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BIRMINGHAM LABOUR

BRIEFING

INCORPORATING NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

No. 26 November 1986

Birmingham Labour Group and

THE METSO MONCRIEFFE AFFAIR

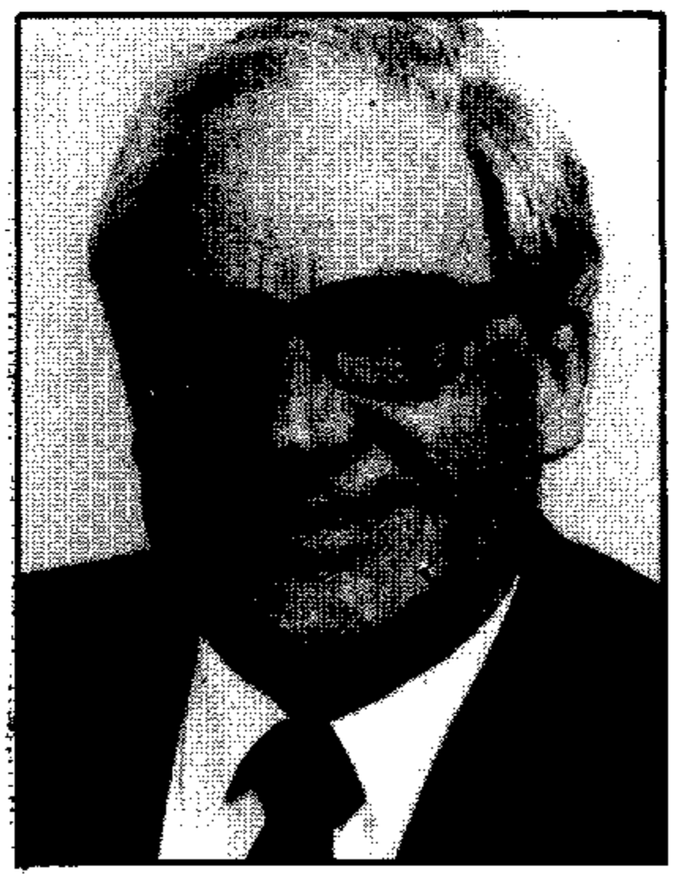
On 7 October, at a full meeting of Birmingham City Council, Councillor Phil Murphy presented a petition. Signed by over 4,000 Birmingham residents, the petition said: 'We the undersigned residents of Birmingnam call upon Birmingnam City Council to do all in its powers to stop Metso Moncrieffe being deported from Britain. We also call upon the Council to make Metso Moncrieffe a Freeman of the City.'

The petition was seconded and after voting the Lord Mayor declared the petition could not be accepted because there were more votes against it being received than for. It is almost unprecedented for a petition not to be received by Council - they are quite distinct from resolutions.

After this declaration, two supporters of Workers Against Racism unfolded their banner and shouted 'No deportation! Metso Moncrieffe must stay!' The police were ordered to remove them. Pandemonium had broken out in the Council Chamber.

Meanwhile Phil Murphy challenged the ruling asking if it was against practice, precedent and procedure for a resolution to be declared 'lost'. The reply said it was up to the Council. Council leader, Dick Knowles, then deplored the demonstration and said the petition would have been received but for the reference to making Metso Moncrief'e a Freeman of the city.

C'llr Mick Rice then demanded a named vote. This was refused. Then C'llr Gurdev Manku re-presented the petition under his name. This was ruled out of order. C'llr Albert Bore challenged this ruling at least six times because the Lord Mayor refused to allow the City Solicitor to make a ruling.



Dick Knowles - opposed receiving petition.

Pandemonium continued with Albert Bore siting down when the Lord Mayor stood up and then rising again as soon as the Lord Mayor sat down. The impasse was broken when the Lord Mayor called on C'llr Carless to present another petition. This he did.

Although there is a certain element of farce in these events, some important lessons can be learned. Normally petitions are not won or lost, merely referred to the relevant committee for consideration. How then did it come about that a petition to help prevent the deprtation of a young black man failed to be received by a Labour conrtrolled Council? Dick Knowles statement to the Council said it was because it referred to making Metso Moncrieffe a Freeman of the city. In this way C'llr Knowles was making it quite clear that he was prepared to collude with the Tories on Birmingham City Council to defeat a petition because he did not like the request being made. It is important to remember here that it was not being decided whether to confer Freeman status simply whether or not to receive the petition. Knowles was saying to over 4,000 residents that he was not even prepared to contemplate such a request, let alone grant it. He was also prepared to collude with the Tories in removing from a member of the Labour Group a fundamental right - to present petitions on behalf of residents.

