

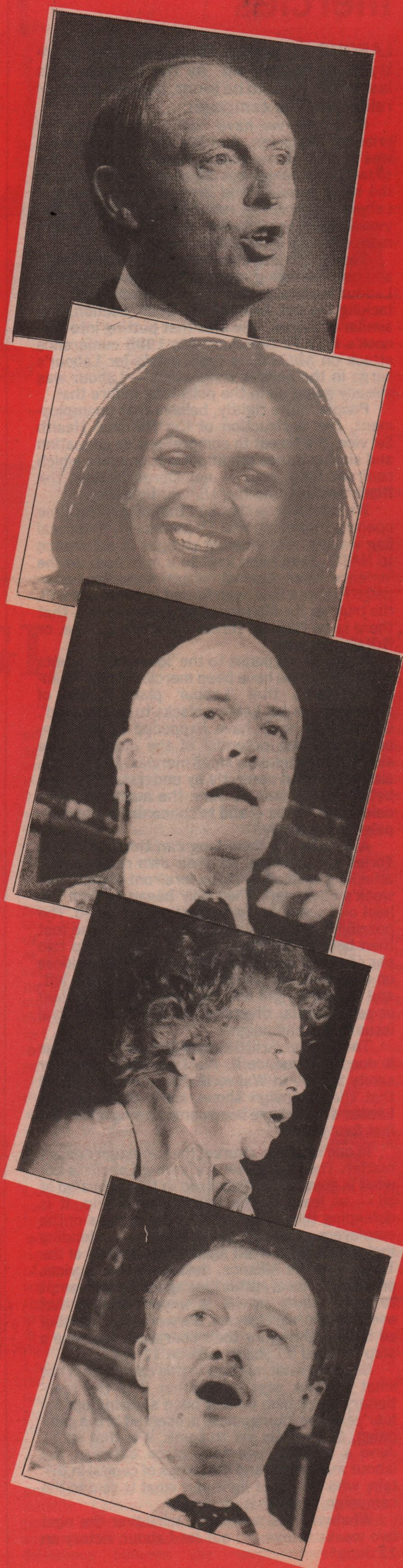
Socialist ACTION

BUILDING AN ALLIANCE FOR SOCIALISM

Inside

- Women and the election
- Thatcher's war on local government
- Phase two of the campaign
- Eyewitness from South Africa

ALL OUT FOR A LABOUR VICTORY



Socialist ACTION

Be thankful for small mercies

LABOUR supporters throughout the country were buoyed up by the opinion polls last week. And, to be blunt, heaved a sigh of relief over the campaign.

It is true we have had a ridiculously TV oriented campaign. And the first TV broadcast was an almost non-political embarrassment. But so far the campaign has concentrated on some of the most popular, and progressive, aspects of Labour's policies — rebuilding the health service, defending education, attacking the government's record on unemployment.

The records also show what a waste of energy, and how damaging, was the four years effort the Labour leadership has spent in witch hunts, attacking the left, bashing the Black Section, and similar activities. The idea that putting into Kinno's first TV broadcast his 1985 conference attack on *Militant* is responsible for Labour's surge in the polls is simply daft — Labour was already going up in the polls long before that.

People, quite rightly, believe that unemployment, the destruction of the National Health Service, the threat to comprehensive education and similar issues are important enemies which confront their lives — not Derek Hatton, the Black Section, and the *Militant* tendency.

We may also be thankful that, apart from the opening shot of the first TV broadcast, hysterical flag waving, and undying pledges of adherence to NATO, have been kept to a minimum on the 'defence' issue. Against his entire previous campaign Kinno was even forced to come out with the truth at the Monday press conference — that there is no Russian threat to invade Europe, or Britain, anyway.

So far, in response to the 'looney left' taunts of the press, we have been mercifully spared announcements that 'Labour plans purge of thousands' or 'all Labour blacks to be expelled'. Given what *could* have happened in the campaign, and the potential of the situation, we should be grateful for small mercies. The left has also responded correctly by understanding that between now and 11 June the main task is to defeat the Tories — and to concentrate the campaign accordingly.

A question is 'how long can this last?'. The Tories and Alliance, for their own reasons, put attacking each other in the forefront of their first week's campaign. They only began to turn the heat on Labour as the second week opened. The possibility for Labour to shoot itself in the foot then became endless. Just let Labour slip two per cent in the polls, or the Tory press cut loose on a particularly outrageous assault on the left, and Labour's right will start demanding *Militant* or some similar diversion, be made the central issue in the campaign.

The left can do little about the campaign — as it doesn't influence it. All it can do is pray for sanity to rule in Walworth Rd — and point out that the campaign shows some of the things Labour should have been campaigning on for the last four years.

In one sense, of course, the campaign doesn't matter. The real reason for voting Labour is not what is going to be discussed in the campaign at all — at least by the Labour leadership. It is defending the unions against the attacks of the employers and government, defending the Labour Party itself against the assault of the Tories and the Alliance, defending the services provided by local authorities against the attempt to break them up. It is understanding that everything progressive in the world, and most of all those fighting for their liberation, will take a step forward if Labour wins on 11 June.

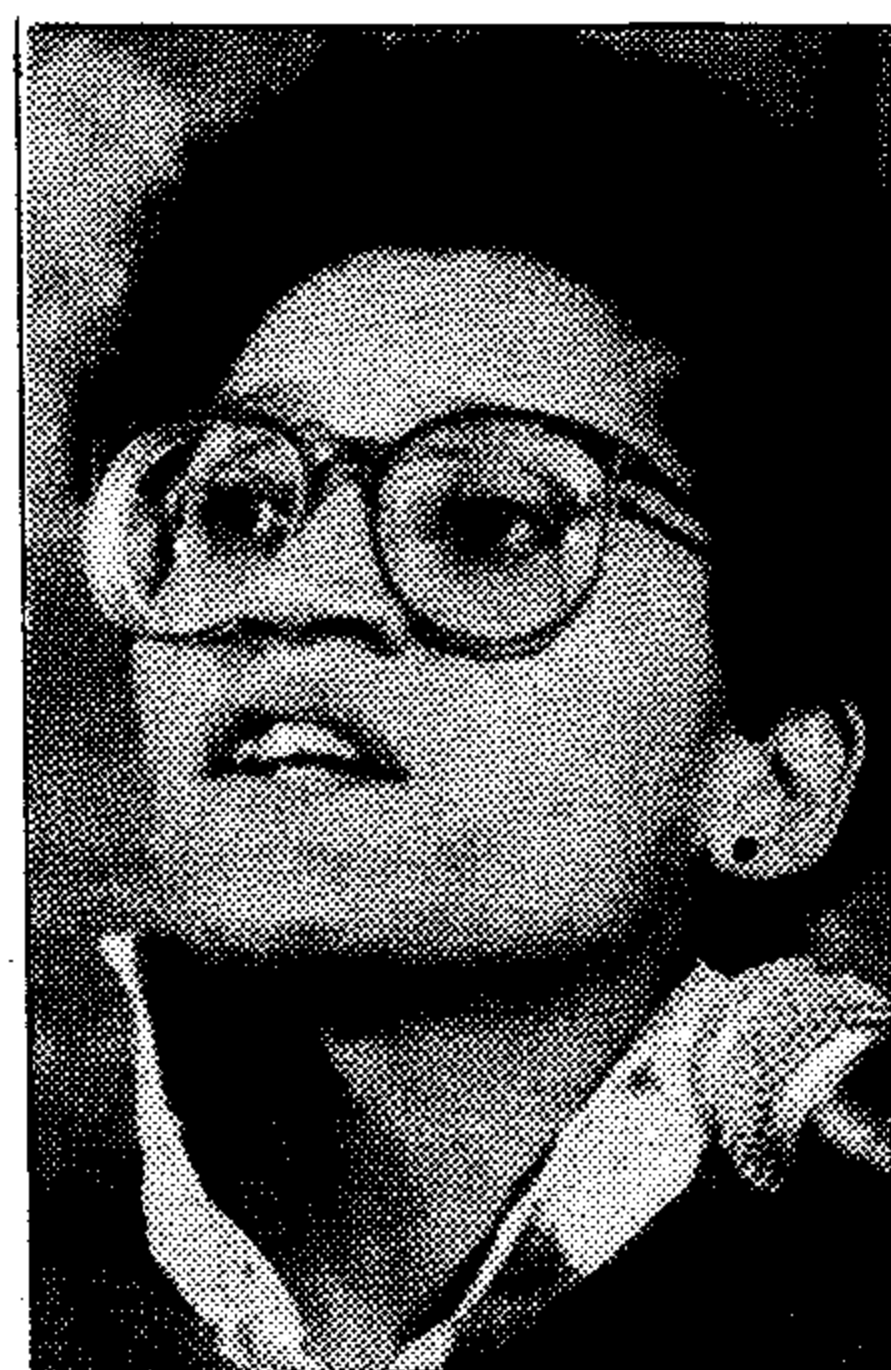
Because what matters in this campaign is not what Kinno says — whether it is the reactionary patriotism he has been spewing out for four years, the 'human face' presented in the campaign, or inanities yet to come. It is that on 11 June a collision will take place between the labour movement and the forces of capital in Britain. Who wins that fight, not what is said in the campaign, is what is important.

Whatever the campaign, whatever the next two weeks brings: All out for Labour victory on 11 June!

Tory plans for the inner-cities

LAST WEEK, the Tory Party launched its general election campaign with a manifesto promising even sharper attacks on local government. In addition to introducing a poll tax everywhere, the manifesto commits a third Thatcher government to setting a fixed and universal industry rate. It promises an increase in private rented accommodation and further erosion of council housing, as well as the widely-publicised changes in education and extensive privatisation of council services. According to *The Next Move Forward*, local government and especially inner-city problems arise primarily from the policies pursued by left wing Labour councils.

