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LABOUR BRIEFING

NATIONAL SUPPLEMENT

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# BRING OUT FLEET STREET!

# NO SELL-OUT!

By Alan Thornett

**The battle to defend trade union organisation in Fleet Street stands at the crossroads. Murdoch is standing firm and getting his papers out of Wapping despite the mass pickets on Saturday nights and large pickets on other nights of the week. He is suffering some losses through the boycott campaign, but they are losses which are acceptable to him, his aims and objectives — to impose a historic change of relationship on Fleet St by breaking the print unions and introducing full management control through the use of scab labour.**

Murdoch was prepared to face a lengthy shutdown if necesary to achieve this, and will regard his present losses as a quite acceptable price to pay for the huge gains which are at stake for the newspaper employers.

It is becoming increasingly evident that the present strategy being employed by the print unions is not going to win the battle. It is also being increasingly obvious — if it was ever in doubt — that the battle involves the whole of the national newspaper industry and not just the News International titles.

The deal at the *Express*, the *Telegraph* and the *Scottish Daily Record* could not make it more clear.The print unions are now signing away thousands of jobs and surrendering working conditions won over decades of struggle in order to "avoid another News International situation."




Ian Swindake

**Part of the 25,000-strong national demonstration called by the print unions on April 6, which marched from Trafalgar Square to Wapping.**

At the same time Murdoch has been able to use the full weight of the courts against SOGAT with impunity. SOGAT is fighting with the whole of its assets sequestered.

The cold reality is that Murdoch is winning; if he is not stopped he will destroy effective trade unionism if not actual trade unionism in the whole of the newspaper industry. He will not be stopped by the present strategy of confining the dispute to News International.

● The vicious no-strike, no-closed shop, "right to manage" package he proposed could well become the model for every Fleet Street employer. Who would have believed a year ago that the courts could seize the fund of a print union with no reaction? The sequestration of SOGAT affects every member of the union in the printing industry and hangs as a threat over the NGA. Print union members must recognise com-

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 2**

**LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!**

# NO SELL OUT! (continued)

mon cause with the Wapping strikers.

Of course the TUC ducked out of its duty to the miners and stabbed the NGA in the back over the Warrington dispute in 1983. Today's Murdoch battle can be seen as a far more central issue for the print unions than the Warrington fight. But without mass action by printers against the sequestration it is clearly impossible to expect that other unions or the TUC will be pressured into giving increased support.

● The traditional print union policy of playing off one employer against another, by increasing print runs of other titles whilst strikes paralyse production, is inapplicable against Murdoch, who has maintained almost full production throughout, and whose papers are largely passing through the main distributors in each area. An all-out strike in Fleet Street would show the seriousness of SOGAT and the NGA, and expose those SOGAT distribution and shop workers still scabbing on the dispute. Other employers who have backed Murdoch and expect to adopt the same tactics would be faced for the first time with the strength of the print unions in place of the endless retreats of the leadership.

● A Fleet Street stoppage would strengthen the case for solidarity boycotting action and respect of picket lines by non-print unions, especially the TGWU and redouble the impact of print support committees across the country. At present, with printworkers still working normally on the national press, only the most dedicated activists see the fight as serious. Few trade unionists would be prepared to risk their jobs to show support while the sacked strikers' own SOGAT and NGA colleagues do nothing to risk theirs.

● With a stoppage on Fleet Street, thousands of print workers could be mobilised in picketing the Wapping plant, and other targets including distribution depots in and around London. The whole dispute would force its way back into the centre stage of the class struggle.

● The argument that Fleet Street workers are subsidising the sacked strikers from their weekly wage packets — and that the strikers could not afford for them to be called out — is one which accepts the permanent isolation of the fight, and the present half-cock strategy. There is no advantage in tactics which result in a dispute which drags on for month after month making no impact on Murdoch, deluding print union militants, and extracting conscience money from doomed Fleet Street chapels.

● The public "support" that has been won on the strength of the boycott campaign may appear broad but has little if any impact on Murdoch.

● The most decisive argument is also the most obvious: unless the dispute moves into a higher gear, and a new level of confrontation with the employers, the courts and the government, it will be lost. On their present course, Dean and Dubbins can deliver only a shabby, scabbing sell-out. Printers who now falsely believe "we are winning" will become increasingly disillusioned unless they see a way to take the fight forward. Nobody who opposes the fight to pull out Fleet Street has yet offered any credible alternative to step up the fight and put the whole trade union movement on alert.

● At the same time, the NUJ NEC must take disciplinary action agains its 500 scabs at Wapping and gear up its strike office to organise a serious picket rota.

● SOGAT must take action against its 150 scabs still working for Murdoch.

● TGWU leaders must take disciplinary action for the expulsion of the TNT drivers who are flouting the official instruction not to cross picket lines — and mobilise TGWU official pickets to the depots.

● The EETPU must be expelled from the TUC for its scab-herding role in recruiting Murdoch's Wapping mobsters, who have not only put printworkers out of a job, but also threaten the jobs of Fleet St electricians. The expulsion of the EETPU must be linked to a campaign to "poach" sections of their members to other appropriate unions.

● Labour Parties and non-print unions can assist in mobilising pickets for Wapping and for local distribution centres, building support groups and raising money to sustain the dispute — offering facilities for the sequestered SOGAT, organising meetings and speaking tours of local labour movement bodies and workplaces.

Kinnock must be forced to reverse his current disastrous stance of opposing the repeal of all Tory anti-union laws: this year's Labour Party conference must see resolutions spelling out a clear line of restoring the trade union rights and immunities crushed under the Thatcher/Tebbit machine.

# NEC move the goalposts

**by Dennis Skinner**

**When the NEC change the rules on the quorums on April 18th, they will have shifted the goalposts.**

**Those of us on the real Left who left the previous NEC meeting stopped a witchhunt taking place, and we stopped a kangaroo court from proceeding.**

We didn't miss a vote. I've never missed an opportunity to vote at the NEC, in Parliament, or anywhere else.

The right wing majority on the NEC ave now started from the top a witchhunt on Liverpool District Labour Party. It's strange that when in the past comrades asked why Mellish, Chapple and Maxwell were still in the Labour Party, they were told that proceedings against them could not start at the NEC. The move must come from the CLP where the member lives, they were told. But in Liverpool no request for expulsion has come from any CLP. The NEC has turned their previous arguments on their heads, and started expulsions from the top.

The right wing are themselves responsible for losing their quorum. They started their inquiry not with party officers but with members of the NEC who were expected to be both judge and jury. And what's more, the membership of the inquiry team was heavily weighted with right-wingers. If it had been more evenly balanced – say 4/4 – they wouldn't have ended up losing their quorum.

Comrades should be aware this is not the first time a walk out has resulted in no quorum. The right wing has done it twice. I remember about a year back after a lot of the right had drifted away from an NEC, it looked as if we might have a majority. So the remaining right-wingers walked out. I don't remember any fuss about that.



Neil Kinnock charges us with evading our responsibilities. I do not take that nicely from those who abstained in the deputy leadership contest.

Once we give in to witchhunts, there will be no stopping. The Tory press won't be satisfied. They will continue to argue that there are others to follow. It's not just Militant they're after.

The witchhunt is not just to do with individuals. Firstly, the aim is to discredit those on the Left who seem easiest to attack. Then attack those who oppose the McCarthyite witchhunts. Then attack the policies themselves. Within days of the abortive NEC meeting and Kinnock's threat to change the constitution of the Party, Dennis Healey was declaring to the world that the much-cherished policy of scrapping all nuclear weapons and bases would not be totally carried out because he was hedging his bets on Polaris.

In 1983 we lost the General Election even though we expelled the Militant Editorial Board. Jim Mortimer, then General Secretary, now admits it was unproductive and a waste of time.

At this moment, there are 25 people appealing to the NEC against expulsions that are occurring throughout the country. We must stop all this now.

# BRIEFING INTERVIEWS TONY MULHEARN

**The inquiry into Liverpool DLP has signalled the start of a new broader witch-hunt of socialists in the Party. Briefing interviewed Tony Mulhearn, Liverpool City Councillor and DLP President about the inquiry and the threatened expulsion of the Liverpool 12.**

*Briefing: Many of us on the left saw the NEC inquiry as a sham from the start. What was your experience of the way it was conducted?*

Tony Mulhearn: The whole thing was conducted in a totally unrealistic way. When we asked what charges were being made against the DLP we were told there were no charges. At the inquiry we were able to answer every question put to us regarding the procedures and practices of the DLP. Not one member of the inquiry team expressed an dissatisfaction with our answers.

We asked them directly if they were making allegations that any outside body was exerting influence over the DLP – they said that this was not alleged.

*Briefing: The summaries of the inquiry team's reports suggest that they objected to the holding of 'aggregate' meetings, they also claimed that at certain meetings delegates were excluded from voting and that intimidation took place. How do you respond to this?*

Tony Mulhearn: I gave a pretty full account of this in Tribune recently (March 14th). But I can say that the aggregate meetings were really extended DLP meetings. When we had very important issues to discuss we invited not just the delegates to the DLP but all party members in the city. After all the decisions were going to affect them all. All delegates were informed of these meetings by first class post and only delegates were allowed to vote. It is an absolute fabrication that any delegates were excluded. At these meetings, those who turned out to be politically in the minority actually were allowed a disproportionately large share of the debating time, so they cannot argue that they were silenced or anything like that. Incidentally these aggregate type of meetings have been going on in Liverpool at least since before the war. They are not something we invented.

*Briefing: If the inquiry was into the DLP why were the 12 people eventually threatened with expulsion singled out from the rest?*

Tony Mulhearn: I think the right wing wanted to disband the Party and reform it but they were worried that the same officers and so on would be re-elected. The only way for them to prevent that was to try to expel some of us, really using our known association with the Militant newspaper as a cover. Of course this wouldn't hold up for John Hamilton or Eddie Loyden who don't have that particular association. Some of the right wingers were not worried about this difference though. Turnock actually moved that Eddie Loyden (MP for Garston) should be expelled and Sawyer supported this. The majority thought that was a bit imprudent so it was withdrawn.

## Using the Courts

*Briefing: There has been some criticism on the left about your use of the courts in your fight against expulsion. How do you respond to this?*

Tony Mulhearn: Of course, we only used the bourgeois courts as a last resort. Actually, it is a scandal that we were forced to use them to get some element of natural justice. Even the bourgeois courts have to give some semblance of appearing to mete out justice which doesn't seem to apply to the NEC.

We asked Turnock for an assurance that in any appearance before the NEC we should be able to question the 'evidence' against us and bring witnesses on our behalf. He gave us that assurance – the NEC broke it. Larry Whitty actually swore an affadavit that these procedures would be followed. It doesn't appear to be worth the paper it was written on. These are basic requirements for any semblance of a fair hearing. Their abandonment just indicates that those who are to judge us have already made up their minds.



Tony Mulhearn (left) with Derek Hatton (right) leading a march through Liverpool.