There is, however, a broader lesson to be drawn. It is evident that the controlling right wing of the Labour group is quite happy to make superficial claims about its commitment to racial equality. These claims seem

continued overleaf...

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to be made as a public relations exercise to mislead the Black electorate in their wards into believing they are seriously committed to racial equality policies. But when this same right wing group are called on to demonstrate their commitment in practice they are found wanting. The superficviality of their claims become evident. Dick Knowles and those who support him seem to be telling the Black of Birmingham and the country as a whole that they are quite happy to sit around and see black people deported because doing something about it might cause them 'embarassment' and force them to change their preconceived notions of what black people should or should not do to fight racism.

The Metso Moncrieffe affair shows clearly why Dick Knowles and the right wing have so strenuously resisted Birmingham District Labour Party policies on Race Relations and Equal Opportunities: they are simply not committed to them.

The Black communities can draw only one conclusion from this and the Labour Group's record in the past: Knowles must go. In the words of a British war time leader: "You have sat here too long for any good you might have been doing".

Black people are fighting a war against racism. We can only support those leaders who are prepared to join in that war. Those who are not part of the solution are part of the problem. Knowles is clearly not part of the solution.

Councillor Phil Murphy.

Postscript:

After writing this article, Phil Murphy told *'Briefing'* that he had learned that Knowles and company had decided that it was Phil Murphy and not Dick Knowles who had to go. It appears they have decided to remove him from vice-chair of the Race Relations and Equal Opportunities Committee at the next Council meeting. It seems they are also instructing officers of the Council not to allow him to operate as vice-chair of the committee, or indeed as chair during the absence of the chairperson. This is because only a full Council meeting can revoke an appointment made by a full Council meeting. Phil is concerned about the legality of these instructions and also what it is that people are afraid he might do while acting as chair person'

Youth and Ireland

Day School

8 November

Birmingham University.

Speakers inckude Sinn Fein, NUR, Christine Crawley MEP, Black Sections, LWI, LCI and many more.
Get your students' union, labour club or other organisation to sponsor the school. For more information, contact: Jim Padmore, c/o 64 Bickton Close, Erdington, Birmingham, or tel: 021 643 5904.

Next month.....

Next month *'Briefing'* will have full coverage of the visit by Sinn Fein councillors that was taking place as we went to press. There will also be the usual up to date coverage of what's going on in the Birmingham party.

YARDLEY CONTINUES WITCH-HUNT

Predictably enough, the Labour Party's National Executive Committee (NEC) has sided with the Yardley constituency party in its complaint about Bob Whitehead's membership of Birmingham District Labour Party.

The letter from party headquarters in Walworth Road is interesting for a number of reasons.

Firstly, the letter was sent to the Selly Oak party, of which Bob is a member, and the Yardley party, but not to Bob himself, the person at the centre of the disoute.

Secondly, the NEC seems, from the letter, to be more than a little confused about the whole business. None of this, of course, will be any surprise to anyone who has been on the receiving end of Yardley's attentions in the past.

The letter, like the previous decision on the refusal of the Yardley party to accept five people, some of whom were transfers from other constituencies, into membership, makes no mention of the word 'expel'. Nor does it give any reason for its implied call for the suspension of the comrade. And of course neither Bob nor the Selly Oak party had any chance to present their case to the NEC. Sounds familiar?

Meanwhile, the Selly Oak Party has taken a firm and unequivocal stand on the whole business. The party has a long-standing opposition to expulsions, was affiliated to 'Labour Against the Witch-hunt' several years ago, and submitted a resolution on the Khan/Scally case to this year's national conference.

At a recent General Committee meeting, Councillor Albert Bore proposed a resolution advising the NEC politely, but firmly, that Selly Oak was deeply disturbed by this attack on one of its members, that it understood the original NEC decision as upholding the exclusions from Yardley, but that Selly oak was a different constituency party and was keen to have Bob as a member. The resolution was passed unanimously and Bob was similarly re-endorsed as one of the party's delegates to the District Party.

