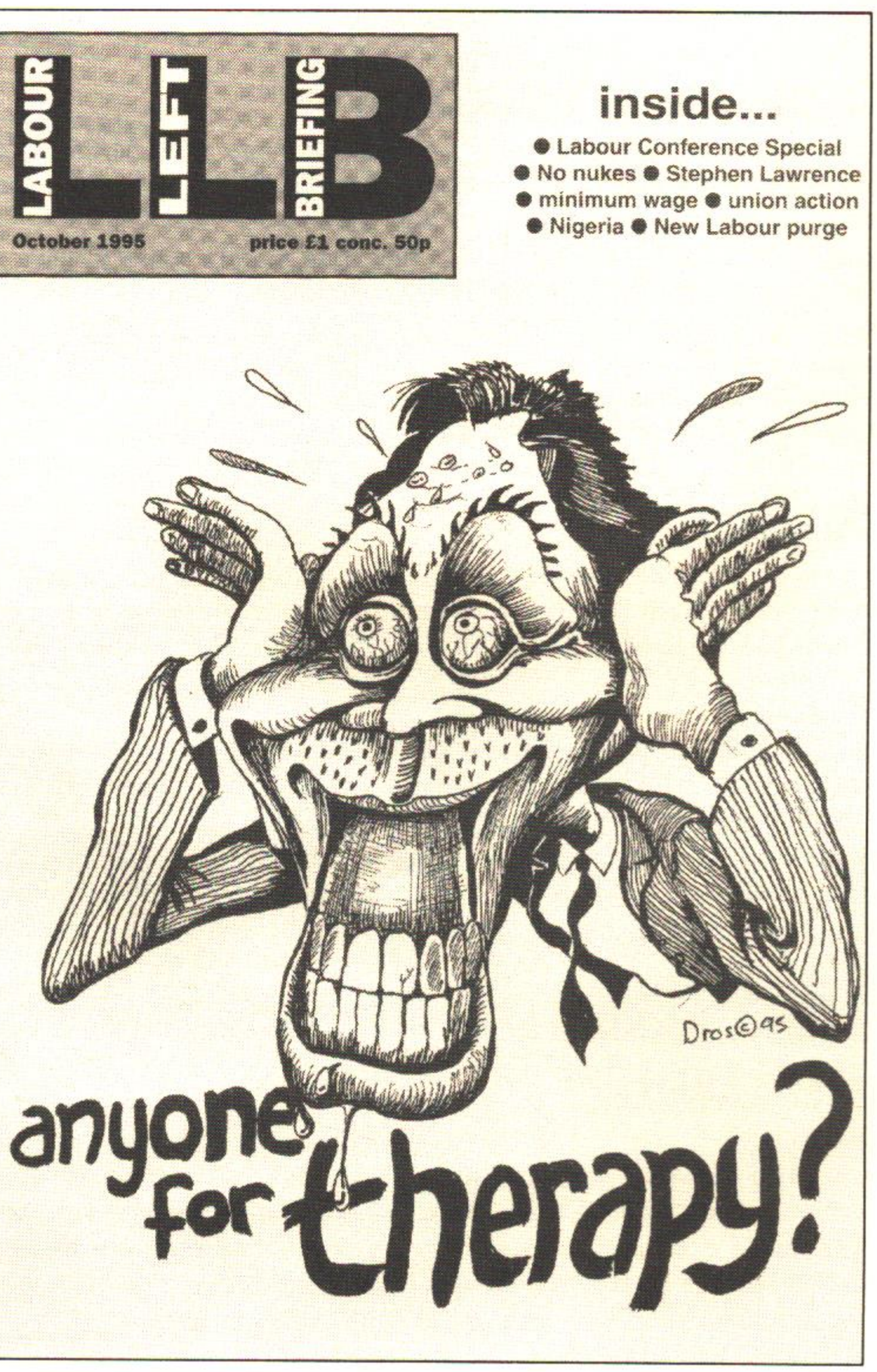
FULL-TIME MP

LOCAL COUNCIL FLAT

Continued on next page

DON'T WAIT FOR THE BY-ELECTION
Bermondsey needs YOUR help NOW!

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!