Press Association

*Briefing: Following the walkout by the left on the NEC are you now hopeful that the moves against the 12 will be abandoned?*

Tony Mulhearn: Initially we thought they might withdraw. But now Kinnock is so rabid. Just look at the language he used about us and the seven left-wingers on the NEC. The last time someone called their political opponents "maggots" was when Julius Rosenberg, the Nazi, used it to describe Jewish people – well, we have to be prepared for the right wing to push ahead.

They may be prepared to use all kinds of measures to give them the necessary majority and opportunity to move our expulsion. The only thing which can really stop them is a rallying of the whole left in the Party and in the trade unions. If they expel the 12 there is no doubt that the tirade in the press will force them to widen out the witch-hunt. The right wing have been hung on this peg ever since Kinnock's speech in Bournemouth.

## United against expulsion

*Briefing: When the Editorial Board expulsions took place the left's campaign was divided. Do you see unity against expulsions as being vital this time?*

Tony Mulhearn: Yes we need a united force across the whole of the left.

*Briefing: After disbanding the DLP the NEC set up a Temporary Coordinating Committee to organise for the elections and so on. You were elected to chair that committee, what does this development mean?*

Tony Mulhearn: What took place was a vindication of our position. It proved we are not 'Johnny-come-lateleys'. Myself and the others have got our roots in the local labour movement; this was reflected in the elections at that meeting. There have been reports tha the officers elected would not be recognised, but Ray Gill (NW Regional Secretary) was at the meeting and did not challenge the proceedings in any way and we have not heard officially of any moves to overturn it. As far as we are concerned it is an entirely legitimate body.

## Incalculable damage

*Briefing: What effect has the suspension of the DLP had on the campaign leading up to the local elections?*

Tony Mulhearn: The damage done to the Party is incalculable. Just for example, we would normally have had all the candidates in place two months ago. This year we are still appointing people to the panel four weeks before the elections. Our ability to mount an effective campaign in the city has been completely undermined by the actions of the right wing.

*Briefing: Tony, as one of the 48 Liverpool councillors facing surcharge and disqualification what do you make of reports that 150 others may be facing the same fate?*

Tony Mulhearn: Unfortunately it is working out as we anticipated. The fate of Liverpool and Lambeth is bound up with that of other Labour authorities. The Head of the Audit Commission is a conscious political animal out to make an example of those councils which supported the Party's policy of non-compliance. If we are defeated it will be open season on all those councils fighting to preserve jobs and services and oppose the Tory cuts. Cunningham's statements about our case were a blow to Liverpool and an undermining of every single Labour councillor who is prepared to fight. The movement needs to rally itself urgently to the defence of all those threatened with the draconian penalties.

# WHY VOTE LABOUR?

**As the May 8th local elections draw nearer and the next general election begins to loom we will be faced more and more often with the question, why vote Labour? Why should young people vote Labour when their modest desire for a job is branded as 'impossibilism'? Why should Black people vote Labour when their proposals for the same autonomy afforded to all other sections of the Party are viciously attacked? Why should trade unionists vote for a Party whose leadership stands aside from their struggles and refuses to promise the repeal of all Tory anti-Trades Union laws? Why, in fact, should anyone cast in favour of Kinnock's 'democratic socialism' while he ignores conference policy and seeks to expel socialists who fight for it?**

These are difficult questions to answer. It is certain that anyone who thinks that simply voting for Labour politicians will transform their life is in for a rude awakening. However the real difficulty is that this would remain true even if these were genuine left-wingers elected on a radical manifesto. Any administration committed to genuine change would be faced with the full power of Capital and the State. From its first day in office it would experience economic sabotage, civil service obstruction, legal attack, the threat of a military coup... even a parliament of 635 Dennis Skinners could do little to resist such pressure. Unless, of course, such an administration was backed by an alternative source of power – a power to match that of the businessmen, bureaucrats, judges and generals; a power that could carry through the radical transformation of society against all their opposition.

## COUNTERPOSES ELECTIONS TO ACTION

Yet the Labour leadership's concept of elections is one which, increasingly, discourages people from taking power into their own hands. Electoral appeals are based on a managerial ethic: 'vote for these men [in the main] and they will look after you more efficiently'. Labour's recent 'Jobs and Industry' Party Political broadcast was a classic of this genre – it might almost have been a Nissan advertisement! This is backed up by attempts to demobilise those struggles which do break out. Thus we are told that the miners' strike, the opposition to Tory ratecapping, the rebellion of Black youth, are all injurious to the cause of Labour. Moreover the leadership backs up its words by either distancing itself from or openly attacking these actions. Now they are going even further and seeking to expel those who have been most consistent in their militancy. As voting days approach so all these attempts to dampen down struggle increase. In sum, Labour's electoralism is one which not merely divorces elections from action but actively counterposes the two.

The tragedy of this approach is twofold. In the first place, had the Labour Party and movement, on a national scale, put the same effort into the miners strike that it puts into any set of elections then the strike could have been won, Thatcherism defeated and the political landscape completely transformed. Not only would this have meant the preservation of jobs and communities it would also have supplied Labour with an electoral boost to match Thatcher's 'Falklands factor'. In the second place, the forces which the leadership seeks to demobilise are precisely those which would be necessary to carry through a reversal of Thatcherite policies. Their struggles pit them, in the present, against the same enemies which would face a newly elected Labour administration – the struggles of miners and printers confront Capital's attempt to drive up the rate of profit, they are also forced into confrontation with a hostile police force and judiciary. To achieve real power, the power to effect social change, Labour needs their strength. But the reverse is also true. Particular struggles against Capital and its state will only achieve ultimate success when allied to an overall political challenge to their might.

## MINERS AND PRINTERS

Once more, the miners and printers disputes provide powerful examples. Even had the miners stopped closures in the short-term their long-term security would remain dependent upon an overall energy policy which challenged the nuclear industry, increased dependence on coal imports from countries like South Africa, and the whole question of industrial production and generation of energy demand. The printers' dispute raises even wider issues. While SOGAT members fight for their jobs the quickening introduction of new technology poses the fundamental question of how wealth is distributed in a society where more and more can be produced by even fewer people.

The lessons to be drawn are straightforward. On the one hand the Labour Party needs to become more involved in ongoing struggles. The creation of Miners' Support Groups provided a tremendous move forward in this respect. Now the momentum must not be lost. Through continued support for sacked miners and Printworker support groups the process must be spread. On the other hand those in action need to place clear political demands upon the Labour Party. The significance of our Party lies in its democratic control by constituencies and Trades Unions. Yet we must fight to extend that democratic control to previously excluded sectors – to women and black people – such that their struggles can be brought into, can strengthen and be strengthened by the Party.

It is in this spirit that we call for a Labour vote. Not because we have illusions about individual candidates, not as a substitute for action, but in order to put Labour representatives in positions where we can place real demands upon them. This means that, far from toning down action as election day approaches, we must continue and build upon the resistance to Thatcherism. We must press forward the rights of Women's conference and Black sections. Above all we must show that elections are not won by repudiating socialism and expelling socialists. Defeating Thatcher in action is a prerequisite to beating her at the ballot-box.

**Steve Reicher (Exeter Labour Party and Devon Labour Briefing)**

# 'A Million Jobs a Year'

**As the Kinnock/Hattersley leadership rushes rightwards to join with the SDP and the Tory 'wets' under the Michael Heseltine inspired banner of 'caring capitalism', the need for a thoroughly worked out socialist plan for jobs grows. The publication of Andrew Glyn's 'A Million Jobs a Year' pamphlet and continuing debate is a timely spur to such a development.**

A recent conference on this issue, quoted by John Palmer in the last issue of Briefing, saw Glyn and Robin Murray, once of the GLC, stage-managed into a head to head debate on the way forward for the left. Andrew Glyn, however, failed to take up this challenge by indicating that the ideas in his pamphlet were not meant to be a blueprint but only a short exposition on the fiscal powers and other controls which would be necessary over the 'City' institutions, foreign trade, multi-nationals, etc., with some examples of how rapid reflation has worked in the past. The pamphlet does play a key role in exploding the Thatcher myth of 'there is no alternative'.

It is of course true to point out, as Robin Murray did, that one cannot depend on Labour ministers, no matter how radical, to deliver a million jobs a year by edict. The working class must struggle in the here and now for a different economic system which reflects the real needs and aspirations of all the oppressed. This must be one of the enduring lessons of the miners' strike which was surely a struggle of whole communities for just such an economic plan based on production for need. And it is the lessons of this and other unsung struggles which are the cornerstones of a plan for jobs which will take on the power of the 'City' and be implemented, monitored and controlled, not

# SUPPORT SILENTNIGHT STRIKERS

**On her one and only feleeting visit to Lancashire Premier Thatcher deigned to consider the efforts of only two industries. As she swept into the County behind a phalanx of police that would have done justice to ex-President Marcos, she paused long enough to meet a Barnoldswick employer by the name of Tom Clarke. It is known that she described him as Mr Wonderful but what is unclear is whether the tribute was in anticipation of his brutal decision to sack his workforce and recruit scabs to break the union at his compnay Silentnight.**

Since Thatcher's visit to the "sunrise" industries of the North West the regional Mr Wonderful has attempted to earn his acolade. However, it is the fierce and patient determination of the Silentnight strikers that has proved a good match for their employer as the dispute now enters its 9th month.

The 9 months and the long campaign for a boycott of Silentnight's scab beds has begun to take its toll as short time working is now introduced at the Barnoldswichk and Sutton workplaces. Even Ministry of Defence orders, won no doubt despite the presence of a junior Defence Minister as local Tory MP, have failed to prevent Clarke's solicitors rushing for injunctions against would-be boycotters.

Much of the boycott campaign work has been organised by local Trades Councils and strike supporters across the North, just the type of action in which FTAT, the union organising the strikers, should have been leading the way. Yet, from day one, it has been the strikers themselves who appear to have pushed a somewhat reluctant Union into a dispute it did not appear to want.

The recent disappointment of the pre-hearings of the Industrial Tribunals at Leeds have not helped the confidence of workers who have sufferd the hardship of a long dispute. Yet the strikers and their supporters are convinced that the strike is as winnable now as it ever was. Stepping up the boycott campaign and planning well-organised and publicised mass pickets is a job that can best be done by FTAT. With Silentnight production slumping, tough union activity can both increase morale and demoralise Mr Wonderful and his scabs. The profile of the dispute needs to be raised at Union and regional conferences and the pressure built to use the boycott campaigns locally and nationally as a platform from which to launch effective picketing.

*Donations to FTAT Cravendale 92 Branch Strike Fund, 10 Rainhill Crescent, Barnoldswick, Lancashire. For speakers ring Terry Bennet on 0282 603055.*

# Southern Region Conference Report

**This year's Southern Region Labour Party Conference saw a well organised presence of the left. A dozen or so *Briefing* supporters from Sussex distributed a Conference bulletin, the main theme of which was "End the witch-hunt — Fight for a Socialist Manifesto". Much of the weekend was spent trying to counter the manoeuvres of the platform which have tended to dominate regional conferences in the past.**

Most of the agenda was fairly non-controversial, issues such as Ireland, Nuclear Power and Local Government being the exceptions.