LINDA BELLOS, leader of Lambeth council, gives her views of what a third Thatcher government would have in store for the inner-cities.



Linda Bellos

THE Tory Party wants to decimate local government. It wants to further restrict our finances and break up more of the services we provide than the Thatcher government has already done in its eight years of office. That is why attacks on local government are at the heart of the Tory manifesto.

Local authorities are a bastion of Labour's power. The Tory Party cannot win power in local elections, so it wants to destroy local government any way it can. That is why Margaret Thatcher has already abolished the GLC and metropolitan councils.

I don't think local government should have power for its own sake. The fact is that councillors are more responsive and accountable and living in the communities they represent.

Local communities are in the best position to determine what is in our interests. Some of us in local government are critical of how we operate as local authorities, believing that we are not responsive enough to the needs of local people. Thatcher is determined to make the possibility of local councils responding to the needs of local people extremely difficult, if not impossible.

Poll tax

The attack on local government finance is at the root of the Tories plans. Just before the dissolution of parliament they brought in the Scotland Act to introduce a poll tax, the so-called community tax, for which they have no mandate. They have almost no seats to lose there; they don't control any councils

in Scotland. And they have said they would introduce a poll tax elsewhere.

The net effect would be that the people of Lambeth would pay approximately £117 more in rates than they currently pay. That's contrasted with people in boroughs like Westminster paying less. The richer in a community would pay less, the poorer would pay more.

The poll tax, coupled with the proposal for a standard industry rate, would bring the overall rate revenue down. Employers have been encouraged over decades to relocate, from the inner-cities to 'green sites'. This will further reduce employment in areas like Lambeth.

The Tory manifesto says: 'in many of our inner-cities the conditions for enterprise and pride of ownership have been systematically extinguished by socialist councils.' That is crass dogma.

Socialist authorities have been seeking to encourage cooperatives and also small private businesses. But the powers that we have to support local employment are restricted by this government.

The Tories are pursuing a twin-track policy. First, by branding Labour councils as 'looney left', they have attacked our policies which are easiest to whip up common prejudice against. Now they are using that to attack the foundations of local government: housing, education, social services. The lot.

Housing

Their proposals on privatisation would attack street cleaning, rubbish collection, just about everything. The Tories are seeking to decimate local authorities and local democracy and the control that people have over the services that they want to see provided.

Take housing. They want to take ownership and control away from local councils. Say a group of tenants decided they might get more out of a property company.

The property company would spend a lot of money on renovation. It would then do what the private property market has always done: start evicting people — jack up the rents and harass people to leave, so it



could sell those homes. That is something we already have evidence of — it has happened in Wandsworth.

I know that many people are dissatisfied with the repairs service from councils. I am not proud of Lambeth's record — we take too long, and we are devoting a lot of time and attention to improving that, as our colleagues in other councils are. We readily acknowledge that because of the financial constraints imposed on us we are not able to spend as much on council house repairs as we want.

But we know from our experience through the environmental health services that the record of the private sector is appalling. Even now, Lambeth takes less than half the time to carry out repairs than the private sector does.

Old people

Or take social services. The Tories have talked about privatising council old people's homes. Westminster City council tried to. I can well see companies coming into existence to milk the market, to exploit old people for profit.

All over the country privatisation is so unpopular with working class people because they know that with all the faults in social services, we have staff who do their job with commitment. If staff were working for a private company that degree of care would not be forthcoming.

The caring services, particularly where there are large numbers of women and/or black people, are low-paid low-status jobs. Private companies would make a profit by reducing pay and reducing the time available for each person being cared for.

In January this year, in the very cold weather, caretakers in Lambeth were knocking on the doors of people they knew to be vulnerable, doing shopping,

if their pipes were frozen making sure that water was provided. No private care-taking firm can provide that kind of service. Yet it was vital. I am proud to say that no one in Lambeth died from hypothermia for want of council action. Private firms cannot promise that.

Quality

The majority of people are interested in the things that affect their lives: the quality of their children's schools, the quality of roads and pavements, how often dustbins are emptied, how quickly repairs are done, recreational facilities, creches — it's a huge list. I know from the feed back I get from local people that many of the things we're doing are in tune with local needs, but some are not. Some of the things we do — and they've been the contentious things, the ones the Tories have described as 'looney left' — I'm delighted to say are going down well in Lambeth.

We pursue positive policies because discrimination occurs within our society, in Lambeth, and there are a number of steps we have to take to redress imbalances. If I only read the press I would believe that all white people were abridly racist. My experience tells me that isn't true in Lambeth and it isn't true in other places that have pursued positive policies.

Initiatives

When we raise the sensitive issue of lesbian and gay rights — there's no getting away from the sensitivity of it — and when we've explained what it is we are doing, why we ought to do it, and what the benefits are for the community as a whole, those initiatives have been supported.

There is something to be learned from that, something I want to see local government taking forward. It's up to local people to make their voices

heard. And slowly and surely we are trying to respond.

Local authorities have a duty to consult the communities; I would also say that working class people have a responsibility to raise their voices and say exactly what they need and want.

We want money and we want resources. Central government must recognise that inner-city areas are here to stay, you neglect them at your peril. We need redistribution of resources, which is what rate support grant was supposed to be about before this Tory government eroded it.

The contribution that used to be made from central government to Lambeth was 56 per cent. It is now 39 per cent. The balance, the difference, is coming from local ratepayers. But the majority are living in poverty.

Misery

I want to see rate support grant restored to all local authorities, with the balance in the favour of working class communities. The Tories took that away because those councils were Labour-controlled and they had no electoral gains to make by giving us money.

Socially, economically, morally we need that money to spend on building and repairing homes, on more sheltered housing for our increasing elderly community. We need recreational and education facilities for young people.

And more than anything else we need jobs. In some parts of Lambeth there is 70-80 per cent male unemployment. That is the level of unemployment on some of our estates. Putting the hope back by building homes and providing necessary jobs not sham jobs of YTS schemes.

That is what councils like Lambeth would want to see a Labour government do. All the Tories promised is more misery for the inner-cities and for Britain's working class communities.

Thatcher's war on local government

THE CENTRE piece of the Tories election manifesto is a programme for an all out assault on local government finances. JOHN ROSS looks at the Tory battle plan for smashing local government. And at why that assault on local government is so politically necessary — the tremendous popularity of radical Labour authorities such as the GLC.

How the Tories plan to smash local government

THE main goal of the first two terms of the Thatcher government was to break the power of the trade unions and the Labour Party itself. Thatcher's policies against the unions culminated in the struggle against the NGA at Warrington, against the print unions at Wapping, and, above all, against the miners. Almost 4 million members have been lost by the trade unions since 1979 — over a quarter of their members.

Against the Labour Party the ruling class assault meant, through the creation of the SDP-Liberal Alliance, smashing down Labour's vote from 11.5 million in 1979 to 8.5 million in 1983. This combined loss of 4 million trade union members, and 3 million Labour votes, is some measure of the severity of the assault of Thatcherism.

For its hoped for third term, while keeping the attack on the unions and the Labour Party, Thatcher is picking out for special assault the third bastion of the labour movement — Labour's control of local government.

Despite the weaknesses in local government — its often bureaucratic character, the attack of both right and 'left' Labour councils on the trade unions — it has still been one of the ways the working class has defended itself against the onslaught of Thatcher.

Labour's strength in local government also in-

teracts with the trade unions — as much of the unions strength is in the public sector.

At the beginning of Thatcher's government 82 per cent of workers in the public sector were unionised compared to 70 per cent in manufacturing and only 17 per cent in private services. Much of that public sector strength lies in local government. The assaults by cuts and privatisation mean a tremendous weakening both of local government services and the unions.

So severe are the proposals in the Tory manifesto for local government that if Thatcher wins a third time it is hard to see how effective local government can survive other than on government sufferance. The Tory machinery of controls, already in place with rate capping, are strengthened still further by the manifesto proposals. Each measure is designed to fit together with the others to speed up the disintegration of local government.