Briefing is part of the long, honourable tradition of radical dissent, playing an important role over the last two decades in challenging the political status quo and making the case for liberty, peace, justice, democracy and human rights. While others conform and acquiesce, *Briefing* asks awkward questions, promotes critical, sceptical thought, and refuses to defer to those in positions of power and authority. Imaginative, idealistic, irreverent and indefatigable, *Briefing* pioneered radical ideas like queer emancipation many years before they were deemed politically acceptable. The fact that queer human rights are now on the mainstream political agenda is due, in part, to *Briefing's* trail-blazing inititiatives. Congratulations! Thank you! And solidarity!

PETER TATCHELL

Without *Labour Left Briefing*, there would be simply no sustained, honest, unfettered criticism coming from within the Labour Party on the disastrous impact of New Labour.

JOHN PILGER

As New Labour lurches further to the right and internal democracy is withering, *Briefing* becomes increasingly important as a forum for socialist ideas and principles. Its honest reporting and informative articles are an invaluable resource.

MILDRED GORDON, former MP for Bow & Poplar

SIX REASONS TO READ *LABOUR BRIEFING:*

1. It gives you an invaluable guide to who not to vote for – although I must confess I have never managed to extend this to Pete Wilsman, who has received many votes over the years. This, however, can be rationalised as being in the interests of giving Margaret McDonagh a decent dancing partner.

2. It gives you a guide to who is causing the most angst by naming class traitors of the month. Although it has always also been good at a put down, Briefing once told me that I was "far too unimportant" to be a class traitor of the month!

3. If you save back issues you can reassure yourself that it is not only you that has moved across the spectrum of Labour. Others, for example Pat Hewitt or Margaret Hodge, c. 1983, make very good reading.

4. You can surprise GC members when they launch into attacks on you by quoting *Labour Briefing*. This sometimes confuses people as there is a natural reluctance to believe that anyone would buy it who did not believe in it.

5. It's not as vindictive as *Tribune*.

6. Overall there is a need for some plurality and diversity amongst the press. Therefore, after having thought about it, I will renew my subscription for another year.

RICHARD BALFE MEP

The working class and ordinary people need good friends and support against imperialism. We believe that *Labour Left Briefing* is doing good work. *Briefing* has forged strong international links with us, building a bridge between Britain and Turkey. We will continue to support joint action with *Labour Left Briefing*, and are ready to do whatever is needed in the common struggle for socialism. Congratulations and comradely greetings on your 20th anniversary.

ERKAN GOK, Management Committee, Day-Mer Turkish and Kurdish Community Centre, London N16

Our congratulations to *Labour Left Briefing* on the occasion of your 20th anniversary. You have our full support for your continuing defence of workers in struggle.

JIM DAVIES, Shop Stewards Committee Treasurer, on behalf of the 500 sacked Liverpool Dockers and their families.

BLAIR CAN BE STOPPED

Tony Blair is the candidate of the British establishment. This establishment knows that Labour is now well placed to form the next government and is eager to ensure that that government serves its interests. Blair is not only the media's man – he is the City's man, the employers' man, the judges' man, the coppers' man. His election would be a guarantee that the next Labour Government would pursue none of the radical measures required to address the increasingly desperate conditions facing our people.

June 1994

THE TRIAL OF THE MCLIBEL TWO

After a year of legal wrangling – including twenty-seven pre-trial hearings – McDonald's, the burger behemoth, represented by Richard Rampton QC, one of the country's most expensive libel lawyers, will confront Dave Morris and Helen Steel, two unwaged environmental activists, who will represent themselves in a trial that could last six months.

"We've already won because we've refused to be intimidated, "Morris insists. "People must stand up against attempts by wealthy corporations to use the libel laws as a means of censorship."

July 1994

DEFEND SOCIALISM

Clause IV has obviously become an embarrassment to the Labour Party leadership, which is already far adrift from the principles on which the Party was formed. I didn't join the Labour Party to try to make capitalism work more effectively and efficiently than the Tories. I joined because I want to see a rotten, corrupt system replaced by socialism, and the abolition of exploitation, inequality and injustice.

ARTHUR SCARGILL, November 1994

CLASS TRAITOR OF THE MONTH

This month's Class Traitor gives ugly people a bad name. That darling of the intelligentsia, Robin Cook MP, is little more than an icon of political cowardice and personal vanity.