A minor victory was winning an assurance from the platform that the resolution from Brighton Pavillion on Irish self-determination would be discussed. The resolution was heavily defeated, and the lesson we should draw is the need for the issue to be raised more consistently in the trade union movement.

A resolution calling for a "halt to the nuclear power programme and phasing out of all existing plants" received overwhelming support.

The guest speaker from the NEC was Larry Whitty, and it was no surprise that his contribution lacked any mention of policy. The dropping of any commitment to socialism from the manifesto is the underlying aim of the witch-hunt.

The Labour Left Co-ordination fringe meeting attracted an audience of around 50, with Jack Collins (Kent NUM), Sarah Roelofs (LCI) and Val Price (CLPD) speaking. A positive discussion followed with comrades emphasising the need for work on issues such as the Justice for Mineworkers Campaign as well as challenging the leadership in its efforts to pull the Party to the right.

By contrast, the main theme of the LCC fringe meeting was a virulent attack on Liverpool District Labour Party. Speaker Sean Hilliard (NUPE) seemed to hate the *Militant* more than the Tories! So negative was the outlook from the LCC that even some of its own supporters spent the rest of the weekend apologising!

Most Regional Conferences are used by the leadership as little more than local rallies. It is for the Left to inject life and politics into the proceedings. Watch out for the Conference Briefings next year!

**Dave Lewney,**
**Brighton Labour Briefing**

# the debate continues.

by Ministers of State, but by workers and communities themselves.

This is the basis for the synthesis of Glyn and Murray's comments, that we must have a clear understanding of exactly how the superstructure of the capitalist state operates and how best to take control of it, and secondly in order to win and keep that control we need to develop a mass base of popular support and involvement in the planning of economic reflation on a socialist basis. The bringing together of these two previously disparate parts of the economic debate marks a qualitative leap forward for the left. It is clear that the re-aligned left will oppose such ideas. Mike Ward, ex-chair of the GLC Industry and Employment Committee, raged against 'utopian' idealists in his summing up on the economic debate at London Labour Party Conference. But in singing the praises of GLEB and new co-op developments without challenging those who control investment and trade, Mike Ward is peddling the same myths and unfulfillable promises as Hattersley, Kinnock and the Tory 'wets'.

There now needs to be a thoroughgoing discussion across the whole labour movement to fill out and develop this approach as a clear alternative to the present leadership's sprint into the arms of the 'City'. We need socialist plans for the public transport system, a plan for energy, health care and the drugs industry, telecommunications, the motor industry, arms conversion, child care and domestic work, all integrated at local, regional and national level with the full involvement of the labour movement, working class communities and oppressed at every level.

We need action plans for depressed areas such as the north east, the West Midlands engineering sector, London's Docklands and specific strategies for youth, addressing in particular the increasing frustration and anger of black youth. Above all we must place the needs and aspirations of women at the centre of such a socialist strategy for jobs and re-examine the structure of the working week and day, working practices and the development of appropriate training and child care.

The Socialist Society is aiming to develop some of the issues mentioned above as a further contribution to the debate on the economy. Also, CLPD is shortly to publish a pamphlet on public ownership and a number of draft resolutions for Party Conference. It is crucial that we don't allow the right wing to dominate the terrain of this all important debate. The authors of this article have drafted resolutions which will hopefully take the debate forward and could form the basis for debate at branch, CLP and union meetings. Speakers such as Andrew Glyn and Robin Murray can be arranged.

For more information contact Bill Hamilton on 01-802 4604.

**Bill Hamilton**
**Narendra Makanji**




# Women and the Labour Party

*In recent years many women have been enthusiastically drawn into the Labour Party, hopeful that it could provide a means of access to political power for women through structural changes enabling it to represent them and their struggles.*

*The article below records the views of five women from Brent East CLP following the 'realignment' since the miners' strike and ratecapping. It raises important questions for those of us who are committed to ensuring that women remain within the Party and that their hopes become a reality. Other contributions on this issue would be welcome.*

**In the late 1970's many women joined the Labour Party, partly because of Thatcher, partly because of leftward moves within the party and greater internal democracy. There was a feeling of a 'new age', a chance for genuine change.**

**But five years on, many women are disillusioned with the way the Labour Party actually works, and, despite all the rhetoric, its unchangeingness.**

**Here five women activists in Brent East — one acting as questioner — talk about the party and their problems with it. All of these women have been active in the Women's Section; some of worked on the Women's Council and Women's Committee; four have been on the GMC.**

**BM:** Some of you have now resigned from the General Management Committee (GMC), and may leave the party altogether. Why?

**GC:** I've resigned from the GMC because women in the Labour Party have always been marginalised. I didn't feel effective as a representative of my ward on the GMC e.g. over reselection in Brent East. I was 'unofficially mandated' by my ward to vote for Ken Livingstone and I have very grave reservations about him because I feel women SHOULD be selected for safe Labour seats: there SHOULD be positive discrimination for women and that really famous white men should stand in marginals.

## Intimidating

**PS:** The reason I've begun to question why I want to be in the party is the GMC. I've been in the Labour Party since 1979 and on the GMC for 2/3 years and I find the way in which the business is conducted, quite frankly, intimidating. Any other meeting I go to is like a tea party in comparison: conflict at meetings outside the Labour Party seems to be manageable and expressed directly and that's the end of it. At the GMC the way the conflict is expressed and the personal insults between men and to women makes it almost impossible to function politically.

**KD:** I've never seen it as vicious as the last two GMC's. If you'd gone in there and you hadn't known what was going on, you would have been appalled at the behaviour. Unfortunately, some of the women have behaved as badly as the men, recently.

**DR:** Generally the GMC is about proving points, scoring points off one another, repeating what the person before has just said. They just love nit-picking over the way things are phrased and about procedure rather than discussing policies. We've always got a huge back-log of resolutions, most of them well out of date, and it just shows the contempt with which they treat politics. Something that comes up first on the agenda can end up dominating the meeting for the next two hours and anything that's after it ends up falling off the end of the agenda. Another thing is that the men are great at spot-on speeches, but it's all up front stuff to impress other men in that room. In reality their lives are totally unrelated to socialism.

**KD:** What I notice about women, about us round this table tonight, is that women have OPINIONS, we can COMMENT, we can make comments that are opposite. Sometimes at the GMC I feel I just want to stand up and say a couple of sentences. You should be able to do that if you wish, but its all geared around the idea that you have to 'make a speech' or you're a total wally. I've seen women do that, get up and say just 2 or 3 sentences, then dry up and sit down agonising about having made themselves look foolish, when what they said had far more content that five minutes from most of the men.

**PS:** You rarely get debates about resolutions or policies. The debates seem to be AROUND political alliances. . .I mean I'm concerned with the way its so inward looking and so little involved with the outside world. . . even during the miners strike there wasn't an enormous shift. In a way it seemed a kind of diversion from inter-party politics.

**DR:** I agree with what you're saying about the GMC in one way but I do still think its important to be in there. I would really resent say, on an issue like Ireland, that you would be more or less saying 'leave it up to the men'. That would amount to saying: let the 'men' sort out Ireland in the Labour Party.

**GC:** But they do now, don't they?

**DR:** There are really big issues coming up and I think women should be involved in them. Its a matter of getting resolutions to national conference, by going through the GMC. You've got to keep pushing. It may seem futile, but. . .

**GC:** But what we're talking about is defining our own territory, our own agenda

**DR:** But we can't have our own world, or sort out Ireland simply by sitting around a table talking about it.

**GC:** Well we might arrange public meetings on Ireland, we might go out and campaign around certain issues to do with Ireland which are more direct, and have much more impact on a wider population than you might from within the Labour Party.

**DR:** Oh yes, you might educate people about Ireland but you won't get British Troops out that way. The only way to do that is through the Labour Party, because it needs a government to pull out troops.

**CJ:** Could you not organise a Women in Ireland group and liase directly with women in Northern Ireland?

**DR:** Yes, I think all that is brilliant in terms of building up awareness and educating people but we're not going to change British policy that way.

**DK:** There's another thing. The men in the party think TROOPS OUT is the only issue, but it took the feminists in Brent East to bring forward to the GMC the strip searching in Armagh issue and we got that as the main resolution to annual conference in 1983.

**BM:** So there is some purpose to being in the party as a political activist. . . But has it benefitted any of you as individuals, human beings even?

**PS:** I think the Labour Party has had an indirect impact on me. I am much more aware of political processes. I am more astute. I can pick things up more quickly. That's reflected at work where I am much more aware of what's happening and the way management treats its employees and how it treats women.

**CJ:** I don't think I've ever got anything from the Labour Party. I think its meaningless. You could go to Labour Party meetings 7 nights a week and have not the slightest human effect on human life at all.

**BM:** But do you all feel its important that Labour wins elections? I mean, would you campaign for them?

**KD:** I hate the way you're supposed to unquestioningly support Labour. I find it difficult canvassing, when occasionally you meet somebody on the doorstep, who actually articulates all the misgivings about the Labour Party which you yourself have. How can you stand there and convince somebody that they should vote Labour? I will canvass for the council elections (in May) but I don't think I would canvass in a general election locally. I would feel better going to a constituency where I felt the candidate was breaking new ground, a black candidate or a good woman candidate.

# Overcoming child abuse

**At the last Streetlife Supplement meeting we discussed the issues raised in the articles we had received on incest and child abuse. The following is a view of some of the ideas and discussion points raised. Whilst we only began to scratch the surface, we hope it will provoke further discussion on this issue.**

When we began, we were all very aware that we were discussing something that none of us had had any direct personal experience of. We were conscious that our views had been predominantly formed by what we had seen or read in the media, or in books and reports, and to a small extent by contact with other people who had had personal experience of child abuse or incest. Nevertheless we felt it was valid for us to try and draw together the political issues raised by the articles we had published.

The Left has often seen the problem of child abuse as exclusively a symptom of poverty and social deprivation. Whilst it is clear that poverty does create stresses and strains within family units, and does lead to a brutalisation of the individual and hence to their relationships with others, we felt it was an inadequate explanation for all the aspects of child abuse. For one thing, child abuse does not occur solely in poor, working class families. In addition whilst poverty and the consequences of poverty affect women to a far greater extent than men, the vast majority of abusers, particularly those responsible for sexual abuse, are men.

We also felt that the explanation that child abuse is a product of the nuclear family structure of society was not an adequate one. Certainly the structure of the nuclear family places particular stresses on individuals, which exacerbate the problem of child abuse. The 'privatisation' of the nuclear family also makes the detection of child abuse difficult. However, child abuse does take place in other social structures such as extended families and when children are 'in care'. We felt that the most predominant characteristic of,child abuse is its link with patriarchal structures, and that it is essentially a problem of the abuse of male power.