Meanwhile, the Yardley party, still sulking, have tried to take it out on their left delegates to the District Party by withdrawing their delegation, which, of course, includes the District Party secretary, Margaret Wells. In addition, Yardley were one of the four Birmingham parties not to submit a resolution to this year's party conference. Again, they were named at the last District Party meeting as one of the four party's holding back funds that are essential to the work of the District.

Nice one, Yardley! Keep it up!

BIRMINGHAM LCC - A FADING INFLUENCE

A major review of the growth of the Labour left in Birmingham is being compiled by the Birmingham Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC).

This review comes hot on the heels of a similar LCC project nationally. Birmingham LCC feels it is necessary to take stock of its position in the city, where its own influence has faltered and declined at a time when nationally the LCC is claiming to have seized the initiative, and when, in Birmingham, the focus for the left has shifted to *'Briefing'* and the new Summerfield Group.

A five page first draft document sets out a commentary on the fortunes of the left since the formation of Birmingham Labour Left (BLL) in 1981. Its political analysis apparently owes much to Andrew Lydon, a member of Hall Green CLP and a 'veteran' of the old BLL.

The failure of the Birmingham LCC is attributed mainly to the difficulties it has found in presenting a united and distinctive stance to the rest of the party. The document points to the lengthy debate that took place in 1985 over the 'rates crisis'. LCC members ended up not putting forward any alternatives, in contrast the the firm stance coming from the recently formed *'Briefing'* group. Moreover, as the document explains, "a long standing LCC member, Albert Bore, had been a principal assistant to Dick Knowles in presenting the leadership's case", resulting in further fragmentation within the LCC.

True to the openly frank and honest tone throughout the document, it admits that *'Briefing'* supporters have been the loudest single voice at District Party level. LCC members did not act in unison in realising the need to break with the *'Briefing'* block and put forward alternatives "to prevent the LCC becoming a subsidiary to Briefing."

The review is scathing of the new Summerfield Group, which it claims has "continued the closed practice originating with the Birmingham Labour Left...thus the organised left becomes a group that is more personally cosy rather than coherently political". The Summerfield Group is blamed for the failure of Lynne Jones to be elected to the Labour Group Officers (Executive) position in 1986, and for exposing Theresa Stewart to a serious challenge for her position as chairperson of the Social Services committee.

Although a welcome and necessary contribution to serious political debate in Birmingham, the LCC document skates over the fundamental strategic problems facing the 'soft' left. Albert Bore and Greg Campbell set the agenda for this sector of the left in 1983 with a strategy they called "drawing in the centre". The most fundamental factor underlying the fading influence of Birmingham LCC, and its failure to present a coherent political alternative, lies in the realisation that this strategy has proved to be a complete flop. They have been left isolated and marginalised by the polarisation of the Birmingham party around two clear and rival pathways - more of the same under Dick Knowles and company, or a new socialist administration focussed on the Summerfield Group/ *'Briefing'* left.

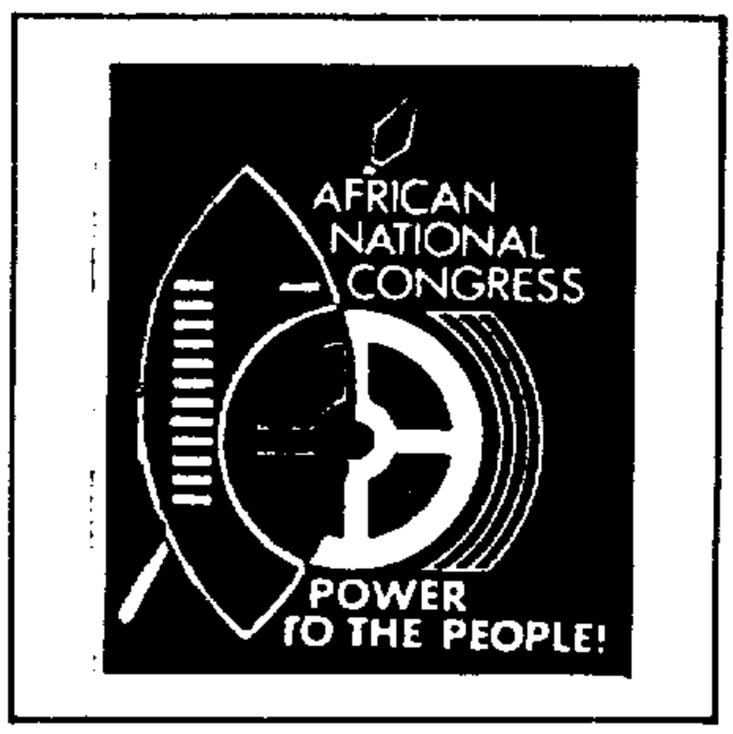
Birmingham LCC faces a choice as to which side of the fence it is going to jump. Or will it continue to sit painfully above the rest of us, bemoaning the fact that no-one any longer takes any notice of it?