Of course, Cook is hamstrung by the fact that Blair simply wants to have no foreign policy discernibly different from the Tory Government's. But the problem is deeper than that. Over the years, Cook has realigned his political compass so often that waffle has become a way of life and mode of thought. The most fluent speaker and intellect in the Shadow Cabinet simply has nothing left to say.

April 1995

LIZ SMEARED

The process of selecting Labour's prospective parliamentary candidate in the key marginal of Leeds North East was a model of one member one vote democracy. The constituency had volunteered for an all-women shortlist. Labour Party officials even invited a Yorkshire TV crew to film the whole process – from nominating meetings to the final ballot.

But when the winner of that final ballot proved to be Liz Davies, a left-wing councillor from Islington, the Party hierarchy began looking for ways to overturn the result. Within days, a campaign of hostile publicity was launched.

When some press coverage of the NEC decision treated the claims about Davies with scepticism, there was a quick riposte from the leader's camp. The *Guardian* ran letters from two Blairite Islington councillors condemning Davies' alleged "disloyalty" to the Party – particularly her refusal to support cuts in adventure playgrounds.

September 1995

STEPHEN LAWRENCE

It has been two years since the CPS dropped charges against two men for the murder of our son Stephen without even caring to consult or advise us of their decision. It was an act as hurtful and painful in its effect as the news that Stephen had been killed.

No family should ever have to experience the last two years of our lives. This is the worst kind of fame. We have been brought into the public spotlight not by our own acts but by the failure of others who were under a public duty to act.

DOREEN and NEVILLE LAWRENCE, October 1995

UNDER THE SPOTLIGHT

I am very lucky. I have not lost my job or my home or my freedom, which is the price paid every day by people who are victimised at work or in the courts. Becoming an MP has never been my main aim in life. I went into the selection to take part in the Labour Party and to argue the case for socialist policies. Finding myself unexpectedly under the media spotlight was often an uncomfortable and nerve-wracking experience. But as socialists we must never allow ourselves to be ruled by fear either of the leadership or of the media.

Liz Davies, November 1995

LABOUR'S LANDSLIDE

On May Day, people were voting not for "New Labour" but for improved public services paid for through progressive taxation. They want a concrete change to a more just and equal society, not just mere rhetoric or a "change of tone".

June 1997

DEATH OF A PRINCESS

The response to Diana Spencer's death is symptomatic of the retreat from reason and democracy characteristic of this phase of capitalism. In her life and death the pre-modern met the post-modern, the world of feudal right and blood status entered the media-refracted society of the spectacle. The result should alarm all those who want to live in a community shaped by informed, critical, genuinely pluralist debate.

MIKE MARQUSEE, October 1997

WELFARE CUTS

The unity of the Government and the Tories means that on this issue at least, we have a de facto coalition government. The real argument is no longer between the two major parties but between the New Labour Government and the Labour left.