Right

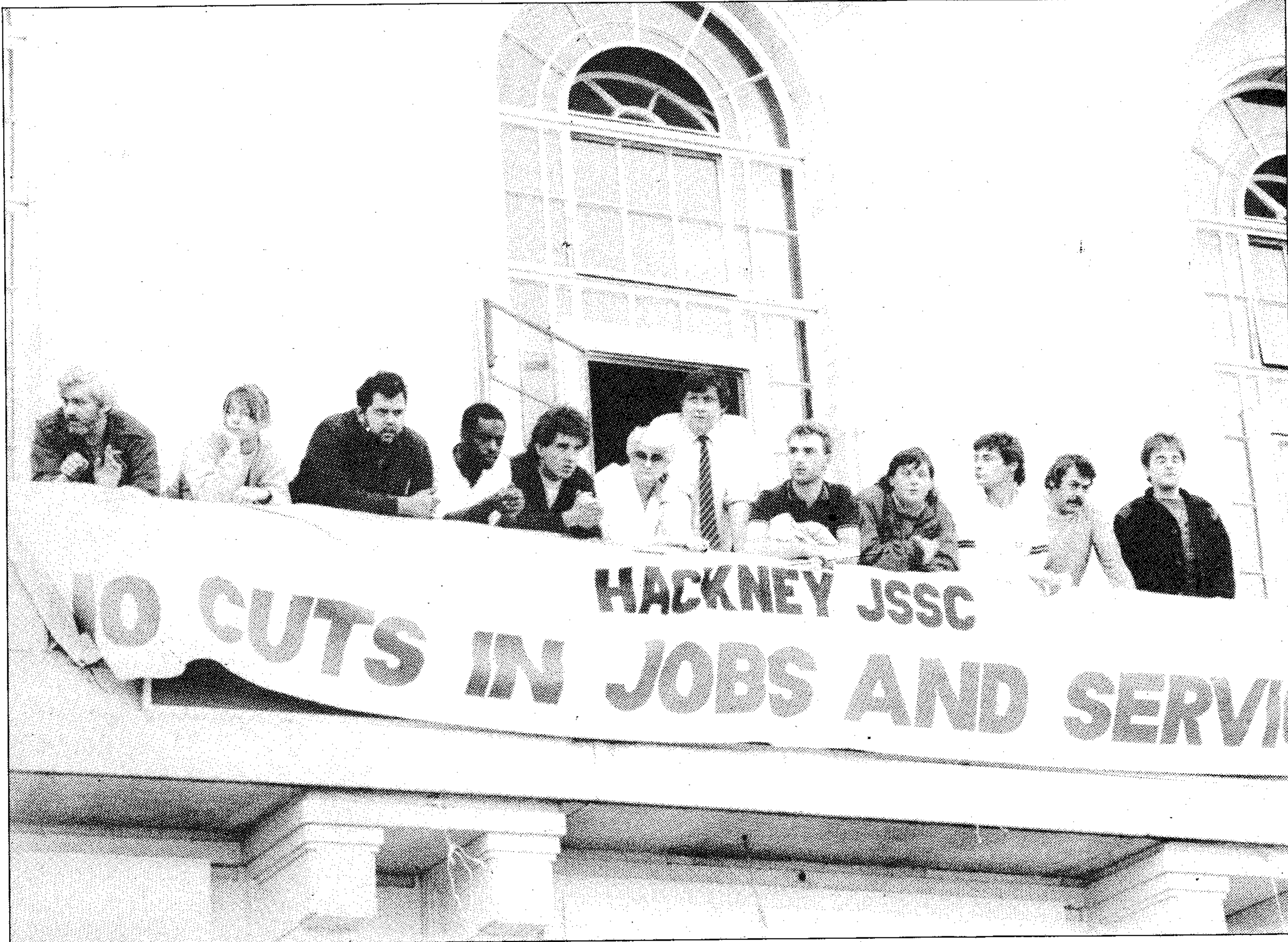
The poll tax is the first step. In almost every area of the country anyone below the top ten per cent income level will be worse off.

The shift of resources away from ordinary and low income families will be tremendous. It means literally that the Duke of Westminster, with an income of £100 million a year, will be paying the same as a person in a low paid family.

The poll tax, together with taking rating of businesses out of local control, is aimed to smash the financial base of local government.

The measures on local government finance interact with the proposal to allow tenants to opt out of council estates — and for whole estates to become independent. If there is a major cut back in local spending, because of rate capping and capital controls, at the moment when the Tories are offering tenants the right to opt out of council controlled estates, many probably will do so. It will smash the provision of council housing.

The same applies to education. Labour controlled authorities are generally major areas of deprivation with middle class, prosperous, pockets. Labour councils usually pursue policies of drawing school boundaries so there is a mix of ability and income in each school.



The legacy of the GLC

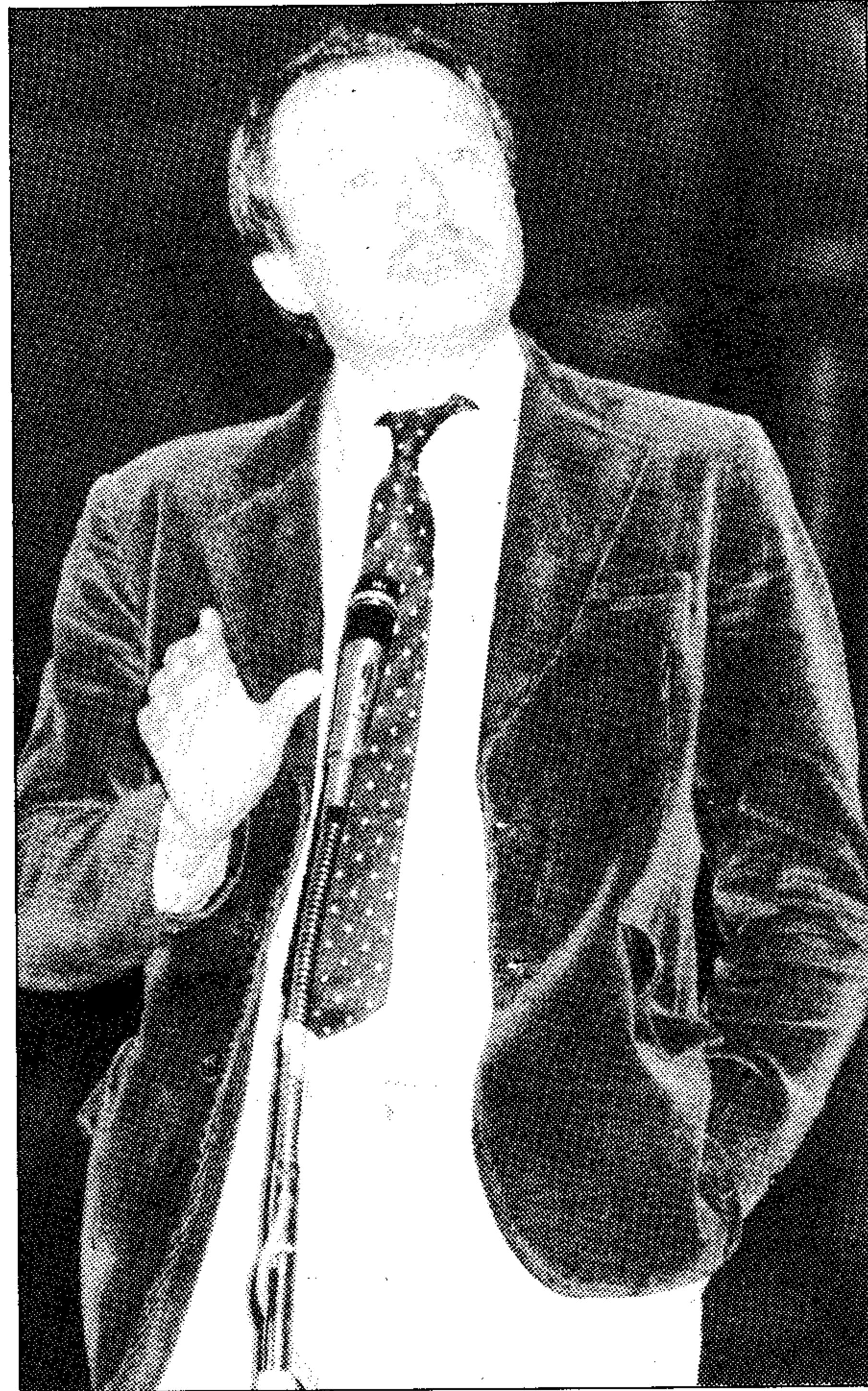
THE REASON for the ferocity of Thatcher's assault on local government is not just economic. It is because local government is one of the areas where Labour has built up real popular support.

It is notable that a higher proportion of people vote for Labour in local elections than in national ones. In particular local government has been an area where Labour has built up support against the Alliance and the Tories, in many big cities, have become a fringe group. The evidence is that Labour's support is more readily built up by radical left wing policies than simply by competing for the middle ground.

This does not mean Labour councils simply projecting a nebulous 'left image' — by itself that doesn't cut any ice. It means councils developing clear specific policies — and making it clear they intend to carry them through.

Nothing confirms this lesson more strongly than the most important example of radical Labour local government under Thatcher — the GLC. Indeed much of Thatcher's present assault on local government, and Kinnoch's complicity in it, is designed to smash the legacy of the GLC. So it is vital to be clear on just how popular the GLC was and how much it changed political perceptions in favour of the labour movement.

First the GLC itself



was directly popular. Voting in London traditionally matches pretty exactly national figures. But the GLC consistently built up Labour leads in London far exceeding anything nationally.

By September 1984

Labour was four per cent behind the Tories nationally, but 28 per cent ahead in London. Throughout the last two years of the GLC its support consistently ran ten to twenty per cent ahead of Labour nationally in the polls.

This support built up even before the fight against abolition fully got underway. In the 1983 election the swing to the Tories in Britain as a whole was 5.2 per cent. In England it was 4.2 per cent. But in the GLC area the swing was kept down to 3.8 per cent.

Political support spread into other issues than simply the popularity of the GLC itself.

● By September 1984 support for unilateral nuclear disarmament stood at 39 per cent nationally but at 44 per cent in London.

● Support for subsidised public transport was 10 per cent higher in London than nationally.

● The view that crime should be dealt with by tackling the social problems that cause it was supported by 51 per cent in London compared with only 46 per cent nationally.

● The 19 per cent national majority in favour of the government's anti-trade union legislation was reduced to seven per cent in London.

● In London five per cent more people thought Labour kept its promises than the national percentage did. Six per cent more people gave their reason for supporting Labour in London as the fact that they liked Labour policies.

The GLC received support both from inside and outside Labour's traditional base. Traditional support was shown in the difference between the

London view on the anti-trade union legislation and the national view. There was also remarkable support among pensioners. But Labour also cut deeply into the 'yuppie' vote which the Alliance had tried to pick up.