Youth Against Apartheid

Over the last twelve months there has been a massive increase in the struggle to overthrow apartheid in South Africa and Namibia. The white South African regime has responded with batons, bullets, detentions and murders.

'Youth Against Apartheid' is open to all under 26 who wish to fight for sanctions against apartheid and build solidarity with the organisations struggling for freedom in South Africa and Namibia.

Youth Against Apartheid meet every Thursday at Birmingham's Other Bookshop 137 Digbeth, 7.30 pm.



CAMPAIGN FOR THE REINSTATEMENT OF AMIR KHAN AND KEVIN SCALLY

The struggle continues...

Despite losing by a narrow vote at Conference, Amir and myself will continue to campaign for our re-admission to the Labour Party. Prior to Conference, we had been informed that the National Executive Committee (NEC) had decided to reopen the case, because of our legal challenge. Our immediate task now will be to try to ensure that this does not result in a stitch-up. If Ken Cure is in charge, then it will be.

The vote at Conference was 3.4 million to 2.7 million. We managed to win the support of the vast majority of constituency delegates as well as that of the Transport and General Workers Union, NUPE and several smaller unions. During our lobbying of trade unionists before the vote, it was clear that many had decided to oppose the resolution only on the grounds that the NEC was re-examining the case. Moreover, many delegations were swayed by the very broad hint that Larry Whitty, Labour Party General Secretary, had given in his speech on the debate. He indicated that cases like our would be dealt with very favourably by the NEC. Afterwards, Whitty told me that he had opposed our expulsion but conceded that the NEC majority would not be influenced by his views.

During Conference, both Amir and myself were struck by the extent of the goodwill and support we received from ordinary delegates. We were invited to speak at numerous fringe meetings, including the *Tribune* rally, the *Campaign Group of Labour MPs* rally, the *Campaign for Labour Party Democracy* rally and the *Labour Co-ordinating Committee* rally. It was clear that support came from right across the political spectrum, and that even many right wingers were uneasy at the expulsions. On the



Kevin Scally

conference fringe circuit, Sparkbrook constituency party gained a reputation that it will take a long time to live down. On the eve of the final day of Conference, at the celebrated *Red Revue* performed before an audience of 1500 delegates including Neil Kinnock



Amir Khan

himself, Sparkbrook CLP was the subject of one of the most caustic sketches.

Otherwise, this was a Conference when the leadership was in complete control and where trade unions, in particular, were unwilling to rock the boat. Our cause was a particularly sensitive one, concerning as it did the party's deputy leader. Many therefore chose the 'safer' option of leaving the NEC enquiry team to deal with the matter. The left, however, should place little faith in this right wing dominated NEC coming up with a just solution, unless political pressure continues to be applied. For this reason our campaign will have to continue. Amir and myself are still taking speaking engagements all over the country and this will continue until our readmission has been won. All constituency parties will soon be circulated with a further appeal for support. We shall be sending out model resolutions for submission to regional party conferences. Activists should be lobbying inside trade unions which did not support us at Conference, especially UCATT, TASS and ASTMS. We are still attempting to get information on how some other unions voted.

The campaign, meanwhile, continues to win support in Birmingham, where nine out of the twelve constituency parties are backing our readmission. Both the *Labour Co-ordinating Committee* and *Labour Briefing*, representing the major organised left currents in the party, back the campaign. With this level of support we believe we can win and so put a stop to other witch hunts of left wingers who may be in a minority inside hard right dominated constituency parties like Sparkbrook.

Kevin Scally.

WOMEN FIGHT BACK!

Women in Sparkbrook fought back at a 150 strong public meeting in Digbeth Civic Hall on Friday 10 October. Hattersley may dominate the constituency, but he certainly does not control the Women's Section of the Sparkbrook Party who organised the meeting.