Specifically on the question of incest, we felt that it was necessary to dissect the issue, and separate the question of the exploration and development of sexuality by young people from that of the enforced sexual abuse i.e. rape of children and young people by a sibling, parent, or other relative. The latter, like any other rape or sexual assault, is totally abhorrent. On the former issue, whilst we all agreed that young people should be free to develop their own sexuality, concern was expressed by some of us that a totally permissive attitude to the sexual activity of young people could leave some children, and particularly young girls, exposed to exploitation. In other words, can children really express their 'free will' in a structure within which they have very little power? One view was that the dangers of exploitation were not just there for children but also for adult women, and that overprotecting children only increased their inability to cope with exploitation in later life. Others felt that children were particularly vulnerable and did need protection.

We did agree that the legal age of consent did not protect children. Indeed we felt that it often prevented young victims of sexual abuse and rape from coming forward because of the fear and guilt they feel about being involved in an illegal act. The only real legal safeguard for children is legislation and sufficient resources to ensure detection of all crimes of violence and sexual abuse. In the case of incest, we felt that it was also vital that there were places of refuge for young people to seek help and support outside of the family structure.

In conclusion, having agreed that child sexual abuse (and for that matter all sexual abuse) is essentially a product of male sexuality and its expression as power and aggression, we discussed whether we thought the problem could ever be eliminated. Of course the abuser must take responsibility for this action. But we all agreed that human behaviour is extremely susceptible to social structuring and conditioning. To that extent we felt positive that a future socialist society could eliminate child abuse as a problem. Only however if we ensure that a fundamental component of such a society is the removal of patriarchy and the empowering of women and other oppressed groups.

**Jane Stockton**

**CJ:** I would also find it difficult to canvass for the party with its current Kinnockite approach.

**BM:** What do you think of the Women's Section and your involvement in it?

**KD:** I think there is a clash between women who have a 'feminist perspective' and those with a more mainstream Party outlook. Some of us feel feminist principles have been used.

**PS:** Yes there is a tokenism about the way some men refer to and seem to defer to, feminism, but do not take it on board really. The way some white people try to use black people...

**GC:** It IS tokenism because they're not giving up any power – those nominated, whether women or black, have the official white male seal of approval. . .

**BM:** Do you have sympathy with those who say that the women's section is part of the Labour Party and its main purpose is to feed into the 'body' of the party and that it can't be seen as some sort of separate feminist body?

**DR:** The people who say that are usually the people who want to use the women's section, put themselves up as feminists and get the women's section support for their own ends. Personally I've got no time for them.

**PS:** There's always been those two strands, differing emphases. . . We, as feminists, have had many discussions about why we are in the Labour Party and what the women's section is FOR and obviously to some women in the Labour Party that doesn't make sense because they see the women's section as just a part of the rest of the party.

**KD:** There isn't any ordination that says the women's section is just another cog in the Labour Party machinery. Some function just as CR groups. Some are very close to the party structure and the local Council, yet others deal with localised campaigns. Most of the women in our women's section did a lot of work towards setting up Brent Women's Committee, an awful lot of background work over the years, and 18 months of hard work setting up the Women's Council. . . the planning of meetings, standing on the High Road distributing leaflets, trying to get it all launched . . . but you don't get any credit because you're trying to establish WOMEN'S organisations, not prop up the male mainstream structure. . .

**BM:** That public meeting that the Women's Committee held on 'Women and Safety' – over 200 women attended . . . the mainstream of the party could NEVER achieve that. . .

**KD:** Getting them to the town hall, getting them to church halls on a Sunday; that meeting on cervical cancer. . .

**PS:** Yes, that's taken up proposals with the DHA, its actually getting things done. It all started with that young woman in Brent who died of cancer. Yet I don't think there was a single resolution about that in the party.

**GC:** The point is, DO we as feminists decide to work within the party? Do we put all our energy into working with these separate women's organisations, the Women's Council, the Women's Committee, and in a way forget about the male, the mainstream structures except when we have certain articulated demands. . . or should we learn to use the male structures. . .?

**MB:** Do you mean that feminists should stand for office collectively?

**PS:** I think that this is the crucial current debate in the Women's Section. There is a strand of thinking (which seems to me blinkered) that the answer is simply to have more women in power, in office, whether in the CLP or as joint councillors. Women in office means that women only get a tiny nominated share of power, but it doesn't give women as a group access to power because there has been no fundamental change in the way power is controlled. Given womens' oppression – lack of child care. economic inequality, socialisation of their inferior status. . . women can only hold power if men actively give it up. . .

*Since this discussion took place, all 5 women have greatly reduced their involvement in the Party, including (along with other women) resigning from the GMC.*

## NEXT ISSUE

In future issues we will be developing the theme of violence against women, and rape, and in particular the connection between this and pornography. For example, how should socialists respond to the demands made in Parliament by Winston Churchill and Clare Short on censorship? All contributions are welcome, particularly those from people who can write from personal experience. For reasons of space, they should be no more than 800 words, and should preferably be typed. Suitable graphics and illustrations are also welcome.

Contributions should be sent to: **JANE STOCKTON, 31 Cranwich Road, London N16 5HZ by 12th April.**

**In response to Murdoch's offensive, a group of Lesbian and Gay Printworkers, and supporters, have set up a campaign group which meets every Thursday at the London Lesbian and Gay Centre.**

**So far we have:**

**– produced leaflets which we have distributed in Lesbian/Gay Pubs and meeting places.**

**– held collections – so far raising over £500.**

**– demonstrated regularly at Wapping – with our banner – on Saturdays.**

**– produced articles for the Lesbian and Gay Press.**

**If you want further information then come to Thursday meetings, or contact: LGSP, c/o 274 Upper Street, London N1. 737 2495, 305 0274.**

# LABOUR WOMEN'S FIGHTBACK BEGINS HERE!

**The National Conference of Labour Women has moved north this year – to Rothesay on the Isle of Bute. The decision to hold the conference in Scotland is welcome and not before time. Women from Scotland and the North of England are rightly fed up at constantly having to take the long and expensive journey south every time there's a 'national' Labour Party meeting. However, one does wonder why an island was chosen, in preference to Perth which was originally to be the venue.**

It is proving both difficult and expensive for many women's sections to book accommodation in Rothesay as it is both a small town and a popular holiday spot. The unworthy suspicion has been voiced that the party hierarchy think that by holding the Women's Conference on an island, they can avoid any 'bad' publicity which might result from Labour Women passing 'embarrassing' resolutions (such as opposition to the witch hunts). It is therefore particularly important that there is a large number of women at the conference to show 'our leaders' that their fears are well-founded and that Labour Women totally reject their attempts to shift the Party to the right.

## SHADOW ELECTIONS

The dominant issue at this year's conference will be the Shadow Elections for the women's seats on the NEC. It is disgraceful that while trade union delegates elect the trade union section of the NEC and constituency party delegates elect the CLP section, while the LPYS elect their delegate at their own conference, the women's section is elected by the whole of National Conference, where 80% of the delegates are male!

Acting on a resolution drawn up by the Labour Women's Action Committee which was passed at last year's women's conference, the National Labour Women's Committee have organised shadow elections for the women's section of the NEC. These elections will be held at women's conference, and the women elected will then be the focus of a campaign at National Conference, calling for the women's conference to elect the women's seats on the NEC. 20 women's sections have sent resolutions supporting the shadow elections and calling upon the National Labour Women's Committee to widely publicise the results, and hopefully the debate will receive a good deal of attention in the Labour Party and Trade Unions. It is essential that Labour women at the conference show their support for the shadow elections and the following campaign.

Absolutely central to this year's conference will be the witch hunt launched by the party leadership against socialists in the party and the attacks upon the Liverpool District Party. There are 4 resolutions condemning the witch hunt and the 'enquiry' into the Liverpool Party, and it is likely that there will also be several emergency resolutions on this subject submitted at the Conference. Labour Women are once again showing their opposition to the divisive and anti-democratic policies pursued by the Kinnock leadership.

## FEMINIST ANTI-IMPERALISM

Ireland has been an important issue over the past year, with the signing of the Anglo-Irish Accord and the resulting publicity, and this is reflected in the resolutions received on this topic. There will be a record number of resolutions on Ireland at this year's conference, and credit for this must go to Labour Women For Ireland, for their success in developing a feminist anti-imperialism. There are 5 resolutions opposing the Anti-Irish Accord and the Labour Party's support for it, and, for the first time ever, there are resolutions calling for an outright British withdrawal from Ireland with no strings attached. It is a rather back-handed compliment to the success of LWI in raising the issue of Ireland in the Women's organization that there are 4 Militant resolutions rejecting the right of the Irish people to self-determination. Resolutions opposing the degrading practice of strip-searching will also be discussed, particularly drawing attention to the cases of Martina Anderson and Ella O'Dwyer, the two women who are currently being held on remand at Brixton Prison, and who are being subjected to regular sexual harassment in the form of strip searching.

The future (or rather the lack of it) of the Welfare State, is of crucial importance to women, as it is women who bear the brunt of the burden which results from the Tory policies of dismantling the welfare state, and this is reflected in the resolutions in this section of the agenda. There are many resolutions condemning the Fowler Review on Social Security and calling upon a Labour Government to restore all cuts made by the Tories. Also included are proposals for a *socialist* system of social security, recognising that the present system, even before the cuts, leaves much to be desired, particularly in the way in which it meets women's needs.

There are some excellent resolutions on the subject of women's health and reproductive rights – eg resolutions calling for improved screening facilities for cervical cancer and several resolutions opposing the Hargreaves Bill on embryo research (a re-vamping of the Powell Bill) and asserting a woman's right to choose. Sadly there is also a resolution attacking one of the very few victories achieved by women at the 1985 National Conference – the Party's support for the end of the 'conscience clause' for the Parliamentary Labour Party with respect to matters relating to women's reproductive rights – the end of men voting away women's right to control what goes on with their own bodies. Resolution 125 deplores this decision and supports the right of MPs to the conscience vote. Hopefully it has little chance of being passed by Conference.

The heroic struggle of the South African people, particularly women, is rightly recognised this year. There are 8 resolutions concerned with South Africa, which should ensure a major debate on the subject.

Over the past few years the Labour Women's Conference has consistently taken positions to the left of the Party nationally, and hopefully this will continue this year. Labour Women are in a strong position to take up the struggle against the right in the party. The fightback begins here!

**Jane Prust**
**(Labour Briefing Women and Deptford CLP)**



Pam Isherwood

**National Conference of Labour Women 1984**

# CONFERENCE

## SHOULD THERE BE A BLOCK VOTE

**There has been considerable debate among women in LWAC (Labour Women's Action Committee), at the AGM and since, on whether a block vote should be introduced to the Labour Women's Conference – based on the number of women members in the unions. Although the resolution at its AGM calling for LWAC to campaign for the introduction of a block vote was defeated, this remains an important issue which should continue to be debated.**

Those who argue for the introduction of the block vote claim that it would mean that women's conferences would be taken more seriously, would increase the participation of trade union women in the Labour Party and give them a focus for campaigning for a stronger voice for women in the unions. Those against it argue that it would import into women's conferences some of the worst practices of Annual Party Conference, give union bureaucrats increased power over women's conferences and a motive for exercising it, that under present conditions it would overturn all the gains made recently at women's conference and could only be contemplated if women in the unions had greater control over their delegations and policy.