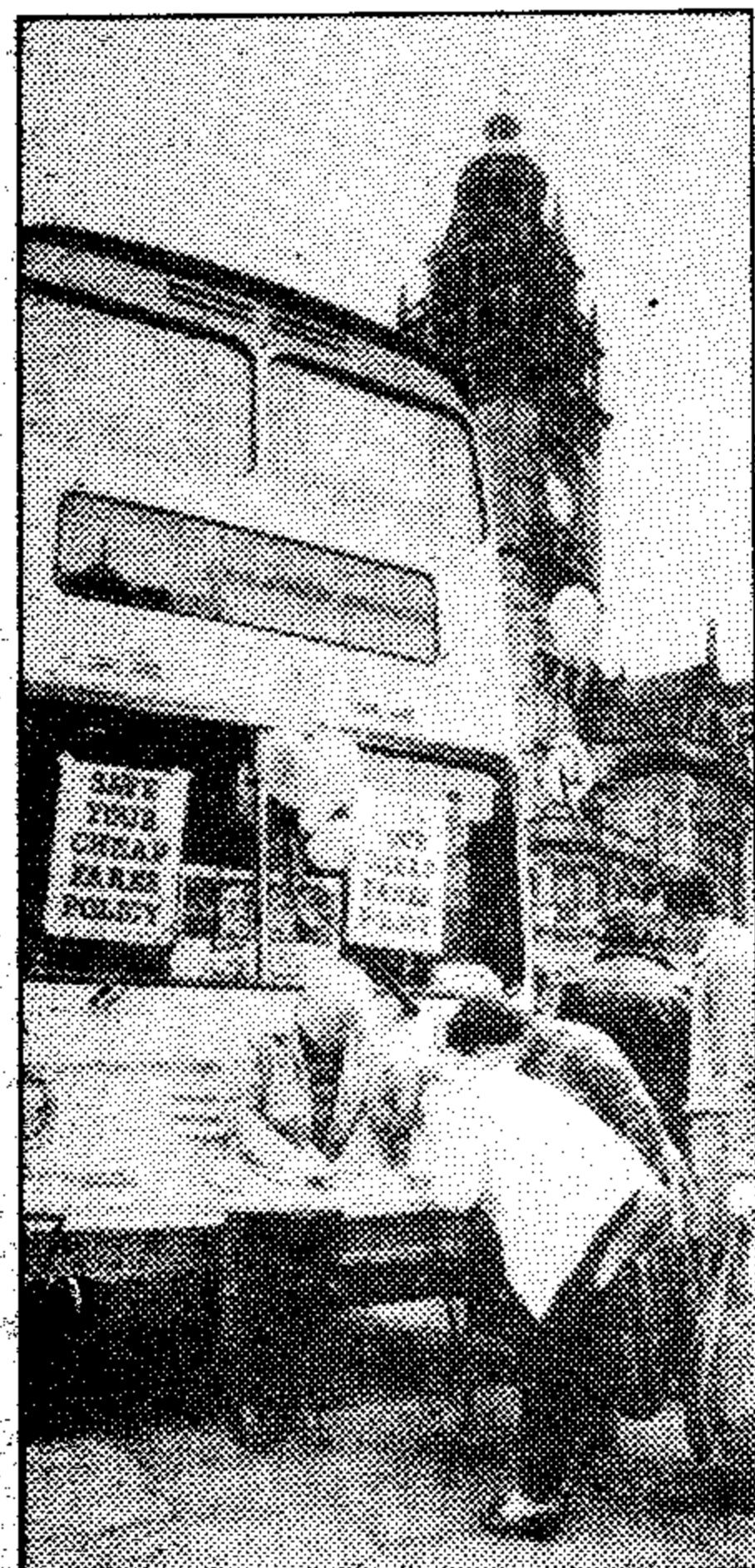
Among 18-34 year old white collar and skilled manual voters, the Tories averaged 28 per cent support nationally and in London. But the popularity of the GLC transformed the situation between Labour and the Alliance.

Nationally 40 per cent of this group supported the Alliance and 28 per cent Labour. In London the figures were reversed — 39 per cent supporting Labour and only 30 per cent for the Alliance.

The policies of the GLC, in short, built on, but did not replace, Labour's traditional support. The GLC maintained or increased support on traditional issues such as fares, opposition to trade union laws and disarmament. But it also won whole layers which in other parts of the country went to the Alliance.

It is this combination of support which explained the popularity of the GLC. The GLC proved Labour's support was built more by radical and left wing policies than by simply competing for the right wing and middle ground.

That is why Thatcher abolished the GLC. That is the political reason she is determined to smash popular local government.



In Brief

Thatcher's plans for youth

THATCHER'S plans for youth are part of the Tories' 'radical manifesto'. To any young person who has passed through state education in the last eight years, or is in the 80 per cent of 16 year old school leavers annually now who do not go into permanent jobs, or has been coerced onto a YTS scheme or has to move home every eight weeks to qualify for housing benefit, or is a student who has lived through the decrease in grants by 24 per cent from their 1979 level — the approach is not new. The Tory manifesto simply promises to round off the policy aimed at creating a vast pool of cheap and easily-manipulated youth labour.

The Tories' 'first guarantee' to youth is 'a place on the Youth Training Scheme to every school leaver under 18 who is not going directly into a job'. Only 20 per cent do. 'As a result, none of these school leavers need to be unemployed' — and the added incentive is: 'we will take steps to ensure that those under 18 who do deliberately choose to remain unemployed are not eligible for benefit.'

By Anne Kane

That is, the Tories will literally force hundreds of thousands of school leavers every year into unsafe, non-unionised, temporary jobs at the rate they would get for being on the dole and which now, of course, lasts for two years.

Having promised industrial conscription for the weakest and most vulnerable of potential workers, others are promised 'guarantees' mild by comparison. The Tories' 'second guarantee', for the 18 and 25s unemployed between 6 and 12 months, is 'a place either on the Job Training Scheme or on the Enterprise Allowance Scheme or in a Job Club'. The third, for those older, is a place on a 'Restart' scheme.

Although the compulsion is not spelt out, the implication is obvious. These 'guarantees' come on top of the £100 million yet to be cut from the benefits of those between 18 and 25, beginning in April 1988, and the 'available for work' questionnaires being introduced. This initiative is planned to 'cut' 200,000 from the unemployment figures.

NUS: let women decide

THE WEEKEND of 30-31 May at Newcastle University sees the first NUS women's Campaign Conference with the right to elect a women's officer as a full voting member of the NUS executive.

This right was created by a large majority at the last two NUS conferences.

By Polly Vittorini

But the timing of conference in the middle of exams has meant a very low and unrepresentative submission of motions — 64 per cent of motions come from Manchester University where the 'Democratic Left'-supported candidate, Julie Grant, comes from. Only six colleges have put in motions and the contest for women's officer looks set to be decided on a low poll. The conference is further undermined by the fact that it is not even standard practice for delegates to be elected.

Concrete proposals for discussion include: affiliation to the Stop the Strip-Searches Campaign and support for the anti-strip-searches demonstration in Durham on 13 June; affiliation to the AAM in recognition of the struggle of women in South Africa; support for the campaign for abortion rights in Britain and the north of Ireland. Some very backward motions call for NUS women's campaign instead to prioritise campaigns for tampon machines and work on 'bread and butter' issues. This deeply chauvinistic stance ignores the life-and-death issues of women being psychologically tortured in British jails in Ireland, women who are raped or deported, and the many other issues central to real women's lives.

● Campaign Student fringe meeting, 9pm Saturday 30 May, speakers from Stop the Strip-Searches Campaign and Labour Women's Action Committee.

Thatcher's assault on education

'PARENTS DO not want their children taught positive images for gays'. Margaret Thatcher, explaining the Tories' education policies, was quick to go on the offensive in supporting their repressive educational programme.

The Tory manifesto is clear. Education will be battered from nursery to further education. The Tories have prepared for this not just through government but, prior to that, through building a reactionary coalition which includes everyone from industrialists to heterosexist bigots. The consensus for comprehensive education in the mid-seventies is being challenged and Labour is unprepared in mounting a serious defence of it — partly because it accepts the parameters laid down by the Tories. RAY SIROTKIN looks at the Tories' education plans.

THE Tory argument is simple. The Tories call for 'moral values' and 'hard work' to be taught — insisting on being taught 'the sort of school they want'. This means 'higher standards'. To achieve this the curriculum must rid itself of those subjects deemed irrelevant. The Tories therefore call for a core curriculum — Labour does too, and there isn't in principle anything wrong with that. What lies behind this is a package to ensure that the education mould is very rigid and not to allow for regional needs or specific local policies. In particular anti-sexist and anti-racist teaching will be removed. Tragically, much of the left have dodged this question while the Tories have been on the offensive.

Policy

The Tories' proposals for reorganising education, which are not unrelated to their ideological ones, are equally horrendous. Despite the limitations of Labour led authorities such as the ILEA — who often pay mere lip service to progressive policies — the Tories, despite several attempts, have been unable to oust them from control of London's education. The Tories know, however, that when they cannot win a majority, they can always change the rules. Thus they have already, before the election, piloted the practice of 'financial devolution'.

This system means the school is given a fixed budget. It can have a set number of teachers or have larger classes so as to purchase necessary equipment. In the Cambridgeshire experiment, serving teachers have even been asked to pick headteachers up from the airport to save money!

On this system, if a school needs extra funding, it could opt for the City Technology College model where it is directly sponsored by, and therefore accountable to, capitalist enterprises such as Dixon's or the Hanson Trust.

It is also worth noting these proposals are designed to split teachers and smash the solidarity of the teachers' unions. Up until now teachers have attempted to resist local authority threats to move teachers. This was seen recently in ILEA. But if a teacher in a particular school felt that maintaining a full staff cut into their own wage she or he might be less likely to resist their colleagues being

moved then at present.

With ILEA particularly in mind, the Tories will allow school management to opt out of the local education authority and become 'independent'. In the case of inner London they will allow boroughs to declare UDI from ILEA.