Besides hearing speakers opposing strip searches, supporting the sacked Borderway's workers and from Women Against Pit Closures, the meeting also heard Linda Bellos, leader of Lambeth Borough Council and the first black woman to hold such a position, launch a scathing attack on Hattersley. In particular she supported demands for the reinstatement of expelled party members Kevin Scally and Amir Khan. She also noted how unusual and how pleasing it was to be part of an all woman platform addressing a mixed meeting.

The final speaker was prospective Parliamentary Candidate, Diane Abbott. She, too, took the opportunity to rejoin her attack on Roy Hattersley and his racist attitude towards black people. But central to her speech was her faith in women and their ability. She remembered sitting amongst the Parliamentary Labour Party at National Conference and realising they were nothing to be afraid of. Anyone in the room could do better than most of them.

The meeting came to an emotional and inspiring end as the women from Women Against Pit Closures sang their anthem to the women of the working class.

SUMMERFIELD GROUP SET FOR LAUNCH

The final steps have been taken in launching the Birmingham Summerfield Group, a new broad left alliance of Labour Party members.

Letters are being distributed to all party branches, constituencies, women's sections and Young Socialist branches inviting party members to declare their support for a wide-ranging document calling for radical socialist reforms in the city.

The new Summerfield Declaration calls for "a high socialist profile in Birmingham and.....an active party campaigning for radical socialist policies and raising political consciousness amongst the electorate." Among the policy priorities are;

* an end to grammar school education in Birmingham;
* building 2000 council homes a year by 1988;
* money to be spent on regenerating manufacturing industry rather than on 'prestige' projects;
* a proper Contracts Compliance Unit with 'teeth' that will raise working conditions and opportunities for Black workers;
* more rights for council tenants;
* expansion of the Women's Unit and Race Relations Unit and establishment of a Lesbian and Gay Rights Unit;
* implementation of the neglected Nuclear Free Zones policy;
* introduction of socialist planning agreements.

These, and the other policies on the Summerfield list, are drawn from existing District Party policy. It is not yet clear how the Summerfield Group will think through the development of new policy.

Finally, a provisional date of Saturday 29 November has been set for the launch of the group which should now complete the job of demolishing the right wing's domination of the Council.

Rob Pocock.

SUTTON

For many years the Sutton Coldfield constituency party has been known for its moderate views. Maybe now, at last, things are beginning to change.

After a long period of bitter debate in the constituency, branches of the party have finally been formally created. This has resulted in a newly constituted constituency party.

At the September General Management Committee meeting a resolution was passed calling for the re-instatement of Kevin Scally and Amir Khan as Labour Party members. The resolution commanded the support of both the left and the right in the party.

It was overwhelmingly felt that Khan and Scally had broken no constitutional rules of the Labour Party and had merely spoken out for democracy in the Sparkbrook party.

Stuart Moran - Sutton Coldfield CLP.

BRIEFING

'Briefing' mets regularly on the second Monday of each month. Next meeting on Monday 10 November at 7.30 pm. Phone for details.

Send all articles and letters for *'Birmingham Labour Briefing'* to;

48 Thornhill Road
Birmingham
B21 9BS

or telephone (021-) 551 9174.

December's *'Birmingham Labour Briefing'* will be out on 25 November. The deadline for articles, letters etc. is Sunday 16 Novemebr. When you send an article, please enclose any pictures or illustrations you think may be useful.



SEXUAL HARASSMENT - COUNCIL MOVES TO SILENCE WOMEN

Evening supporters may have read in the *Evening Mail* about the "too hot teachers sex quiz" dropped by the Labour group at October's Education Committee. This referred to a questionnaire about sexual harassment which was to be sent to a sample of women teachers in the city. It was part of a school management project set up by the Women's Committee with the support of the Education Committee.

The School Management Development and Women Teachers Project is a one year action research project to identify the role and responsibility of management in promoting equal opportunities in teacher employment. It has many aspects and is curently working on career development, re-entry after maternity leave, late entry to teaching and so on. It is, however, the work on sexual harassment, central to the project, which has come under fire.

The Project Director has led a group of four teachers in the research on sexual harassment in schools. Current research led the group to believe that it is an aspect of employment which affects the health, welfare and effectiveness of women in particular. Management response to incidents was not always adequate. The group aimed to compile data which could be the basis of policy initiatives.