I want to further the debate by airing my own misgivings about campaigning for the block vote at present, although I am not opposed to it in principle.

### At What Cost?

A block vote undoubtedly would give women's conference more weight, but at what cost? The male party hierarchy and union bureaucrats might take more notice of our conference, but this would mean that they would make greater efforts to try to control it, in deciding who went on union delegations and ensuring that the vote was used in accordance with their wishes. Do we want to risk the possibility of our conference decisions being controlled by male union hierarchies?

The counter-argument to this is that it would give trade union women an impetus to fight for the democratisation of their unions, for greater accountability in the use of the block vote. This seems to be based on misplaced optimism. It would certainly give women something to fight for, but can we expect them to achieve overnight the democratisation of the unions that men have failed to achieve? True, women in the labour movement are a more radical force for change than men, but it is naïve to expect us to effect some magical transformation of the unions in the face on an entrenched bureaucracy that would have just been handed, in the shape of the block vote, even stronger grounds for resisting our demands. Women need to be in a much stronger position in the unions to be able to exert the degree of control over policy and delegates that a block vote would necessitate.

This is seen by those in favour of a block vote as a patronising dismissal of trade union women, placing conditions on them before "allowing"them the block vote. But do we know whether the majority of rank and file women in the unions want the block vote? Has anyone ever asked them? For LWAC to have gone ahead with campaigning for a block vote without doing the preparatory groundwork *would* have ben patronising.

Accusing opponents of the block vote of putting down trade union women ignores the fact that we are all (at least those of us in waged employment) trade union women. We are not type-casting trade union women as a separate species of wimps manipulated by men. We are saying that we, women in the labour movement as a whole, are not yet in a strong enough position to introduce the block vote to our conferences.

### Imitating Men

A further argument which I have heard from those who claim that opponents of the block vote are denigrating women is that "if it's good enough for men it should be good enough for women." This I find a bizarre argument implying as it does that women's interests are advanced merely by imitating men. It presupposes that the sort of organisation the Labour Party as a whole has is necessarily good, when in other ways we have all been busily campaigning for years to change and democratise the Party's structures. LWAC has done much to expose the horse-trading of votes at Party Conference that the block vote entails. Do we want this to happen at women's conferences too?

It is argued that if this happens and leads to a swing to the right at our conference, then it merely shows us how much work is still to be done. But we already know we still have a very long way to go before our movement is truly democratic and we have won the majority of women in it to the left and to feminism. We don't need to take on the full power of union bureaucracies to learn this lesson. We don't need to be made to fight our case from a weak and defensive position. Let's make no mistake about it — the shift to the right that the block vote is likely to bring about, if introduced in the form existing at Party Conference, would be dramatic and long term. We stand to lose, for several years, our ability to use the women's conference as a base for campaigning for socialism and feminism.

### Weight of the Block Vote

The problem of the block vote, moreover, is not just the result of lack of union democracy. There are more fundamental problems concerning the weight of the block vote at Party Conference. Is it democratic, in any case, for the unions as a whole, or often one or two big unions, to be able to determine the outcome of any vote? Obviously unions should have a block vote reflecting the number of members they represent, but I am not at all sure that this should outweigh votes from the constituency section of the Party. Unions, after all, have votes as affiliated organisations, not as representatives of individual members. Also unions can have a large impact on constituency policy through their delegates to GMCs so they have the opportunity to influence Party policy both through the constituency and union sections of the Party.

If we are thinking about introducing block voting to women's conferences, this crucial question of weighting must be dealt with.

The final accusation thrown at those who have doubts about the block vote is that we have no alternative. I am not sure what this means, what sort of alternative they have in mind or to what end. In any case, opposing a change does not logically require any alternative other than keeping our conferences as they are for the time being. If they mean alternative ways of involving more women in the unions and in the Party, there are many other ways. It is far more important to encourage trade union women to join the Labour Party and participate in its grass roots organisations than to campaign for the block vote.

Ultimately, I believe, we should have and will have a block vote at women's conference. But before we jump in and start campaigning for it we need to think about how it would be organised, the weighting it should have, as well as doing the ground work in our unions to find out what women think about it and how they think it could be made accountable. I also believe that this should not be pursued in isolation from LWAC's other demands. The issue of the block vote would best be resolved in the context of drawing up proper rules of conduct for and affiliation to the women's organisation of the Party and its relation to the Party as a whole. And, as LWAC has demanded in the past, this should be done democratically at a special rules conference.

**Stevi Jackson**
**Organiser, Wales LWAC**
**(in a personal capacity)**

## NATIONAL LABOUR WOMEN'S CONFERENCE – SHADOW ELECTIONS

**Nominations for the Shadow Elections for the Women's Section of the NEC which will be held at this year's National Labour Women's Conference, have now closed. The Labour Women's Action Committee will be holding a postal ballot of their members to decide upon their slate for the elections, ballot papers will be going out to LWAC members in the near future.**

*Briefing* supports the following women in the LWAC ballot:–

**Dianne Abbott**
**Sarah Roelofs**
**Mandy Moore**
**Gill Jenkins**
**Linda Bellos**

# Y.S. CONFERENCE REPORT

YOUTH BRIEFING

**For at least the third consecutive year the National Labour Party YS conference was smaller than the year before. Of course, it is difficult to build the YS in the aftermath of the defeat of the miners, with the YS budget being slashed and its members witch-hunted by the NEC. But did this year's conference deliver answers to the problem? Unfortunately, the policies of the majority tendency, Militant supporters, only compound the problems.**

For example, linking up with current struggles is crucial if we are to build the YS as a relevant, vibrant force in the labour movement. But the current print dispute hardly figured at all in th conference. There was to be no mobilisation for the following week's national demonstration, no motion or debate. Instead, the print dispute was only one more example of how evil capitalism is.

An important feature of this conference was the intervention of Black Sections around Kingsley Abrams' candidature for the NEC of the Labour Party as well as a well-attended fringe meeting.

Hopefully, the Black Sections will have spearheaded a more general interest from the Labour Left that will continue through the next few years. The Labour Left has treated the YS with indifference for too long. So, the fringe meeting organised by the Labour Left Coordination was also a welcome feature.

Kingsley got 37 votes in the NEC elections, uniting almost all the non-Militant votes, with the exception of Socialist Organiser. Militant voted more defensively than ever in response to Kingsley's campaign, but their total vote (194) signals that they are just about holding their own. (Last year's vote was 195). It is noticeable however that they are having to run to keep still.

There was no debate on NATO, nor on Nicaragua. On one level, in fact, YS conference passed pretty much the same kind of resolutions this year as last year. But there are differences. A motion moved by Briefing supporters calling for the YS to support any genuine initiative against the witch-hunts was passed. We'll have to make sure this sticks for the conference called by Vauxhall CLP.

Another motion passed, affiliating the YS to LCLGR represents a real step forward.

Similarly, although conference again attacked the Black Sections, after a particularly low level debate, there are waverers in the ranks of Militant. Some now actually agree with black self-organisation. As long as it doesn't happen inside the Labour Party!

Perhaps the highlight of the conference was the speaker from the South African Metal and Allied Workers Union. After a standing ovation, it was a shame that conference passed motions committing it only to abstract solidarity work rather than anything concrete.

The LCC also lurked at the edges of the conference hall. But their insignificance at conference shouldn't allow us to forget they are manoeuvring outside the conference hall. They are in fact a big danger for the YS.

The most worrying aspect of the conference was that the votes show a small decline in the non-Militant left active inside the YS. Some are tired of banging their heads against the wall evidently. This raises the difficult question of how we can organise these people to challenge the dead-hand of Militant and take the YS forward.

If the YS is to be built, alliances must be created. The Militant have refused to do this with the Anti-Nazi League, Youth CND and anything else outside their control. This was in part the significance of Briefing supporters campaigning for Kingsley Abrams. But these alliances have to have some political basis, and not just a collection of people from different struggles on a platform. Especially when at Youth Action's fringe meeting the ANC speaker attacked the idea of independent trade unions in South Africa. This is why Briefing supporters also had a successful daily bulletin backing up the central questions, putting forward its politics as well as making the necessary alliances.

**John Tuite, Vauxhall LPYS (Personal capacity)**



Ian Swindale

**Kingsley Abrams**

## LESBIAN AND GAY RIGHTS — NOT JUST A PAPER COMMITMENT

At this year's YS National Conference, Lesbian and Gay Rights was once again debated first thing Sunday morning. The Militant leadership of the YS still seem unwilling to take lesbian and gay liberation seriously enough to give it equal priority and debating time with other issues. However, the resolution which was passed amounted to a very comprehensive step forward for the LPYS. It recognised Lesbians and Gays Support the Miners and also instructed the LPYS National Committee to affiliate to the Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights. The affiliation to LCLGR should be seen by all lesbians and gay men in the YS as a great victory brought about by Lesbian and Gay Young Socialists and lesbians and gays in Militant, recognising that self-organisation of an oppressed group achieves results without dividing the movement.

What was not forthcoming from the resolution was a clear commitment to do anything. The LPYS NC were merely asked to 'produce more and detailed information on the issues'. Also, a resolution which called for the YS to produce a leaflet on the issue and demanded that lesbian and gay rights should be covered in each issue of Socialist Youth was overwhelmingly voted down by conference after the NC said it couldn't afford to print the leaflet because of budget cuts! I call on each YS branch to print their own leaflet on lesbian and gay rights (and send the NC the bill!).

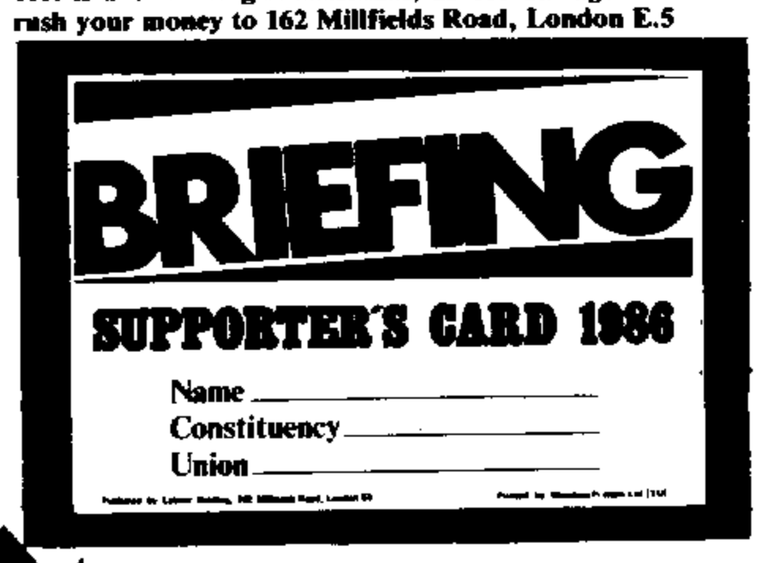
**Alan Holder, (Delegate, Weymouth and Portland LPYS)**

## Streatham seeks Parliamentary candidate

Streatham Constituency Labour Party seeks applications for Prospective Parliamentary Candidate. Streatham is committed to positive discrimination and intends to shortlist only black and white women, and black men. Please apply to The Secretary, 25 Cedarville Gardens, London SW16 before 30th April 1986.