Once again the Tories plans combine attacking education with attacking the teaching unions. The Tories are not simply creating new grammar schools — which they do want, and allowing the richer London boroughs such as the City of London, Westminster, Kensington and Chelsea to withdraw their funds. They also have directly political tasks. The best way for the Tories to break up the Inner London Teachers Association (ILTA), the most powerful part of the NUT, is to deal with ILEA first.

The privatisation theme of the Tory manifesto doesn't forget the underfives either. Thatcher would wish to see local education turn to private sources where possible. This can only mean a further assault on the nursery end of the education chain as the Tories urge councils to 'turn to the voluntary sector' rather than providing nursery education themselves.

Campaign

Significantly, the rural schools will not be subject to the same capitalist rationale. Perhaps because the Tories have no expectation of winning support in the inner cities, but have much to defend in rural areas, that they aren't prepared to take any risks with their support in rural areas of Britain at this point.

As regards further education, the universities will be run by a new University Funding Council (UFC), with 'non-academics' fully participating. Polytechnics will be removed from Local Education Authority (LEA) control. This combination of proposals means adapting further education to the direct needs of modern capital as never before.

Education, always used to serve the needs of capitalism, has traditionally been organised mainly through the local state. The post war consensus whereby Labour controlled councils would assist this purpose is no longer reliable. The deep economic and social crisis has prompted the Conser-



vatives to prepare for a new structure by which education can best serve the interests of the ruling class.

Effective local government, as the GLC abolition and rate capping indicated, was an optional aspect of bourgeois rule. So are local education authorities. The Tories have therefore decided to radically restructure the local state and its functions.

The tragedy for Labour is that it has joined in with the ideological offensive which the Tories have as a

cutting edge for gaining support for their policies. Indeed the NEC have pandered to and accepted the stream of Tory filth.

The working class needs positive images, not bigotry. The Tory offensive, though resisted by the NUT, at least in terms of policy, has now been carried through to its logical political conclusion. Education has proved to be of political importance not just for teachers, but also for the working class, women, lesbians and gays and black people.

A political solution for teachers — which includes affiliating to the Labour Party — is essential to defend the gains of the post-war period. Uniting with the NAS/UWT will give teachers greater organisational strength, but will not in itself allow for the alliances which need to be made to challenge the Tory strategy.

One thing is certain. Not only for teachers but for the entire labour movement education is now right at the top of the political agenda.

Tories plan to reintroduce grammar schools

THE TORY campaign on education was a shambles at the end of the last week with Thatcher and Secretary of State for Education Kenneth Baker appearing to publicly contradict each other. But the row was not because there was confusion as to what Tory policy was — as the press claimed. The reason was that Conservative policy was drastically unpopular and they had mistakenly let the cat out of the bag. Comparing the policy statements by Thatcher, and supposed 'corrections' of them later, shows no ambiguity on policy at all.

The Tory manifesto is clear. It states 'we will allow state schools to opt out of LEA (Local Education Authority) control... They would become independent charitable trusts.'

What would be the status of the schools that were allowed to leave the local system? Kenneth Baker was clear — and there has been no retreat. Schools opting out of local authority control could become grammar schools.

Baker said that when a school applied to opt out of the local authority system at first he: 'would want to be assured that the character of the school and its range of ability would be retained'. However if at a later time a school wished to change that character:

'they would be able to make an application under the 1980 Education Act which allows local authorities to request a change in a school's ethos.'

Thatcher made it clear last Friday these schools could re-introduce selection. Thatcher said selection was already in use by direct grant schools and privately aided schools. 'It is up to the school to pursue its own admission policies'.

Thatcher spelt it out without ambiguity on Sunday. 'I am a great believer in grammar schools, particularly in large cities... if there are proposals to set up new grammar schools, either from local education authorities or from teachers and parents, that too would be considered.'

There was no ambiguity on Tory policy. Schools removing themselves from local authority control would have to remain comprehensive for an initial cosmetic period. But then they would be allowed to change their character to become selective grammar schools.

On payment of fees Thatcher also opened up the door. She said on Friday: 'Schools which opt out of local education authorities will still be state schools. We do not and will not charge admission fees at state schools.' However she also said: 'If a grant-maintained school (one that has opted out of local authority control) wishes to raise extra funds as a trust for specific projects then it will be free to do so.' This obviously is the thin end of the wedge to payment for education.

Giles Radice quite rightly said: 'Her hope is obviously for a commercial schooling system in which there would be low-cost, low-grade provision for the majority and a different strata of schooling at different prices for the buying minority.'

Hammond's threat to TUC and Labour

THE CONSEQUENCES of 'new realist' policies in the unions and for the Labour Party took a huge step forward last week with the open threat of Eric Hammond, general secretary of the EETPU, to split the TUC. Writing in the latest issue of the EETPU journal, before the union's conference, Hammond denounced attempts by NUPE, the TGWU and GMBATU to gain support at September's TUC conference for a code of conduct including strict rules on single union deals — and which would specify that such deals must not include 'no strike' clauses.

Hammond wrote of the TGWU, GMBATU, and NUPE moves that: 'I must warn that these proposals imply a restrictive practice of considerable magnitude and one which is fundamentally against the public interest. If these unions wield their big bloc votes at this year's TUC conference, it could lead to another critical situation over our continued TUC membership.'

The TGWU, GMBATU, NUPE proposals are being put forward after the EETPU has signed around 20 strike free deals — mainly in Japanese owned companies.

It has recently sought to cut the TGWU and GMBATU out of representation in two such deals in workplaces where they already had members. This angered even George Wright, right wing TGWU regional secretary of Wales. Wright declared the EETPU to be a: 'tame neutered and subservient union willing to do the

Japanese bidding at any cost!' The TGWU is taking the EETPU this week to the TUC's inter-union disputes committee over a no-strike agreement it has signed at Orion Electric in South Wales.

By Bill Andrews

Anger was also expressed at the UCW conference over the EETPU role at Wapping. Delegates voted unanimously for the expulsion of the EETPU from the TUC. Alan Tuffin, UCW general secretary asked the conference to approve the motion despite the fact the union's executive had instructed him to ask for its withdrawal. Tuffin said he had opposed similar moves by the UCW conference last year, but realised now the conference was right and he was wrong.

Hammond, however, has declared his determination to continue with the EETPU's policies regardless of the conse-



Eric Hammond with Roy Lynk of the UDM

quences. He stated: 'We will fight to preserve our right to make agreements in the interests of, and with the support of, our members, free from the kind of vindictive interference that is threatened... The members will not be impressed by wordy, conference resolutions that fail to reflect the realities of their working lives or by the empty class war rhetoric of out-of-touch and out of date leaders.'

Hammond's article came in response not simply to the moves in the TUC but also to resolutions to the EETPU's conference opposing no strike deals and censuring the executive for its role in the Wapping dispute. Ham-

mond is being opposed in the EETPU ballot for general secretary by Flashlight sponsored candidate John Aitkin.

In another move the EETPU executive has refused to endorse Labour's overall election campaign by contributing funds to all Labour candidates. The executive decided that only 'good, decent, moderate' Labour candidates would receive funds from the £200,000 the EETPU was putting into the election.

The union also decided to be 'selective' in backing even politically acceptable candidates and not to contribute to those who were considered to have no hope of winning — which fits in with various tactical

voting campaigns. Mr Ira Walters, the EETPU research officer, announcing the decision, said the EETPU would not support candidates who 'oppose its views'.

Specifically singled out for mention as not receiving EETPU funds were members of the Campaign Group of MPs and Ken Livingstone — who was claimed to have regularly attacked the union, its leadership and its members. The EETPU stated it would be financially supporting only around 250 of Labour's 650 candidates.

John Grant, the EETPU's press officer, will be fighting the general election as an SDP candidate.

The election in Ireland

THE WESTMINSTER elections in northern Ireland kicked off with the attempt to assassinate West Belfast Sinn Fein MP, Gerry Adams's election agent, Alex Maskey, a local councillor, was shot and badly injured at his home by a loyalist death squad.

The response from the British press was not the outcry that would follow the shooting of an election agent for any other party, but instead tacit approval.

The number one issue for the British administration in northern Ireland is to defeat Adams and Sinn Fein in West Belfast. As the table shows Sinn Fein have built up their support to 40 per cent of the nationalist vote in the six counties since 1983.

This goal of defeating Sinn Fein is shared by the new Fianna Fail government in Dublin. Their support for the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) was made clear at a meeting between the Dublin government including prime minister Charles Haughey, and SDLP leader John Hume on 8 May.

The unionist Alliance

Party has already decided not to run in West Belfast and instead is calling for a vote for the SDLP against Sinn Fein. The unionist candidate in West Belfast is Frank Millar, general secretary of the Official Unionist Party (OUP).

The two main Unionist Parties, the OUP and Ian Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) have launched their joint

NI parties' share of the votes

Table showing the percentage of the total vote gained by each party in the last six elections in Northern Ireland.

	1979 General Election	1981 Council Elections	1982 Assembly Election	1983 General Election	1984 European Election	1985 Council Elections
Official Un.	36.6	16.5	29.7	34	21.47	29.8
DUP	10.2	26.6	23.0	20	33.6	26.2
SDLP	18.2	17.5	18.8	17.9	22.09	16.4
Sinn Fein	-	-	10.1	13.4	13.34	10.6
Alliance	11.9	8.9	9.3	8	4.9	6.9
WP	1.7	1.8	2.7	1.9	1.27	1.6

manifesto with the promise to support a new British government which agrees to scrap the Anglo-Irish Agreement. They have concluded a pact not to run against sitting unionist candidates. But the price of this has been massive tensions in the unionist camp.