February 1998

NEC VICTORY

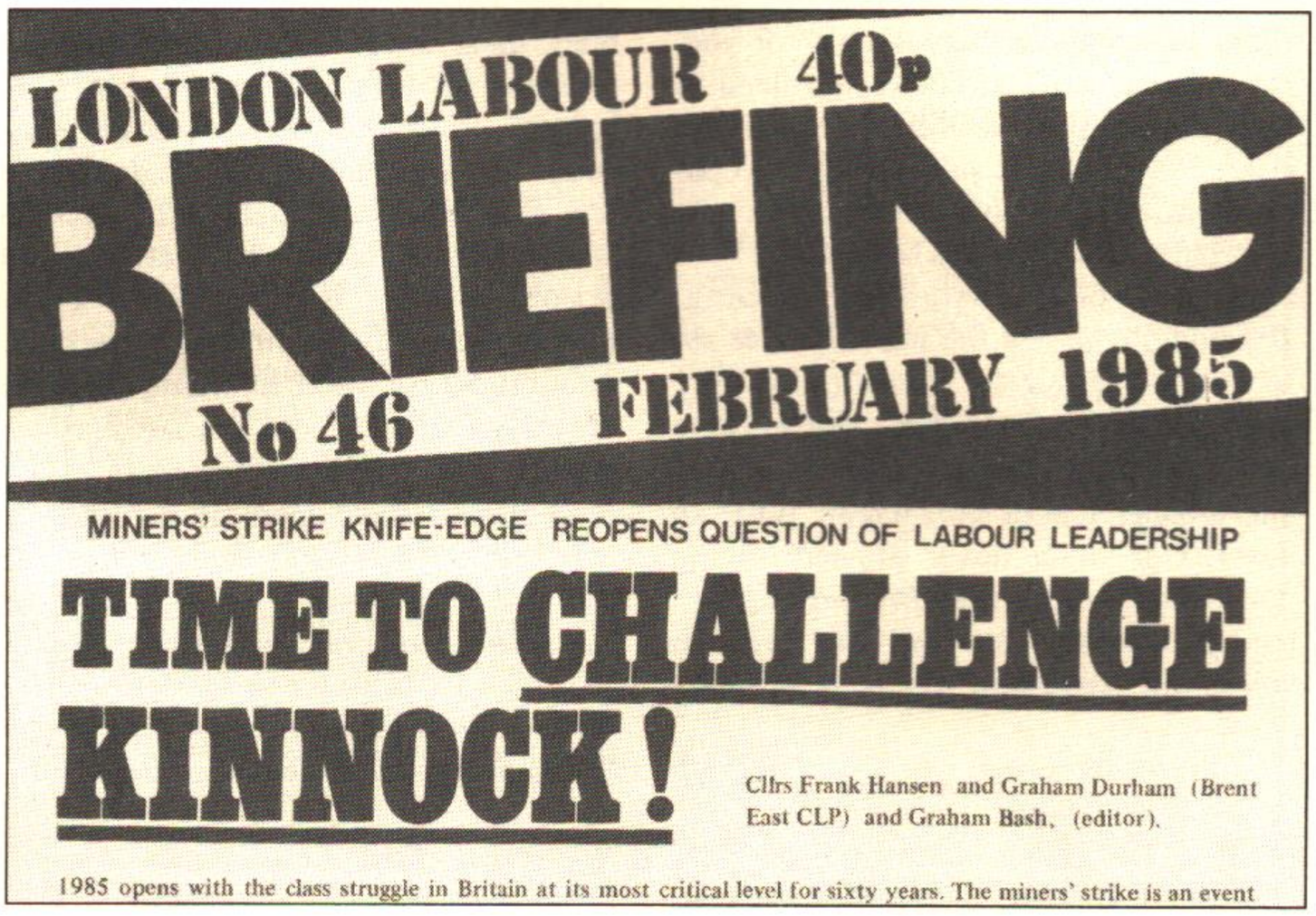
The victory of the Grassroots Alliance candidates in Labour's NEC elections proves that ordinary members can take on the Party machine, the Government, the media, and win.

November 1998

STOP THE WAR!

Like the attacks on Iraq, the intervention in the Balkans is intended to assert the unbridled prerogatives of the world's most powerful military state. An insatiable thirst for credibility is now guiding this war. A terrible price will be paid by ordinary people in order for a handful of politicians to save face.