Thus work began in January to review current research and plan ways of collecting data. An interview schedule was devised and Birmingham women interviewed. Men Against Sexism in Education also agreed to interview men using the same schedule. Black women teachers have been approached to make a similar contribution.

More quantitative research was needed however. Building on recent NUT work, the group formulated a questionnaire, which it piloted, took advice on and revised. The plan was to take a large number of schools and sample all the women in those school. About one third of women teachers in the city would therefore be covered.

By 15 June, the questionnaire was ready to be sent to schools. Teacher unions were asked for comments at their joint consultative meeting. At the follow-up meeting on 11 September all unions indicated their complete satisfaction. Then on 23 September, the unions were told the Education Committee had decided to withdraw the questionnaire. Some confusion surrounds this - members of the Education Committee do not remember discussing the issue until their Labour Group meeting on 29 September.

Clearly much behind the scenes work had gone on over the Summer. Indeed, one co-opted member of the committee, Brian Stoton (whose name crops up a lot lately in rumours of behind the scenes stitch-ups) is believed to have manouevred to initiate an alternative project to be conducted by an outside agency. Meanwhile Stoton and committee vice-chair Charlton, posing as experts,seem to have declared the methodology of the questionnaire 'problematic'. Unfortunately for them it is entirely sound, as has been confirmed by real experts in women's studies and accepted by the unions, who, to their credit, have expressed a willingness to conduct the questionnaire themselves.

The whole affair illustrates how the men who lead this city view women and women teachers in particular. They do not want women to be in control of a research process which may reveal compromising facts about male behaviour. They do not think 'simple' women teachers are capable of conducting such research. They do not know that the Project Director is a highly respected, qualified and experienced teacher and researcher. They do not know that members of the group have studied research methodology. They do not know because they have never condescended to speak to the Project Director.

Most importantly, it demonstrates the limits to their commitment to equal opportunities. Their attempts to silence women show just how little of their power they are prepared to relinquish.

What hope is there, under the present leadership of the Council of implementing policies which will produce real changes that benefit women?

BORDERWAY - ENTIRE WORKFORCE SACKED

Mr. B.Nemeshangi has made a bid for Birmingham Trades Council's 'Worst Employer of 1986' award. On 19 August, Nemeshangi, owner of Borderway plc, Catherine Street, Aston, sacked his entire workforce.

This was the result of twenty of the firm's workers deciding to join the metal mechanics craft section of TASS on 20 April. Despite the profitabilty of the metal pressings company, wage rates are poor; the four male setters earned £2,49 an hour; the 16 women operators earned an incredibly low £1,40 an hour, with no standing-time pay in case of breakdown.

The union's initial application for recognition and negotiating rights was rejected by the company's management.

Following this, the employees then elected two shop stewards. Soon after, they were called into the manager's office, told the company was over-staffed and given twenty minutes notice.

A ballot of the TASS membership followed. There was a unanimous vote for strike action. The company have now dismissed eighteen striking workers, two of the original twenty having returned to work.

The management's claim that the company was overstaffed now seems strange in view of the fact that eighteen scabs have now been taken on.

However, the striking workers are still standing firm. A militant picket is turning away all deliveries and mail but the company is managing to continue functioning.

A mass picket is now planned for 12 November. Meanwhile, pickets take place at these times;

Saturday; 7,00am - 12,00noon;
Monday - Thursday; 7,00am - 5,00pm;
Friday; 7,00am - 2,00pm.

The issue at stake is simple; the right of workers to belong to and be involved in a trade union.

Support the pickets. Send donations to;

TASS Craft Metal Mechanics Section
70 Lionel Street,
Birmingham,
B3 1JG

John Robinson - (TASS Craft Metal Mechanics)

MICHAEL MANLEY IN BIRMINGHAM

Michael Manley, leader of the Jamaican People's National Party (PNP) and former Prime Minister of Jamaica, was in Birmingham in October. He was speaking at a meeting organised by the People's National Party (UK) at Digbeth Civiv Hall on Tuesday 14 October.

In a lengthy and detailed speech, he outlined the lessons of the last PNP government as well as the struggles of recent years against the reactionary and pro-American Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) government of Edward Seaga. Seaga himself, of course, has recently announced his resignation from the leadership of the JLP.