Robert McCartney, OUP candidate for North Down in 1983 has been expelled by the OUP

for deciding to run against the sitting unionist MP in North Down.

By Redmond O'Neill

Jim Allister, the DUP's chief whip and a former personal assistant to Ian Paisley, has denounced the unity between the OUP and DUP as a 'sham and a self-seeking charade' after the DUP decided he could not challenge the sitting OUP MP in East Antrim who had a majority of 367 over the DUP in 1983.

A number of independent unionist bigots are running anyway. Bill Craig will be running for the Ulster Vanguard. George Seawright, the independent 'Protestant Unionist', who made headlines with his call for catholic priests to be incinerated, is running against the OUP in North Belfast.

In the 26 counties the chief concern in government circles is defence of the Anglo-Irish Agreement which is designed to enlist Dublin's help in trying to defeat and marginalise Sinn Fein, in northern Ireland, and to prevent it building up mass support in the

south. This means building up the SDLP in the six counties.

As regards the British general election overall, both the two key bourgeois newspapers in Dublin have come out in support of a Thatcher victory.

In an editorial on 13 May the *Irish Times* says:

'There is some irony in the fact that from an Irish perspective, Mrs Thatcher's return to No 10 must be regarded as the preferred outcome of the election.' The *Irish Press* editorial stated: 'A win for the Conservatives is no bad thing for this country.'

The Anglo-Irish Agreement made history by binding the Dublin government for the first time to support for partition in an international treaty, in direct contradiction with the constitution of the 26 counties which claims sovereignty over the whole of Ireland. Now we have the logical concomitant of that: the papers which reflect the views of the most influential section of the southern bourgeoisie actually calling for support for the most anti-Irish party in Britain — the aptly named 'Conservative and Unionist Party'!

Vote Labour says Irish Post

THE IRISH POST, which with 76,000 readers is the biggest circulation newspaper of the Irish community in Britain, is urging its readers to vote Labour, and take part in Labour's campaign where candidates with a record of support for Irish freedom are running. We don't endorse the *Post's* arguments but we heartily agree with its conclusions. The alliances necessary to secure support for British withdrawal from Ireland can only be built within and not outside, the Labour Party and the labour movement. We reprint below its editorial.

THE general election on 11 June is the biggest test which the Labour Party has faced since 1945. At stake is not only its stature as a party of government but even its credibility as an opposition. The majority of the Irish community has always been partial to the Labour Party — whether out of identification with its social and economic policies or on the Northern Ireland question.

Labour's response in the latter area has always been inadequate to say the least. But recently the direct Irish input to Labour has been considerably improved. Led by the Labour Committee on Ireland, that input has resulted in Labour now having a policy which pledges the repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act and an end to supergrass trials, the use of plastic bullets and strip-searching as we know it, as well as the gradual elimination of Diplock courts. Labour is committed to Irish reunification 'by consent' and to working to achieve that objective. Many Irish people would wish for more from Labour. But neither the Tories nor the Alliance offer anything at all in these areas.

Irish links with Labour are, however, most of all represented by people like Ken Livingstone and Clare Short, who have stood with our community in good times and bad. There are about 30 outgoing Labour MPs who qualify in that regard, as well as, perhaps, as many as 60 other Labour candidates. We owe it to ourselves as a community to ensure in every way possible that these people are elected. Our loyalty to such people transcends Labour Party shortcomings.

On the broader spectrum, Irish people must ask themselves if they wish to see a consolidation of Thatcherism. Given four or five more years of government and the Tories will have eliminated most of the hard-earned social advance achieved by Labour rule after the last war. By then it will be a Britain largely privatised — even its hospitals and prisons.

The shaping of society in this country is up for grabs on 11 June. A Labour victory will bring back an element of caring. Another Tory victory and it will be almost a one-party state with the relegation of socialism to a dissident creed to be barely tolerated.

In the main, Irish interests in Britain lie with socialism. A huge proportion of our Irish-born community is aged. Labour is also the only party which, in London boroughs especially, has facilitated and resourced Irish cultural facilities for our young. Ken Livingstone's GLC did more for the Irish in London in a few years than Dublin governments have done for the Irish abroad in 60 years.

No matter how shifty the Labour leadership may at times appear on the Northern Ireland question, we owe it to ourselves to stand on 11 June with those in the Labour Party who stand with us. Indeed, between now and polling day we should be doing more — like working to ensure that they get elected.

Tripartisan position on Ireland

THE Tory, Labour Party and Alliance manifestos all support the Anglo-Irish Agreement and its central provision which guarantees no change in the constitutional position of the six counties without the agreement of the majority of people in them.

This is the infamous 'loyalist veto' whereby a minority of the people of Ireland, in an artificially created statelet, are given a veto over the wishes of the majority of Irish people in a united, independent Ireland.

Even within the six counties, at least two of them would vote to secede from Britain if a referendum were held tomorrow.

A veto for a six county 'majority' over the wishes of a 32 county majority is as democratic as saying that there will be no constitutional change in South Africa without the agreement of a majority of the whites.

On civil liberties the Labour Party's manifesto is totally right-wing. While it says Labour will abolish strip searching, it leaves out other party policies such as the abolition of plastic bullets and the supergrass trials.

It leaves out Labour's conference decision to repeal the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which is

hated in the Irish community in Britain — with good reason as 55,000 Irish people were stopped and questioned under the PTA in 1985.

If Labour's manifesto is totally right-wing, the Alliance position is simply bizarre. Not content with British rule over the six counties they propose in the long term: 'a confederal relationship between the UK and the Republic of Ireland.'

Both the Tories and the Alliance offer an incentive to the unionists in the form of the intention to restore 'devolved' government in the six counties for the first time since the fall of Stormont in 1972.

Stop strip searches in Maghaberry and Durham

STOP STRIP SEARCHES

End imperialist violence against women

National demonstration
DURHAM
Saturday 13th June
2pm

CRECHE AVAILABLE

ASSEMBLY OF UNIVERSITY STUDENTS UNION, NEW ELWELL, DURHAM

SPEAKERS
E. Arrighi (Prisoner)
P. James (Prisoner)
C.A.M.A.R. (C.A.M.A.R. Women's Group)
Irish Women's Liberation
Women's Support Group (Northern
Ireland's Women's Group)

INVITED SPEAKERS
Toni
Bessie
Farm Defence Campaign
SWAPO
ANC

Women and the election

Fighting for the majority

WOMEN are the majority of the electorate — fifty three per cent. The Tories have maintained themselves in power since World War II almost entirely because Labour has not addressed itself to winning women's votes. Labour defeated the Tories among men in 1951, 1955, 1959 and 1970 but lost all these elections because it did not reach out to women voters — handing the Tories 16 years in power.

But traditional Tory dominance of women's votes is crumbling as more and more women enter the workforce — and less and less vote Conservative. In 1955 eight per cent more women than men voted Tory. This gap had fallen to five per cent by 1964, to 2 per cent in 1974, and to 0 per cent in 1979 and 1983.

But Labour has not gained the votes of women deserting the Conservatives. Since 1955 Labour's support among women has fallen by 14 percentage points. In the same time Liberal and Alliance support has increased by 23 points. JUDE WOODWARD assesses Labour and Alliance policies for women.

WINNING women's vote has been key to the General Election preparations of both Labour and the Alliance.

The Tories have always rested on their mass vote among women. Opinion polls have repeatedly shown that it is among women between the ages of 25 and 45 that there is most at stake electorally for both Labour and the Alliance.

The Tories have simply reiterated their insistence that there is no 'women's question' in politics, there is only a family question, a law and order question and so on. So which party will be most effective in winning women's votes? And which, on its record, ought to be?

In terms of reforms that would make a difference to the majority of women's lives the single proposal of Labour to introduce a national minimum wage is head and shoulders above the rest in significance at this election. Its real effect would depend upon the level it was fixed at. Of nine and a half million women in work nearly 10 per cent, that is nearly a million women, currently earn less than £80 a week before tax. One quarter of all women in work, 2.4 million women, earn less than £95 a week before tax.

Minimums

A national minimum wage that applied to both full and part-time workers, even at the derisory level of £80, would make a material difference to women's lives. If the model of Lambeth Council were used, which has introduced a minimum wage of £123, then 50 per cent of all women workers would benefit — four and three quarter million women.

Labour also puts forward the proposal to create a Ministry for Women with the task of framing policies to meet the needs of women. The party has conducted its own polls which show that the idea of a women's ministry is welcomed by over 60 per cent of women — and it is therefore potentially an effective proposal in the battle to win votes from women. However the same poll conducted by the party revealed that over 90 per cent of women thought that it was the Alliance and not Labour that proposed to bring in the ministry.

In many respects this is the single most telling fact about Labour's campaign. There is no doubt that it is Labour that has the most substantial policy on offer for women, one that, if fully implemented, would make a real difference to women's lives. But it appears to be the Alliance which is seen as the party that is making women a priority.

The policy of the Alliance is high on propaganda value, but low on real content. Prior to the election it established a high profile on women by a combination of strong promotion of its women candidates, such as Rosie Barnes, but also Polly Toynbee, Julia Neuberger, Sue Slipman and even SDP president Shirley Williams. Rosie Barnes was picked out to star in the Alliance's first TV broadcast. Great prominence was given to the Alliance's promotion of women. Its 'one woman on every parliamentary shortlist' policy was publically and vocally compared to Labour's failure on this front.

The arguments for proportional representation have been continuously presented as being particularly favourable to the promotion of women and black candidates. Shirley Williams' response to a question on Black Sections on BBC TV's *Question Time* last week was typical: 'In a five or six seat constituency it is inconceivable that at least one candidate from each party wouldn't be black'. Of course she didn't point out that it is also extremely likely that the black or woman candidate would be the ones to drop off the bottom of any prioritised list!