May 1999


LONDON LABOUR 40p

BRIEFING

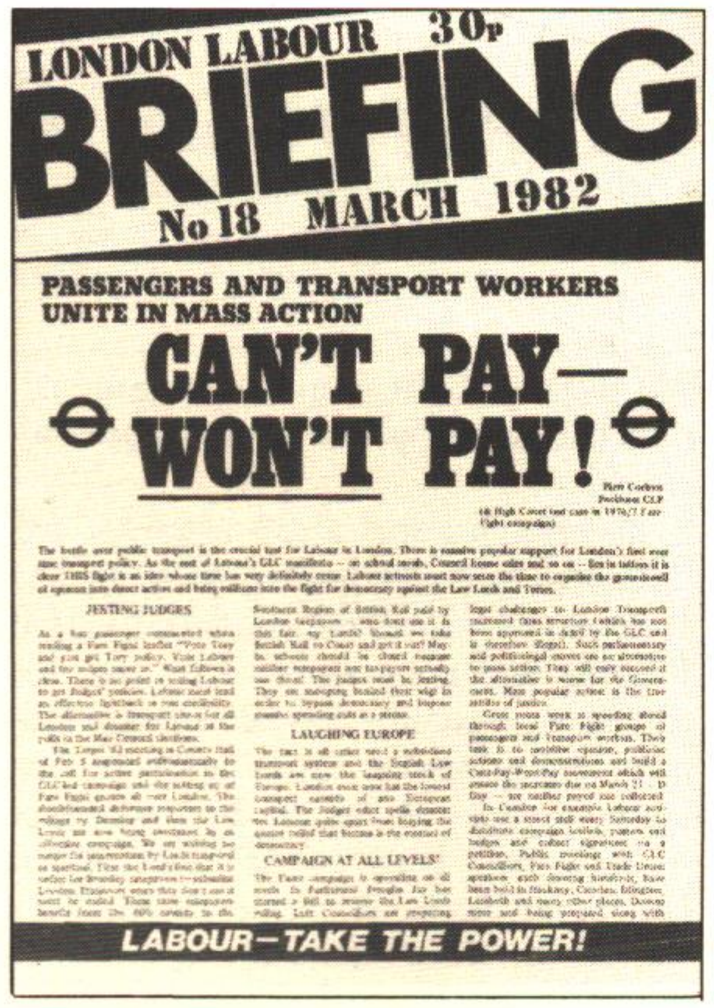
No 46 FEBRUARY 1985

MINERS' STRIKE KNIFE-EDGE REOPENS QUESTION OF LABOUR LEADERSHIP

TIME TO CHALLENGE KINNOCK!

Cllrs Frank Hansen and Graham Durham (Brent East CLP) and Graham Bash, (editor).

1985 opens with the class struggle in Britain at its most critical level for sixty years. The miners' strike is an event


LONDON LABOUR 30p

BRIEFING

No 18 MARCH 1982

PASSENGERS AND TRANSPORT WORKERS UNITE IN MASS ACTION

CAN'T PAY— WON'T PAY!

Piers Corbyn
Peckham CLP
(& High Court test case in 1970s Fare Fight campaign)

The battle over public transport is the crucial test for Labour in London. There is massive popular support for London's first ever mass transport policy. As the rest of Labour's GLC manifesto — on school meals, Council house sales and so on — lies in tatters it is clear THIS fight is an idea whose time has very definitely come. Labour activists must now seize the time to organise the groundswell of opinion into direct action and bring millions into the fight for democracy against the Law Lords and Tories.

JESTING JUDGES

As a bus passenger commuted when reading a Fare Fight leaflet "Vote Tory and you get Tory policy. Vote Labour and two judges move in." Most Labourites chose. There is no point in voting Labour to get Judges' policies. Labour must lead an effective fightback or lose credibility. The alternative is transport use or fall all Londons and disaster for Labour in the polls on the Man Council elections.

The Labour GLC meeting in County Hall of Feb 5 augmented enthusiastically to the call for active participation in the GLC-led campaign and the setting up of Fare Fight groups all over London. The abolitionist defiance responses to the rulings by Denning and then the Law Lords are now being developed by an effective campaign. We are working for merger the non-payment/fare by Law transport as spectacle. Then the Lords free that it is unfair for Bromley ratepayers — subsidise London Ratepayers argue that fare it can at least be stalled. Those same ratepayers benefit from the 60% cutback to the Southern Region of British Rail paid by London ratepayers — who does use it in this fair, say Lords? Should we take British Rail to Court and get it out? Maybe schools should be closed because neither ratepayer nor taxpayer actually use them? The judges must be jesting. They are indulging limited class wigs in order to bypass democracy and impose massive spending cuts as a means.

LAUGHING EUROPE

The fact is all other need a subsidised transport system and the Scottish Law Lords are now the laughing stock of Europe. London must now fall the lowest transport subsidy of any European capital. The Judges' edict spells disaster for London quite apart from forcing the council tenant that increase in the standard of democracy.

CAMPAIGN AT ALL LEVELS!

The Fares campaign is spreading on all levels. In Parliament Peoples Jim has started a Bill to reverse the Law Lords ruling. Left Councillors are preparing legal challenges to London Transport's proposed cross subsidies (which has not been approved in detail by the GLC and is therefore illegal). Such parliamentary and political moves are an alternative to mass action. They will only succeed if the alternative is worse for the Government. Mass popular action is the true arbiter of justice.