## BECOME A BRIEFING SUPPORTER!

**Briefing "Supporters Cards 1986" are now available. The cost is £10 for waged comrades, £3 for unwaged. Please rush your money to 162 Millfields Road, London E.5**




Next issue out Wednesday May 21st.
Deadline for articles: Monday 12th May.

# FRANCE: THE BITTER FRUITS OF CLASS COMPROMISE

INTERNATIONAL LABOUR BRIEFING

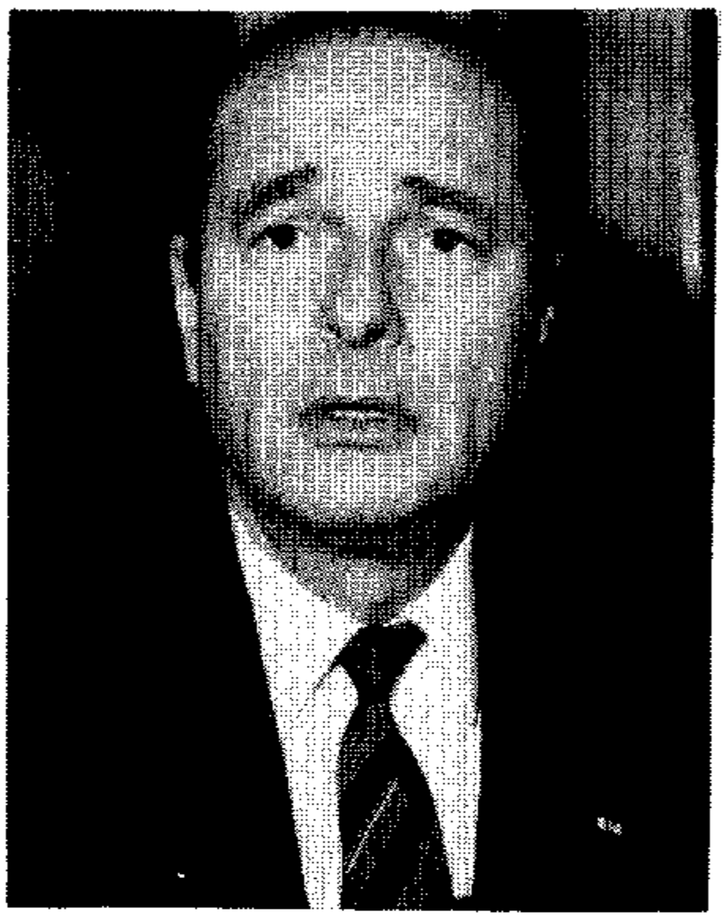
**With the election of a right-wing government, France has entered a new political era. This is unfamiliar territory, with a fragile alliance of Gaullists and other conservatives threatened by the fascist Front National of Jen Marie Le Pen to its right, and dependent on some independent right wing mavericks if it is to carry out its programme. On the left the Socialist Party exults in its establishment as the most important mainstream political party – albeit in opposition – while the Communists begin to fall apart. Dominating the political scene, however, is the experiment of 'cohabitation' between a Socialist President, Mitterrand, and a Gaullist Prime Minister, Chirac.**

Nobody knows how cohabitation will work out but it is at least possible to make some guesses. Constitutionally, Mitterrand can hang on to office for the next two years and, although he can do very little in terms of initiating policy, he can block and delay some of the government's programme. He has already indicated that he will not sign decrees that represent a retreat from what has been won on social questions. This means that if, as is in fact the case, the right seeks to make it easier for employers to sack people, they must submit a bill to the National Assembly and cannot simply issue a government decree. Mitterrand also has the advantage that he can choose to provoke a conflict with the government on favourable terrain and then dissolve the National Assembly in the hope of regaining a left-wing majority.

For his part, Chirac is also happy with cohabitation at present. He can reinforce his own standing and that of his party at the expense of his partners and rivals ex-President Giscard and Raymond Barre at the same time as imposing discipline and solidarity on them in the face of a left-wing President. The new government will seek to impose austerity policies even more draconian than those of the Socialists and will pursue a free-market economic strategy involving extensive privatisation. Overseas, the Chirac administration will be a more resolute ally of the United States than under the outgoing regime, supporting Star Wars and US Central America policy. At home, the French can expect a heavy dose of 'law and order'.

## Class Compromise

If the left as a whole perceived the election as a defeat, from the narrow perspective of the Socialist Party it was a success. With 31.9 per cent of the vote, they are unquestionably established as the main party of the left. When compared to the electoral scores of the Labour Party, the combined vote of the French left (over 40 per cent) gives little grounds for a holier-than-thou attitude on the part of British socialists. However, it does represent a significant decline on 1981 and is the bitter fruit of five years of class compromise. The great danger is that the relative success of one component of the left will prevent its militants from drawing the necessary balance sheet of the Mauroy-Fabius years. Cohabitation puts the Socialist Party in a double bind as it must simultaneously support the Head of State while opposing the government. This might not be a problem if Mitterrand is intransigent in his opposition to Chirac, but there remains the great danger that the party will be forced to play the role of apologist for whatever shoddy deals are done.



Universal Pictorial Press

**Jacques Chirac**

However the situation develops, it is clear that there is now considerable ideological differentiation within the party, a differentiation that is as yet unrepresented by the four official tendencies.

A survey in Le Monde of 2 April 1986 indicated that there is a hard left core of about 15 per cent of the party membership, but that this core (defined in terms of issues like attitude to the Communist Party) is distributed throughout the four official currents and is not only to be found in the supposedly left-wing CERES current. A serious left-wing current in the Socialist Party could act as a magnet to disillusioned Communists. What is lacking is someone to organise it.

## Communist Party

The great losers of the election are, of course, the Communist Party of Georges Marchais. With only 9.8 per cent of the popular vote, the CP has sunk to a dismal level of support equal to that which it enjoyed in 1932 during Stalin's 'Third Period'. Most of the decline has taken place under the leadership of Marchais, indeed it has largely occured since the CP sabotaged the Union of the Left in 1978. Opposition after opposition has sounded the alarm, and each in turn has been expelled. This time the shock has roused even hardened apparatchiks to protest and a signature campaign has been launched for an emergency party congress. At the central committee of 24 March the response of the party leadership was to batten down the hatches. In a display of breath-taking cynicism, Marchais side-kick Paul Laurent explained that the party had actually won more votes than in the European elections (when there was an extremely low turn-out) and that the party's problems were all the fault of their Socialist rivals. It remains to be seen whether the opposition group around Pierre Juquin will make any lasting impact but it does seem that the party is finished as an effective force in French politics.

The decline of the Communist Party has been mirrored by a corresponding decline in the position of the CGT union confederation and a rise in support for the right wing Force Ouvriere. FO leader Andre Bergeron represents something to the right of a TUC-style 'new realism' and is directing his activities to cuddling up to Chirac. It seems unlikely at this stage that the trade unions will form a significant focus of opposition to the right wing government.

So where does the future lie? So long as the French Left remains tied to an aggressive nationalism (nuclear strike force, imperialist adventures in Africa) it will be difficult to mount an effective opposition to the right on foreign policy, and an accommodation to the right on immigration will only strengthen racism and the position of the Front National. What is undoubtedly needed is the emergence of a socialist and internationalist left wing within the Socialist Party, and there is the possibility that this could emerge if those Socialists prepared to draw a critical balance-sheet of the experience of government are joined by dissident ex-members of the Communist Party.

**Chris Bertram (Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP)**

# BRITAIN OUT OF NATO — NATO OUT OF BRITAIN

**SDP leaders claim that Neil Kinnock has made a deal with the soft left in the Labour Party over disarmament – they support him on expulsions in return for which he retains Labour's commitment to a non-nuclear defence and the removal of US nuclear bases. Many Party members with deep commitments to peace and disarmament seem all too willing to welcome such a deal. Whatever else has happened during the Party's drift to the right, the argument goes, at least we are still firm on nuclear disarmament. But are we?**

Certainly the whole defence issue has been put on the back burner by Labour's team of campaign strategists. Once again Healey and Co. are publicly questioning key elements of our disarmament strategy. But the real problem is deeper even than the lukewarm support for Labour Party defence policy which has always been the stock-in-trade of the Parliamentary Labour Party. The consequences of of our continuing membership of NATO under a Labour Government must be faced.

The recent Spanish referendum on withdrawal from NATO has a number of lessons for our Party. First, it was precipitated by socialist Prime Minister Felipe Gonzalez's recantation of his election pledge – and unambiguous Socialist Party commitment – to pull out of NATO. Gonzalez has been seen as the Kinnock of Spain. Like Kinnock he comes from a left background and like Kinnock he has driven his party remorselessly to the right, expelling left-wing members on the way. His betrayal of a key election commitment, and subsequent use of his personal prestige and governmental patronage to force his views upon his party should make all CND supporters in the Labour Party uneasy.

Secondly, despite its defeat, the Spanish Referendum showed the potential for building a grass-roots anti-NATO campaign. Without the support of any major national party except the Spanish Communist Party, outspent by the Government's pro-NATO publicity blitz by 40 to 1, denied fair access to the Government-controlled broadcasting media or the privately-owned pro-NATO press, the anti-NATO campaign nonetheless attracted huge support. It was an imaginative and *internationalist* campaign (Tony Benn, E.P. Thompson, Bruce Kent were among British participants) which drew the biggest crowds seen in Madrid since the fall of the Fascist regime ten years ago.

Pro-NATO proponents of British nuclear disarmament often point out that other NATO members live quite happily without nuclear weapons. This is true, but none of these countries occupies the pivotal position – politically and geographically – that Britain does within the NATO alliance. Nuclear weapons controlled by US military forces have been a presence in Britain for decades; they play a crucial role in US nuclear strategy. It would be naive to assume the US will respond cooperatively to a Labour government invitation to withdraw. The whole history of US intervention abroad since World War II – including their support for Fascist NATO allies in Spain, Portugal, Greece, and presently in Turkey – should be a clear warning to British nuclear disarmers: we will not be allowed to get away with it that easily.

To some extent what the Tories say about nuclear disarmament and NATO membership is true. They *are* inconsistent. We can get rid of Cruise and Trident – and as a matter of urgency we must do so – and we can kick out the US nuclear bases, but we will still be enjoying the "protection" of NATO nuclear forces – and therefore playing our part in the continuing threat to world peace and human survival.

We have always claimed that British uniliteral nuclear disarmament would be an important step towards *world* disarmament. We are not isolationists. British withdrawal from the largest military bloc in the world, a military bloc whose whole strategy is based on nuclear strength, would be an even greater step in that direction. The dismantling of both NATO and the Warsaw Pact would be a huge advance for human life everywhere.