The Alliance manifesto continues in the tradition of high profile promotion of women. The word 'woman' appears on virtually every page, it is featured in

the summary of major manifesto promises, it is pulled out as an issue of special priority in the design of the manifesto, and some of its promises sound exceedingly dramatic. In particular it highlights its promise to ensure that there are '50 per cent of women on all publically appointed bodies within ten years' — a policy which, in itself, Labour should certainly adopt.

Appointments

But singling out the proposal for increased appointments to public bodies is a key indicator of the entire Alliance strategy on women. The present appointment of women to public bodies averages around 23 per cent. Even the Home Office, which appoints the Equal Opportunities Commission and the Department of Trade, which appoints to price and consumer bodies, only manage 30 and 29 per cent respectively. The Department of Education and Science only appoints around 12 per cent women to its public bodies!

For a certain layer of professional women the Alliance's proposal would undoubtedly open up a whole range of highly paid administrative posts which have previously been closed to them.

However given that only 28,500 posts in total are involved, and women already occupy approximately 6,600, this 'dramatic' proposal of the Alliance boils down to an offer of 8,000 jobs, exclusively for highly qualified women, over the next ten years.

This is clearly not a proposal that will benefit the most of us. But for the relatively restricted layer of professional women it is an offer not to be sneezed at, and it has the added advantage of being very good propaganda in establishing the Alliance as a 'feminist' party.

The proposal summarises the Alliance strategy. It is followed through in every aspect of the Alliance manifesto as it affects women. The net effect of the Alliance proposals is to offer some real gains for a restricted layer of professional and highly qualified women. However for the great majority of women the proposals are strictly cosmetic, and the Alliance's manifesto would lead to a deepening of the problems confronting the low paid, and unskilled women workers.

The Alliance proposes to maintain the privatisation policy of the Tories, and their restrictions on local government finances. But it has particularly been in the public sector, especially in local government, that women have made the most gains in pay, promotion

and job access. The continuation of Tory policies by the Alliance in these sectors has far more negative significance for women than the positive impact of Alliance promises of a small number of public appointments.

But if this is the real truth about Alliance policy, why has it managed to successfully present itself as the 'real' party of women? The answer to this lies in a combination of shrewd tactics by the Alliance, combined with the thorough failure of Labour, and the labour movement, to place women's demands at the centre of its concerns.

First, the key Labour policy of the national minimum wage was only established last year — after a decade of fighting against entrenched opposition from the key unions representing higher paid and skilled workers. The vanguard of the opposition to the minimum wage came from the AEU, a union which, along with the EETPU, can be considered as a paradigm of everything that is corporate and narrow in the British labour movement.

Following the adoption of the minimum wage policy last year the same unions conducted a rearguard battle to get it dropped from the manifesto. It is only the fact that unions like NUPE and GMBATU — which championed the policy — are putting up a large part of the money for Labour's election campaign that saved it. The failure to campaign for the policy until so late in the day means that most women workers are completely unaware of the proposal, and the absence of any precise figure for the minimum creates great distrust in Labour's commitment to it.

Débauche

Alongside this missed opportunity there was the debacle around the Ministry for Women. Once the policy had been agreed in the labour movement Kinnock himself led the rearguard battle — this time to get the proposal down-graded, and the ministry not automatically included in the Cabinet. Kinnock was defeated, but the price was that the Ministry for Women was not placed high on Labour's own agenda.

To these failures on external policy we can add the fact that Labour's party has failed to introduce any measures of internal positive action for women in time for this election. Once again it was not until last year that the party conference adopted the 'one woman on every shortlist' proposal — too late for it to have any impact on parliamentary selections for the General Election, and allowing the Alliance to both field more women candidates than Labour and get all the kudos for being the first party to take positive measures to get women to stand.

The Alliance has adopted a clear





Phase two of the campaign

By John Ross

THE TORY election campaign is being run to a precise plan. Thatcher's calculation is that Labour cannot win. Therefore the first goal of the Tory campaign was to smash down the Alliance — the Alliance being seen as the only force, with Labour's current policies, that could eat into the Tory vote. This is why the entire first week of the Tory campaign was devoted to attacking the Alliance, why Thatcher took Alliance defence policy as her target in her first speech of the campaign, and why the Tory manifesto made the extraordinary charge that the Alliance were 'fellow travellers'.

The Alliance also calculated that Labour could not win. This is why they devoted their first attack to the Tories. They hoped to push down the Tory vote to a level where there would be a hung parliament.

But the Alliance, unlike Thatcher, drastically miscalculated what the bourgeoisie wanted. The first demand of capital in this election is that Thatcher should win. As long as the Alliance was directing its main fire against Thatcher it was rubbish in the press. Consistent editorials were carried in the press demanding that the Alliance should concentrate on attacking Labour — because the second aim of capital in this election is that, if possible, Labour should come third.

Media

By the end of the first week of the campaign, the weekend of 24-5 May, the ruling class had got what it wanted on both scores. The Tories had succeeded in blasting down the Alliance vote to manageable proportions — 21 per cent. The Alliance, knowing it could not win, and getting the message from the ruling class, decided to reorientate its fire against Labour.

This was all the more necessary as, for different reasons, both Tories and the Alliance had given Labour a relatively easy ride in the first week of the campaign. It is true the gutter press had carried on an insistent campaign on the 'bash the left' theme — concentrating its fire on Ken Livingstone. But for the first week the Tories had been targetting the Alliance, and the Alliance concentrating on the Tories. The result was that Labour had been given a relatively easy ride to move up the opinion polls. The Tories, in contrast, made the drastic tactical mistake of trying to run on the 'positive' aspects of their manifesto — which were both extremely unpopular and led into a shambles on Friday when the truth about their policy on education became clear.

The second phase of the campaign was therefore launched on Sunday. Its theme was simple — 'bash Labour'. This was gleefully greeted in the *Daily Telegraph* on Monday as 'The election

finally came to life yesterday with Mrs Thatcher and the Alliance leaders savaging Mr Kinnock'. *The Times* daily analyst, Geoffrey Smith, accurately announced on Tuesday: 'The Alliance has relaunched its campaign in the time honoured fashion. It announced that it was not altering its tactics, and then promptly did so. Having earlier indicated that he would not waste his time on Labour because they could not win, Dr Owen was laying into them with gusto yesterday'.

The style of Owen's policy was his attack on Labour on Monday charging it with being infiltrated with Russian agents: 'He (Kinnock) wants a Dad's Army back and Captain Mainwaring's return to colours — or does his confidence stem from his own extensive experience of fifth columnists in the Labour Party?'

There is nothing to choose between Owen's attack and *The Sun* which on Tuesday headlined page two 'Labour would let reds march in, says Maggie'. Both Alliance and Tories will be joining in the last two and a half weeks of the campaign with all out attacks on Labour. There will be no repeat of Labour's easy first week. From now on it is an uphill battle all the way.

Campaign

Those who look most ridiculous of all, even if they are not the most significant enemy, are those who saw the Alliance as part of a 'progressive anti-Tory' force. After all if what the Alliance were mainly about was defeating the Tories they would have been delighted by the first week's campaign. The poll of marginal constituencies on *Weekend World* last Sunday showed that after the first week of the campaign the Tories' potential majority in parliament had been reduced to two. A combined attack of Labour and the Alliance was steadily eroding Thatcher's positions and heading to a hung parliament. There is no reason to suppose the Alliance would have lost seats in this — and could have picked up some.

But Alliance politics have got nothing to do with fighting the Tories. They consider their main enemy Labour. So Labour's advance in the polls, far from being seen as a victory for the 'anti-Tory forces', was seen as a disaster. That is why Owen and Steel turned brutally against Labour. Their fire is now going to be directed against the Labour Party — quite regardless of whether that gains Thatcher a third term or not.

Phase one of the campaign was the phoney war as far as Labour was concerned. It got an easier ride than it could possibly have imagined. Phase two is a brutal bruising fight against a combined Tory and Alliance onslaught. The task of the entire labour movement in the next two weeks is to turn out to ensure Labour wins that fight.

and straightforward, strategy on women. It aims to introduce measures to benefit the growing layer of professional women and present a propaganda gloss on this as being a policy benefitting women in general.

This is a coherent strategy based on the facts of women's changing social position. The last two decades have seen a major increase in the entry of women into further and higher education. For example in 1966 there were 140,000 full time female undergraduates, 27 per cent of the total, and in 1984 there were 244,000, 41 per cent of the total. Today 47 per cent of medical graduates are female. The number of women members of the Chartered Insurance Institute has risen from 4 per cent to 14 per cent in ten years, and the number of women solicitors from 6 to 17 per cent.

It is this social layer which the Alliance is directly appealing to, and on that basis seeking to build up its support among broader layers of women. It is taking advantage of the shift among women away from the Tory party, which has completely failed to update its strategy on women and is still stuck in the mould of appealing to the 'housewife' rather than the woman worker.

The Tory party manifesto had made some adjustments in policy to take account of the female vote. It retains a commitment to child benefit paid directly to the woman, rather than shifting it to the husband's wage packet which was their previous proposal — a policy shift initiated by the Conservative's own women's organisation. However it offers no other specific policy commitments to women, although it has sent Edwina Currie and Emma Nicholson on a speaking tour of groups of female 'yuppies', or 'high flyers' in Tory terminology.

Hidebound

The Tories may be feeling the same pressure as the Alliance, but they appear incapable of making the kind of shift in policy that would allow them to retain their old unrivalled dominance of women's votes.