Manley clearly expects to be Prime Minister again in the not too distant future following the PNP's recent overwhelming victories in Jamaican local government elections. Taking about 57% of the popular vote, they won control of 12 of the island's 13 parishes. Comrades from the one parish which stayed in JLP control were the object of much light-hearted derision throughout the meeting.

Rebuilding the country, however, Manley maintained, would be an arduous and difficult task. Working people, he seemed to imply, would have to be willing to make sacrifices.

Also speaking at the meeting were Councillor Mick Rice, representing Birmingham Trades Council. In a well-received speech, he emphasised the vital task of taking up the anti-racist struggle in the trade union movement. Fine words and rhetoric were not enough, he said. Action was needed, and action had to be fought for.

But another speaker was none other than Councillor Dick Knowles, leader of Birmingham City Council. It was Knowles who brought the house down with his ill-conceived assertion that no-one on the Labour Council was a racist. Few in the audience were prepared to swallow such statements, coming, as they did, so soon after the Council's refusal to accept a petition opposing the deportation of Metso Montrieffe. Fortunately for Knowles, he was able to escape in the middle of a standing ovation for Michael Manley without having to reply in public to several angry would-be questioners.

Knowles' already low-standing amongst large sections of the black electorate of the city must have nose-dived still further as a result of his contribution.

SOCIALIST TEACHERS' ALLIANCE

STOP THE COVENTRY SELL-OUT

The teachers' year-long campaign on pay and conditions has now reached a critical point.

The unions and the local education authorities, the majority of which are Laoour, have signed the so-called 'Coventry Agreement'. For the largest union, the NUT, it represents a major retreat from existing policies on the restoration of relative pay levels, on restructuring of pay scales and on conditions of service. The deal has provoked growing opposition within the NUT. So far fifty local branches have rejected it. Under pressure the union leadership is now admitting that parts of the deal need to be renegotiated. The problem is that the deal is an integral package, with pay rises being traded off against big concessions from the unions over conditions.

The second largest union, the NAS/UWT, having led the bandwagon into the Coventry talks has now jumped off again, opportunistically, at the last minute in order to pick up disgruntled NUT members by a posture of greater militancy. This includes a forthcoming half-day strike, but its strategy remains no different from that of the N.T



Birmingham NUT President
Paul Rodbourne

Whatever the gains in terms of pay teachers thought that the refusal to cover after one day - i.e. to do the work of absent colleagues - was a permanent victory. The NUT leadership's 'interim agreement' to go back to covering for 3 days, 5 days on for ever if no supply staff are provided, has aroused members fury.

In Birmingham, a mass meeting of NUT members in Central Hall on 8 October were promised by Paul Rodbourne, President and Secretary, that there would be no sell-out. In a city-wide ballot, there was a 95% vote for no cover after one day. A week later the local leadership met with the local authority and agreed to unlimited cover if no supply staff can be found. Members are now calling special General Meetings to throw out the cover deal and the Coventry Agreement.

Meanwhile, Birmingham LEA has tried to undermine the teachers' action. The latest threat was to dock a half day's pay from teachers for any lessons they refused to cover. As with the Coventry Agreement itself, teachers are sacrificed on the 'new realism' altar of Labour's electoral dreams.

The immediate tasks in challenging this unholy alliance of Labour Council and NUT leaders is to build support in the schools for motions of rejection at the NUT meeting on 4 November and at the subsequent National Conference, and to put pressure on Councillors Charlton and Byron to support the teachers' campaign, not to sabotage it.

Richard Hatcher - Ladywood CLP, Socialist Teachers Alliance.

LABOUR LISTENS TO THE INNER CITIES?

Under the title 'Labour Listens to the Inner City', the Regional Party Office convened a consultative conference on Saturday 18 October. At a poorly publicised meeting forty or so members heard an address by Vivendra Sharma the party's national Ethnic Minorities Officer. Following a call from Alton Burnett, District Party Ethnic Minorities Liaison Committee convenor, and Jeff Rooker, MP for Perry Barr, the Regional Officer, Eileen Murfin, ended the conference with a promise that it would be reconvened. Below *'Briefing'* prints the Black Sections response to the meeting:

Black Sections have already warned Black people inside and outside the Labour Party of the bantustan sham that is the Black and Asian Advisory Committee.

A Birmingham meeting with the Committee's officer and black and white party members held in Broadway School, Perry Barr on Saturday 18 October bent over backwards to prove the point.