Neither NATO nor the Warsaw Pact will be broken up by joint agreement of all the parties involved. Once again, unilateral action by every country in which the political forces make it possible must be pursued.

NATO was formed by the United States after World War II to secure its military, political and economic dominance in Western Europe. (The Warsaw Pact came into being later, in response to the threat represented by NATO). Its purpose was and is to tie Western European capitalist governments to US interests. No one in the Labour Party should be in any doubt what those interests are. Surely no more evidence is needed after US action in regard to Cuba, Vietnam, the Phillipines, Chile, Nicaragua and the recent murderous attack on Libya, to name but a few? NATO is not now and never has been a "security" pact among friendly neighbours.

The Spanish referendum shows that popular support can be built for withdrawal from NATO. Labour Party members should work towards committing our party to this policy and insisting on its implementation by the next Labour Government. There is no time to waste.

**M. Marqusee**
**Haringey Briefing**


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# South Africa: beyond the national democratic programme

**Charlie van Gelderen (Brent South CLP)**

**By far the most important event in the history of the liberation struggle in South Africa was the establishment of the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) at the end of November last year. From its very foundation COSATU has stressed that it is integrally involved in the struggle, not only for the basic trade union demands — wages, conditions of work, paid holidays etc. — but also in the political battle against the apartheid state.**




Ian Swindale

**Anti-Apartheid held a vigil on April 6 to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the execution of Soloman Mahlangu and to demand an end to apartheid executions.**

It is no coincidence that the Trade Union body, Federation of South African Trade Unions (FOSATU), which was the main driving force for trade union unity, also pioneered the conception that the trade union movement in South Africa could not confine itself to routine trade union matters; that it also had to participate in the political confrontation with the apartheid state and push forward the idea of a political party which could give vent to the aspirations of the working class. These views were clearly expressed in the keynote address, given by Joe Foster, then the General Secretary of FOSATU, at its Congress in April 1982.

Joe Foster's views met with a hostile reception in the press of the ANC (SECHEBA) and of the Communist Party of South Africa (SACP), AFRICAN COMMUNIST, where he was accused of "workerism", "economism", and worse. The ANC and its trade union associate body the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) although not altogether hostile to the development of the independent non-racial unions outside their own sphere of influence, did little to foster the moves toward unity. Indeed as recently as April of last year they could deny the very existence of these unions:

*"The fascist nature of the South African state, which, among other things, forbids the open organisation of Black workers into their own unions (in spite of recent 'relaxations' of industrial legislation)."*

*(SECHEBA, April 1985, p. 27)*

There was also a subtle attempt to refloat the SACTU internally when meetings were held to celebrate the 30th anniversary of SACTU in March 1985.

### Recognise its Growing Power

Since then, the march of events has forced the ANC and SACTU out of its sectarian hibernation as far as the independent trade unions were concerned and to recognise its growing power. Applying the old adage that if you can't beat them, join them, the unions under ANC/SACTU influence (basically those affiliated to the UDF), began to play an important part in building the Confederation.

This is a move which must be welcomed by all who do not take a sectarian view of political developments in South Africa. The future of the South African revolution will be determined by the integration of the political and industrial struggles. But it will also depend on the political and strategic programmes which emerge from this integration.

There can be no doubt that in the past year it is the ANC and the pro-ANC United Democratic Federation (UDF) which has dominated the scene. This does not mean that it is these organisations which have given any specific lead to the shape of the battles in the townships and the state. The townships were being rendered ungovernable by the spontaneous outburst of violence in the streets and schools long before the ANC leadership in Lusaka issued the slogan. The workers, the youth, the people in the sprawling Black urban area of the Eastern Cape and Transvaal — though less so in the Western Cape — have identified their cause with the ANC in much the same way as the British working class identifies itself politically with the Labour Party.

### Definite Socialist Content

At its founding conference, COSATU passed resolutions which are far in advance of the vague democratic formulations of the Freedom Charter. These resolutions give a definite socialist content to the outcome of the struggle with its positive commitment to workers' control at all levels. The official report of the founding conference also made it quite clear that the unions now united in COSATU would *"have no links with any organisation... It must be clearly stated that COSATU, as a workers organisation, will put the interests of workers first."* (*Congress News*, p. 9).

Since then, a delegation from the COSATU Central Executive Committee (CEC) has visited Lusaka where they had discussions with the leaderships of ANC and SACTU. The resulting communiqué would seem to indicate that the pro-ANC forces within COSATU seem to be politically dominant. In a sense the Communiqué is a curious document. In part it seems to refer to the role of the unions and, almost separately, the role of the ANC. But a key passage in the document states *"...that lasting solutions can only emerge from the national liberation movement, headed by the ANC, and the entire democratic forces of our country of which COSATU is an integral part."* In a further passage, it states that *"the ANC ... is regarded by the majority of the people of South Africa as the overall leader..."* In some respects the document is ambiguous, as when it goes on to say that *"... as a representative of our working class, COSATU is seized with the task of engaging workers in general democratic struggle, both as an independent organisation and as an essential component of the democratic forces of our country ... COSATU ... seek[s] to build disciplined alliances so as to ensure mobilisation ... in united mass action [which] deepens the organisational basis of all democratic organisations of the people."* (my emph., *CVG*)

This would imply a recognition that while the ANC might, at this time, be the most prominent of the organisations in the struggle, this might not always be the case and that there are other organisations which must be integrated into the struggle.

This view seems to have penetrated even into the hitherto telescopic vision of the ANC. In the March issue of SECHEBA, an article by Sipho Mila Pityana "One Country, One Federation! One Industry, One Union!" calls on the two large Trade Union bodies whch have remained outside the Confederation to join and discuss their differences from within. Perhaps of more important content is the call to the National Forum to *"join the other organisation [UDF] and argue their political position from within."* (*SECHEBA*, March 1986, p. 25).

### "Two-stage" Theory

If these words are taken at their face value this could imply that the development of the revolutionary struggle in South Africa is beginning to lead to some people in the ANC questioning its traditional policies. Up to now, the "two-stage" theory of the revolution which prevails in the ANC/UDF has been in sharp conflict with the openly socialist orientation of the National Forum and its affiliates, especially the Cape Action League and the Youth Action League.

For the South African revolution to succeed it must go beyond the immediate national democratic programme of the Freedom Charter. The political resolutions adopted by the founding conference of COSATU are much more attuned to the programmes of those organisations which see the revolution as a combined struggle against the apartheid state and the capitalism which it sustains and which sustains it. Implicit in the COSATU political resolutions is the need for an independent political party of the working class. This is the music of the not too distant future.

# 27th CPSU CONGRESS : POLITICAL REFORM OFF THE AGENDA

Oliver MacDonald

**The run-up to the 27th Soviet Party Congress demonstrated that there are some reserves of political radicalism within the membership and some of the officials of the CPSU. But the Congress itself demonstrated that the new party leadership is no more inclined than its predecessor to give such currents any place on the surface of Soviet political life.**

The Congress itself could have rivalled any of those from the Brezhnev period in the boredom stakes. And in terms of producing a new political line it was a good deal less vigorous than the 24th Congress or even the 23rd. There was no equivalent of Brezhnev's peace programme at the start of the 1970s and the only real focus of speech-making at the Congress was economic management; yet even here, the Kosygin reforms – later scrapped – of the 23rd Congress were more far reaching than those put forward by Gorbachev and Ryzhkov.

The pre-Congress discussion had been more lively. Various economic reform plans were canvassed, there were small signs of the start of a cultural thaw in the theatre and cinema, and above all there was evidently a considerable grass-roots movement for effective political accountability of the CPSU leadership. Demands for the mandatory reselection of even the top-most party leadership were voiced in *Pravda*'s letters columns, and were given some encouragement by the new Moscow Party leader Yeltsin. And equally significant, there was open attack on the privileges of party officials: popular anger at illegal corruption was spilling over into attacks on the normal legal privileges of the party bureaucracy; never before has material of this sort surfaced in the pages of *Pravda*.

But all this was banished from Congress speeches, apart from a diatribe delivered by the new ideological chief, Ligachev, second in command to Gorbachev. He made it quite clear that such attacks had to stop and would not be tolerated.

It would be possible to interpret the Congress as a sign that the Soviet leadership has set its face decisively against any qualitative changes in the system. In the field of domestic politics that interpretation is almost certainly correct. There may well be some effort to ensure that technical and cultural communication is improved and there is some talk of small alterations in the electoral system, perhaps even going towards the Hungarian practice of having alternative individual candidates. But beyond these fields and continuing efforts to limit illegal corruption, the leadership seems set on keeping political reform firmly off the agenda.

Matters are probably different in the field of agriculture. While the Soviet industrial economy is suffering a malaise of slow growth, agriculture is perceived by the leadership to be in a state of chronic crisis. This is the policy field in which Gorbachev himself specialised, and from the time when he took charge of agriculture under Brezhnev it has been in a more or less permanent crisis, resistant to all his efforts at improvement. During the Brezhnev years, Gorbachev made no attempt at basic structural change, seeking in vain to prove that the existing system could work through being improved.

There are now signs that a new departure may be contemplated. Last November, Gorbachev staged a coup against the thirteen ministries and state committees involved in agriculture, firing tens of thousands of officials with two weeks' notice and fusing those retained into a single bureaucracy. And at the Congress both he and his agriculture supremo indicated a readiness to contemplate a large expansion of market relations in agriculture. The leadership's continued reticence about the exact character of what they are planning may be due to ideological embarrassment or to continued resistance within the leadership. But one scheme apparently under consideration is to divide the Kolkhoz lands up among family 'labour brigades' which would sign contracts with the kolkhoz management giving them control of the land for fixed periods of years. Part of their output would go to the state procurement agencies, but the rest would be sold on the open market. A change of this sort would in practical terms mean something like family tenant farming. It would produce considerable social differentiation in the countryside, but it could also greatly stimulate production effort by the peasantry.

The changes in the industrial field are quantative rather than qualitative: a shift of priorities out of social consumption into key heavy industrial fields and energy industries, a crackdown on waste and corruption, the first serious attempt by the Soviet leadership to reduce alcohol consumption, a new effort to tie wages more closely to workers' output, and a slight reversal (so far) of the strongly egalitarian income policy of the Brezhnev period (whereby managers often earned only 50% more than skilled workers and white collar specialists often earned less than their skilled manual counterparts).

In the international field, the Gorbachev leadership has gone further than Brezhnev in effectively abandoning the last vestiges of adherence to 'Socialism in One Country' – the idea that the Soviet Union can pursue a smooth course of socialist development in isolation from the world market. But in abandoning such autarchic myths, the leadership has drawn right-wing conclusions, declaring its desire for the Soviet Union to be integrated within a single world economic and state system and offering the capitalist West the prospect of its dropping even lip-service to the idea of resolving the contradiction between capitalism and the planned economies through the spread of socialism.