Great press week is spreading ahead through local Fare Fight groups of passengers and transport workers. Their task is to mobilise opinion, publicise actions and demonstrations and build a Don't-Pay-Won't-Pay movement which will ensure the increases due on March 21 - 10 May — are neither paved nor collected.

In London for example Labour activists use a stand each every Saturday to distribute campaign leaflets, posters and badges and collect signatures on a petition. Public meetings with GLC Councillors, Fare Fight and Trade Union speakers each drawing hundreds, have been held in Hackney, Camden, Islington, Lambeth and many other places. Dozens more are being prepared along with

LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Labour Briefing has been an inspiration to those on the left over the years since it was published.

The 80s and 90s were pretty hard for socialists, subjected as we were to a steady persistent stream of propaganda suggesting that socialism in all its forms was finished and done with and the remnants of it that existed in the world had to be blanked off and cleared up by market forces.

Many people in the Labour Party came to terms with what was called "post modernism" ending up as the most passionate advocates of the very capitalist system that the labour movement was set up to replace. But it was obvious that the people we represent were experiencing unemployment, exclusion and insecurity, the public services were being eroded and a new imperialism was returning in the name of maintaining a global economy.

For those who understood this, the news, information and opinions expressed in *Briefing* provided a source of inspiration not available to the public as a whole.

Now the tide is turning, and after nearly three years of New Labour, more and more people are coming to appreciate the importance of what *Briefing* was saying and ideas which were mocked and jeered at a few years ago are now becoming the conventional wisdom of a generation who want a better world and know that market forces cannot delivery it.

Seattle proved that this was not a movement of opinion confined to Britain, that it was shared worldwide and expressed worldwide, and the relevance of internationalism came back on to the agenda.

Long may *Briefing* continue to guide us through this century, giving us hope that we can do better and showing us the means by which it can be done.

TONY BENN MP

Twenty years of *(London) Labour (Left) Briefing*

(continued from front page)

non-sectarian basis from local to national, from bottom to top, and not the other way around.

● Another special characteristic was the united front approach of *Briefing*. The statement in our first editorial – that *Briefing* was not controlled by any one tendency or group – has remained a fundamental principle. From our very first issue we declared war on the leaderships of the Labour Party and the trade unions (and peace has never been concluded) but we retained a commitment and loyalty to the mass organisations of the labour movement. We were not in the business of seeking to replace or compete with either the trade unions or the Constituency Labour Parties.

● Our task was to break down all those divisions that hampered class unity and prevented the movement from realising its strength:

•the division between local and national politics, as we quickly transcended our initially narrow local government base and broadened our political attack;

•the division between national and international politics, as we gradually acquired an international dimension;

•the divisions in the left itself, as we began to unite the best, most consistent comrades in the Bennite camp together with the most sensible sections of the revolutionary left;

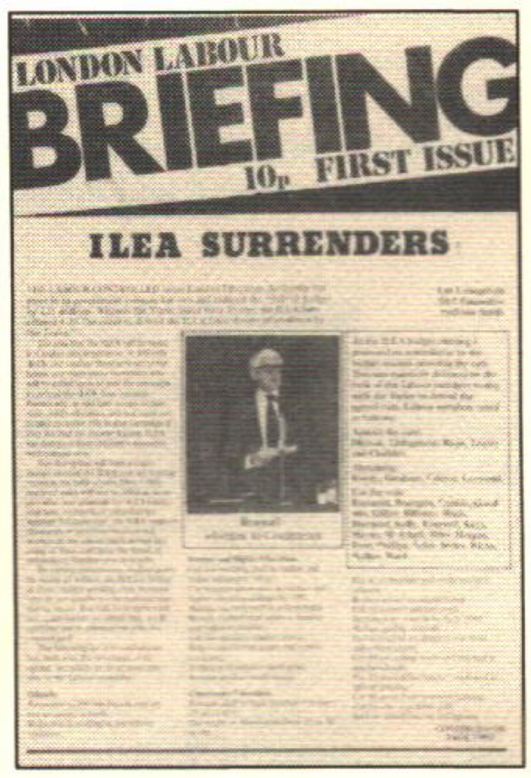
With this emphasis on breaking down divisions and uniting struggles, it was a small step to recognise that oppression did not stop at the GC or trade union branch. Under the pressure of the women's movement and the real world outside, we made the simple discovery that we, Labour Party members and trade unionists, were also women and men, mothers, fathers, single parents, lesbians and gay men. We were racially and sexually oppressed, rape victims, disabled, and victims of mental institutions. The *Streetlife Supplement* was born – where we wrote personally about our experiences of oppression and developed political conclusions from it.