With the presence of two white male MPs, Jeff Rooker and Terry Davis, it gave a disturbing picture of what the Labour Party leadership has in store for black people.

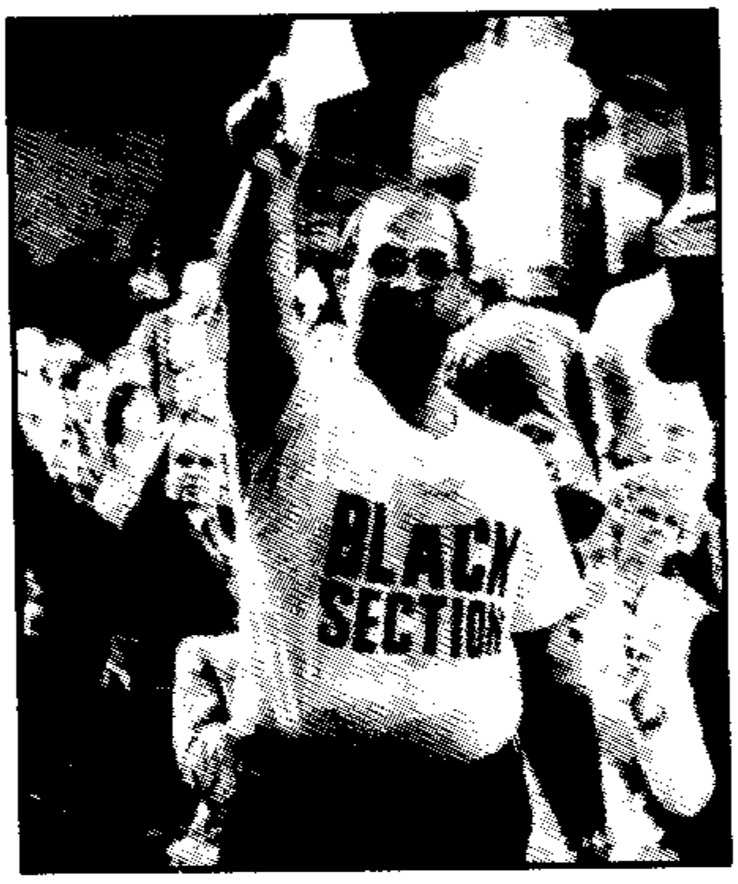
It was clear that the party bosses wanted to give the pressing issue of racism a low profile. With the Committee remaining from low-key to invisible, allowing some black people a little get-together, the leadership can feel they are not obliged to do anything serious about tackling racism when they gain power.

In fact, pushing that view on the small number of black people who attended the meeting was its main purpose.

In the first place, only eight days notice was given of a meeting supposedly held for all Birmingham party members. With the bus strike to defend living standards of bus workers, the Labour Party could say it is doing its anti-racist bit while not having anyone examine it.

So participants were instructed to discuss how to get more black people into the party and involve them at all levels. All very necessary, but it failed to mention how the Labour Party eagerly jumped on the 'keep the blacks out' bandwagon with the 1965 Immigration Act.

It also failed to discuss how the



city council leadership actively attempts to frustrate anti-racist strategies proposed by black people and then ignore them when they are party policy.

Instead, Jeff Rooker said we should look at the conditions of the inner cities and how to get councillors together to talk about it. Others picked up that lead and talked about bad inner city conditions facing all living there.

White participants ended up suggesting that white party members were not really racist and black people will not integrate and have an inferiority complex.

Black Sections say: yes, white people suffer from bad conditions but black people are worse hit because of ideas of white superiority amongst working class people, Labour Party members and society at large.

Black Sections supporters at the meeting felt it was sad that some black participants, starved of any Labour Party anti-racist action and fearful of offending white people if they spoke of racism, fell for the sham.

As a beginning to ending racism, we point to advisory councils set up in India and Africa fifty years ago by British imperialism and say: major political and social change was not achieved by advisory committees but by black people's own organisations.

Simon Hinds - Birmingham Black Section Press Officer.

THE LABOUR PARTY
Black Section

Birmingham Labour Party Black Section has been formed to fight against racism both within and outside the Labour Party, for the greater involvement of black people within the party, and for the implementation of anti-racist policies by the party. Meetings are held on the first Sunday of each month. All black Labour party members are welcome.
Next meeting: Sunday 2 November, 3.00 - 5.00, Council House.