This is an extremely attractive prospect for bourgeois leaders in Western Europe and for some in the USA, though it would involve the quid pro quo that the USSR would be recognised as a superpower with its own inviolable interests and spheres of influence. It is a prospect which the Reagan administration has so far resolutely sought to frustrate, not least because it knows that the resulting detente in Europe would make it extremely difficult for the US to exercise effective control over its capitalist rivals in Western Europe in several key fields.

Gorbachev has staked a very sizeable chunk



Press Association

**Mikhail Gorbachev**

of his domestic political authority on his capacity to deliver some sort of deal with the Americans that will avoid the need for a huge, uncontrolled spiral of the arms race into space. If Reagan and the hawks in the American establishment manage to block such a deal they will have succeeded in severely weakening Gorbachev, possibly even crippling him within the Soviet leadership.

What might the rival trends to Gorbachev be within the CPSU? One certainly would be a trend exalting the more muscular use of Soviet state power both at home and to discipline Eastern Europe and to try to shake the military self-confidence of the Western imperialist powers. But it there the possibility of another type of trend emerging within the CPSU? A trend that wants both real democratisation and an attack on bureaucratic privilege at home, while also wanting a more genuinely internationalist, left-wing line in the third world and advanced capitalist countries? Such a trend certainly is not visible at the leadership level. Lower down we are used, from East European experience, to envisage democratising inner-party oppositions as liberal trends favouring a wider accommodation towards the capitalist West, akin to Euro-communism. But the flood of attacks on 'legal' bureaucratic privileges during the pre-Congress period suggests an anti-bureaucratic trend of a distinctly ideological and left-wing character in sections of the Party rank and file. If such a trend did emerge, combining egalitarianism with the struggle for real political accountability, it would give a very nasty shock to a Western political establishment which has got used over many decades to relying on the Soviet model as a negative example for keeping its own labour movements safely in the hands of the Right.

But even if such a trend is growing within the 19 million strong CPSU it is unlikely to surface unless and until the Gorbachev policy is demonstrated to have failed. As for us, it cannot be the Western Left's policy to believe that

# BUILDING OPPOSITION TO THE ANGLO-IRISH ACCORD

**Loyalist violence against the security forces, whose presence in the North of Ireland they are so insistent on, appears to have set back any short-term chance of success for the Anglo-Irish Accord. But a 'defeat' for it at the hands of Loyalist intransigence is not the same thing as failure for the longer term British strategy underlying it. There are great dangers in this strategy that the left would be unwise to ignore. Indeed campaigning against it is an essential priority for 1986. In particular we have to turn around the confusion and backsliding that led to such a weak response to Labour's support.**

In a historical sense, the accord's goals of defeating republicanism by stepping up repression, giving Dublin a voice in the North and promising reforms, seems doomed. Repression has never defeated the anti-imperialist struggle and reforms have only ever inflamed loyalist violence. But in the jaws of defeat some significant imperialist victories might be snatched.

The government would like to roll back the advances made by Sinn Fein since the hunger-strikes of 1981. Even if the accord itself fails, the government aims to use it to foster illusions in the 'neutrality' of the British state's role in Ireland – especially its security forces. It hopes to foster illusions in the 26 county state and the SDLP as the best guarantors of nationalist interests. And it hopes to marginalise republicanism. Despite the seeming failure of the accord, all these are beginning to happen. If successful on a serious level, all imply reversals of the gains made in recent years.

Whether or not British hopes are fulfilled depends a lot on whether and how the accord is challenged by anti-imperialists. Given the treacherous role of the British Labour leadership in supporting this process, it is particularly vital that the left over here mobilises on the issue.

Labour's support heralds a new form of bipartisanship and much of the left has shown itself largely acquiescent. This is not the bipartisanship of the 1970s in which Labour agreed publicly not to differ with the Tories on every dot and comma of Irish policy. It is more akin to that practised by Dublin in its relations with Westminster.

This involves expressing certain differences and even having the odd tiff (necessary for keeping critical supporters in tow). But there is solid agreement on the basics – maintenance of partition and the fundamentals of British security policy.




**Demonstrators outside the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont as Loyalists stage 24 hour strike against the Anglo-Irish Agreement.**

Those going along with this process (ie not opposing it) in Britain, include erstwhile critics of the *old* bipartisanship and advocates of withdrawal, like Clare Short MP. This is because the Hillsborough agreement is deliberately designed to accommodate 'differences' by creating a new *consensus* – accepted by all parties as the framework for discussion. This framework is set by partition and British interests and it is very dangerous. It aims to freeze out and marginalise supporters of British withdrawal and Irish self-determination on both sides of the water.

It also rides on the credibility gained by figures like Soley and Short through recent Labour Party discussions on Ireland. In these they have developed a line called 'harmonisation' which stood for what appeared to be radical changes leading eventually to Irish unity. But it would do this via minor reforms aiming to 'harmonise' the North and South economically and socially, leaving the major obstacles to Irish unity – partition, British occupation and the loyalists' right of veto – untouched.

All this indicates that building opposition to the accord in Britain has to involve more than just pointing out it won't work or blithely calling for withdrawal. The strategies underlying it have to be confronted.

None of this implies dispensing with the successful broad-based approach to discussions that have won support for withdrawal beyond the traditional hard left in recent years. But it does mean a serious campaign against the accord and the 'realignment' associated with it, in the run up to party conference and beyond.

Unfortunately in demanding loyalist consent as a precondition for real change, the accord is aided by the centrepiece of Labour policy – 'unity by consent'. Garret Fitzgerald holds similar views that were certainly no obstacle when it came to him signing the accord.

At root, what the accord, 'unity by consent', the veto and 'harmonisation' all deny is the right to self-determination of the Irish people as a whole. A long term fight is imperative in order that the labour movement support this right as the only alternative to the accord and the other policies.

The chances of winning this are, in the short term, slim. But a rejection of the accord is a necessary step along that road. Real opposition to the latest of many British offensives to be backed by the Labour leadership, is essential, if the left is to have any future over the next few years. Forums like the Labour Committee on Ireland AGM (26th April, LSE Students Union; 27th April, Camden Town Hall, London) will play an important role in gearing the left for this campaign.

**Piers Mostyn**

## CPSU CONGRESS

worse is better, that Star Wars, the arms race, Cold War, Cocom trade embargoes are in the interests of working people for the sake of some future possible radicalisation within the CPSU. In the entire field of nuclear policy, the Gorbachev leadership has presented proposals that the Left in the West can and must support. A united front with the Soviet state on such issues is necessary. And within that context, the Left should, far from down-playing, actually strengthen its ideological struggle against the bureaucratic authoritarianism which enormously weakens the Soviet Union in world politics and which has come under critical scrutiny in an unprecedented way through rank and file criticism in the run-up to the 27th Party Congress.

## May Day Greetings from Comrade Ken

**'The left hasn't been marginalised, it's marginalised itself. The left could have been the driving force, but in the aftermath of '83 they're looking for traitors and betrayals, someone to blame.**

**They've revelled in being unacceptable and repellant. If I went on telly now and said Kinnock's a scab and Healey should be deselected, everyone in London Labour Briefing would give me a big kiss, and it would no doubt knock two or three points off our standing in the polls. Can you imagine what Lenin or Mao would have done with those sort of self-indulgent creatures? Killed them. And whilst I'm opposed to capital punishment I can see why.'**

**Ken Livingstone**

*Reprinted from City Limits, April 3rd–10th.*

# HELP US TRANSFORM BRIEFING!

The Left of the Labour Party currently faces a historic challenge. All of our gains since 1979 are under threat from Kinnock's "new realism". The last 12 months have seen retreat on nearly all areas of policy: a policy of full employment is now rejected out of hand, the policy of economic planning has dissolved in to a toothless "National Investment Bank" and any commitment to renationalise privatised industries has been quietly discarded. Kinnock's "realism" even extends to preserving Tory anti-Trades Union laws. Even the language of socialism has been discarded. Neil Kinnock now appears on television to sing the praise of Japanese capitalism, to defend "individual liberty before equality" and to defend the right to make profits.

Of course none of these changes have been sanctioned by the Party. In order to achieve his swoop to the right, Kinnock has had to ignore even the pretence of democracy. His style is almost one of presidential edict. Perhaps the most dramatic example of this came on the night that Liverpool and Lambeth councillors were surcharged. John Cunningham, appearing on television, was asked whether a Labour government would revoke the surcharge. Cunningham said no. The interviewer reminded him of just such a policy passed at the last Annual Conference. Cunningham replied, saying that no one listening to Kinnock's leadership speech could have been naïve enough to think such a thing was going to happen. So there we had it: in Kinnock's Labour Party his single voice would outweigh a unanimous vote representing six million people at Conference.

But it doesn't stop at that. For Neil Kinnock to discard socialist policies and Party democracy he must do one more thing: attack those who defend them. Thus we see the witch-hunt gathering pace. Not as a side issue, nor simply as a purge of *Militant*, but rather as a necessary component of Kinnock's shift to the right. Nothing is sacrosant in the pursuance of this aim; no policy too fundamental to discard, no principle too sacred — not even that of democracy. Indeed Kinnock is prepared to ignore all the principles of justice, is even prepared to change Party rules in order to expel those who might frighten his Capitalist friends away.

It is impossible to overstate the seriousness of what is happening or the urgency of a co-ordinated response by the left. The Labour Party has a choice between two diametrically opposed paths. That of Kinnock, based on downgrading Labour's challenge to the interest of a capitalist class, demobilising anti-capitalist struggles, all in the hope that this class will choose not to mobilise its might against Labour — or else a strategy based upon the promotion of a clear anti-capitalist programme and the promotion of anti-capitalist struggles as the basis upon which this programme can be made reality.

There is no middle ground between these alternatives. Those who try to stand in the middle effectively stand by as Kinnock drives rightward. But similarly we cannot afford the luxury of division on the left. Of course there will be disagreements on details of policy and tactics. But if we use these to postpone united action the fundamental issue will have been decided in our absence and our debates consigned to a political wilderness.

For these reasons *Labour Briefing* is holding an extraordinary Annual Confernce on May 10th (see details below). The Conference is a reaction to the urgency of the present situation. Its significance lies in the way in which a series of forces on the left are coming in with *Briefing* to form a united left alternative in the Party. We call on all *Briefing* supporters, on all those who wish to defend and extend the gains of 7 years' hard campaigning, to attend the conference. It is, without doubt, the most important that we have ever organised.

## BRIEFING ANNUAL MEETING

### Saturday May 10, 11am-6pm

### Polytechnic of Central London

Marylebone Rd, NW1
(opposite Mme. Tussaud's, Baker St. tube)

Registration: £3 (£1.50 unwaged)
+ £2 levy for London comrades to contribute to a pooled fare.

For conference documents, register and pay in advance. Cheques payable to Labour Briefing, and send them to Jane Kelly, 26, Crofton Road, London SE5.

Creche provided; but please register in advance

**Voting by Briefing Supporters Card only**

***All Briefing supporters are urged to attend.***

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