● In keeping with everything else, we wrote as human beings – usually avoiding dry, abstract analyses and writing with all of the anger, bitterness, humour, irreverence and mischief that human beings possess. The "hit lists" of the 1980s were succeeded in the 1990s by what was probably our most popular series: Class Traitor of the Month. And even in the direst of times, as New Labour has progressively taken over the Labour Party and undermined the very basis of *Briefing*'s existence, we have somehow maintained our humour and irreverence – the Geoff Martin column, being the latest example.

Over the last twenty years there have been a number of low points, almost too many to bear thinking about.

● Of all the defeats we have lived through, Tony's Benn's defeat in the Deputy Leadership election was perhaps more critical for the future development of the movement than any of us realised at the time. There followed many more: the miners' strike, the ratecapping debacle, the Kinnock witch-hunts, the successive policy sell-outs, the 1992 election, and then the growth of New Labour which has called into question the very nature of the Labour Party.

● In the wake of these defeats came the various defections from the left. *Briefing* must have promoted more eventual traitors to the working class than any magazine or organisation had done for years. I still remember how we felt after Ken Livingstone's defection in the split over ratecapping in 1985 (he came back two years later). At the first big demonstration after this I was literally chased by a leader of one of the revolutionary sects. "Told you so, told you so," he said. I have never seen a man happier than he was that day. I was bitter and remember my reply. "Yes, you were right. Life must be very simple for you. No need to build alliances; no need to build anything in practice; no need to take risks. Just sit on the sidelines, and prophesy defeat and betrayal. You may be useless, but you will always be right."


LONDON LABOUR
BRIEFING
10p FIRST ISSUE
ILEA SURRENDERS

● After the Brighton bombing, *Briefing* committed the unpardonable sin of expressing human sympathy for Tory Cabinet Ministers – thinking that we were somehow connecting with the feelings of the broader labour movement. What an error! Our phone never stopped ringing for a month, as outraged *Briefing* supporters denounced us, and we were forced to publish a grovelling retreat in the next issue.

But we have had our share of high points to remember.

● The left's victory on the GLC played a major role in opposing and confronting Thatcher's Government. As the recent London Mayor selection process has graphically shown, these positive experiences have not been forgotten.

● We have seen *Briefing* grow and develop in the 1980s – and then its development into the well-written, professional looking magazine of the 1990s. Much of the credit for this has to go to Mike Marqusee, our editor at the beginning of the 1990s and subsequently our political correspondent who drafted almost every editorial for the last ten years as well as writing a number of articles in his own name. Credit must also go to Gary Drostle, whose exclusive cartoons have lent *Briefing* a distinct visual identity and so often made our point better than any number of words could do.

● There was a feeling that divine justice was at work when Liz Davies was elected to the constituency section of the NEC. An historical wrong was being put right at last – the appalling treatment she received from the Party leadership when they overturned her selection as the parliamentary candidate for Leeds North East.

● Where we stood firm on unpopular issues of the time – Broadwater Farm; the miscarriages of justice cases; support for Sinn Fein; the institutional racism of the police and its individual victims – mainstream opinion has eventually caught up.

So that's my potted history of the last twenty years. I suppose it's important to mark these anniversaries as a historical record of what we were and what we have become. But much more important is the future. I remember one comrade, who a few years back attacked me for being a stooge of imperialism (I forget the exact crime). He left *Briefing* – but a few months later we welcomed him back. He apologised for what had happened the previous year and I told him last year was history, what mattered was next year. I think that we must approach the future in that spirit. Whatever it holds, I hope our socialist intransigence, coupled with our pluralism, democracy and accountability, will play its full part as the left and the labour movement reassemble their forces for the struggles of the next millennium.

● *LLB* thanks Wernham Printers for their hard work and endurance over most of the last 20 years.