It looks likely that the shift of women's votes away from the Tories is set to continue through this General

Election. The Tories' hidebound approach is summed up by the fact that Emma Nicholson went through the traditional pre-election rushed wedding, to ensure it could not be claimed she was 'living in sin'. Although it must be said that Labour also explicitly encouraged its candidates to present a traditional 'family' image where possible, leading to a much-publicised dispute with the party's London regional executive.

The Alliance has clearly targetted a section of the female electorate as the focus for its strategy. The Tories are looking at the same facts but failing to adjust sufficiently to block off the Alliance. And what about Labour? It has a policy that has failed to take advantage of the huge openings which exist.

Mesmerised

On the one hand Labour's strategists are clearly mesmerised by the efficient manipulation of the media by the Alliance, and would like to imitate its upfront promotion of key female personalities. However there is a proviso, the women have to be acceptable to the Labour leadership, which immediately brings it up against the policies and positions of the Labour Women's Organisation.

The women elected to the Labour NEC in the women's section — currently women like Gwyneth Dunwoody and Betty Boothroyd — are not there because they in any sense represent women. They represent the right wing. Electorally they are a liability from all points of view. The women the party leadership would like to promote, like Joan Ruddock and Harriet Harman, have no position in the party, and only limited support in the women's organisation, and even this support would crumble if they were imposed as the main representatives of women. Women like Diane Abbott, Linda Bellos, Joan Maynard, Ann Pettifor, Audrey Wise, who have a broad base of support in the women's organisation, are totally unacceptable to the party leadership. The result is that the Labour leadership has both made the decision to promote women and then failed to do it in a way that would really capture support.

This contradiction runs through

every decision the party has made on women. As with the minimum wage and the Ministry for Women, abortion rights and nursery provision, it has adopted progressive policies then failed to promote them adequately. There is evidently a reason for what is so painfully consistent a failure.

The policy of the present Labour leadership is incoherent. It seeks to meet the demands of various different sections of the working class without adopting any policies that fundamentally contradict the basic interest of capital. Hence the adoption of the minimum wage was accompanied by a speech from Hattersley indicating that it would have to be paid for by wage restraint — a totally divisive strategy inside the working class. Even an obvious source of increased finances, by cutting the nuclear weapons programmes, is ruled out by the commitment to increased conventional arms spending — and an assault on capital to raise the finance is totally excluded. So the minimum wage policy stays in, it is given no priority, and a large section of the working class thinks Labour will introduce an incomes policy that will cut their wages. Instead of having a tremendously attractive policy Labour risks losing out.

Comprehensive

Finally, the increased impact of women on all political parties is indicated by the fact that all the manifestos contain a commitment to full scale breast and cervical cancer screening. However only Labour has a comprehensive health policy. Its proposals for women's health this time have a clear source of funding — by cutting out public subsidies to private health care.

Women should vote Labour. Labour also has the only policies which even begin to address the needs of the great majority of women. But until the Labour Party puts forward a clear and comprehensive policy — based on women organised within the labour movement, and which does not depend on playing one section of the working class off against the other — then there is a real danger that the Alliance will reap the rewards of women's revolt against the Tory party.

In Brief

Mendis job frozen by Labour group

ON 18 May the Manchester city Labour group decided not to let Viraj Mendis start his job as immigration and nationality officer until the home office gives him the right to stay in Britain.

The decision has created a lot of dissatisfaction, not only among Labour Party members but also in the black community.

Mendis has now been in sanctuary for more than five months to stop his deportation to Sri Lanka. This is the official excuse for the Labour group not to give Mendis his job straightaway. It claims that he can only do the job if he is able to travel.

The real reason is somewhat different. The city council has been under tremendous

pressure from the home office, the right wing media and from racists.

Instead of standing firm against this racist pressure and defending the council's equal opportunity policies, the Labour group decided to back down. But when you please your enemies you lose your friends.

Before the group took its decision, the city Labour Party had already voted to support Mendis taking up his job immediately. In the town hall, NUPE supports his appointment, and NALGO has written to the council leader Graham Stringer asking why Viraj Mendis is not allowed to start his work. Labour Party wards and constituencies and individuals like Joan Lester PPC, Sharon Atkin and others are sending letters to Stringer to protest the decision.

Lesbian and gay rights charter

FIVE hundred people attended the Legislation for Lesbian and Gay Rights conference on 24-25 May.

It was the largest, most representative gathering ever of supporters of lesbian and gay rights in Britain.

The wide range of sponsorship for the conference included

many trade unions, from GMBATU to the NUM. Ken Livingstone pledged from the platform that a Labour government would rapidly enact the legislative demands of the lesbian and gay movements.

The conference resolved to continue the weekend's discussions in order to produce a definitive charter for lesbian and gay rights.

Whitty gives gay rights committee pledge

AN LCLGR delegation will be meeting Labour Party general secretary Larry Whitty on Friday 29 May.

The Labour Campaign for Lesbian

and Gay Rights has now received a written assurance from him that the party will honour its pledge to set up a national lesbian and gay rights working party. The lobby originally called for that day has therefore been cancelled.

Labour right plays 'race card' in West Midlands

WHEN NEIL Kinnock was painting his vision of a compassionate and caring society in Birmingham town hall on Tuesday 19 May, I hope he spared a thought for NUJ member Som Raj who has been fighting a battle against deportation since September 1985. The Som Raj Defence Campaign and the NUJ decided some months ago, as part of this fight, to call a national demonstration in Som's home town of Wolverhampton. The date set was 6 June.

However, issues of race are clearly beginning to worry Labour politicians in the Midlands.

In Wolverhampton, for instance, the council's financial support for the family of Clinton McCurbin, choked to death by the police in a city centre store, was largely blamed for the loss of seven council seats which has now resulted in Labour losing overall control. And in Birmingham the Labour controlled city council has just abolished its race relations and equal opportunity committee despite strong opposition from party activists and trade unionists.

Policy

In Labour-held marginals the cracks are also beginning to appear. Peter Snape, who holds West Bromwich East by 289 votes, was amongst the first to demand action against the Black Section supporters who spoke at the Birmingham rally on 7 April.

Calling for their expulsion from the party, he said: 'They do not represent black people. They represent only themselves and their own ambitions. They

have undermined us long enough. It is time they had the guts to present themselves under their own banner and policies, which are not — and never have been — those of the Labour Party.'

By Mick Archer

What the specific policies of the Labour Party are on issues of race is difficult to say. Certainly they are not planning to use Som Raj's demonstration to focus national attention on the plight of those faced with deportation.

In fact the campaign was rung recently by the Labour lord mayor to ask whether they would consider postponing the march until after the general election date. The campaign said no.

Given all this, black people's ears must have pricked up when Bill Morris started his speech about what the election meant to him 'as a black person, as a socialist, and a member of the Labour Party'. Having discharged his responsibility by calling on all socialists to oppose the Tories attempts to shove black people out of the political mainstream, he turned to



On the day that Labour launched its manifesto with a rally in Birmingham — and only 24 hours after the launch of Labour's campaign on women — NALGO workers formed part of the picket of the Birmingham city council meeting which voted to abolish the women's and the race relations and equal opportunities committee, Labour leader Dick Knowles' response to the party's poor showing at the local elections.

Labour's record on issues of race.

'Ours,' he explained, 'is the party of equality. Ours is the party of freedom, of justice. And ours is the party of tolerance.'

'But comrades, our party is also the party of non-sectarianism. Our party is a party of self-discipline, not self-indulgence. That is the

price that our leader demands of everyone who wants a ticket on this road-train. And the Transport and General Workers Union fully supports that condition, and let that be recorded.'

Roy Hattersley was besides himself with glee. As for Som Raj postponing his demonstration, perhaps

its a ticket price he's just not prepared to pay.

● Som Raj Defence Campaign-NUJ national demonstration: assemble 12 noon, Saturday 6 June, West Park, Wolverhampton; march to the civic centre for a rally. More information contact Ray George, Wolverhampton 735295 or 54183.

Defeat the Alliance in Liverpool!

THE NORTH West of England has more marginal seats than any other area of the country. Twenty-two are on Labour's target list. In Liverpool, the Alliance expresses itself confident of making gains, particularly in Broadgreen where Terry Fields won the seat for Labour at the last election against an uninterrupted Tory rule. Fields was aided in 1983 by the fact that the Liberal Party and the SDP both stood candidates in the Broadgreen seat. This time round the Alliance is sporting a single candidate, ERIC HEFFER explains the significance of the local election results for Labour and why the fight is on in Liverpool.

AGAINST all odds, Labour did extremely well in Liverpool in the local government elections on 7 May. Once again we control the city council.

This was a clear defeat for the SDP-Liberal Alliance which as confident of continuing to lead the council after the elections — and a vindication of the Labour council's fight against the Tory attacks on local government. With the publication of the Tory general election manifesto, it is clear that if Thatcher were elected for a third term, the attacks on local jobs and services would be accelerated.

Labour won 43 of the 59 seats at stake in Liverpool on a higher than usual turnout. More than 50 per cent of the electorate voted, which was 5 per cent up on

the poll of the previous year.

We retook the city council by a majority of three seats. Labour holds 51, against the Alliance's 44 and the Tories 4. The Tories lost three seats to the Alliance, but Labour also lost four to them, three from Broadgreen.

Labour's vote not only held up but increased in Liverpool city. While the Alliance vote went up overall, it did so mostly at the expense of the Tory Party. Their vote collapsed — they lost all three of their contested seats.

If this support for Labour is continued in the general election, the party would do well in Liverpool. But not all seats are safe. In Broadgreen and Garston, the Alliance did better than they ought, partly accounted for by the fact that last time the SDP and

Liberals stood candidates against each other. Work is needed here.

The Alliance is cock-a-hoop at the collapse of the Tory vote. They are hyping this up, attempting to suggest that Labour is on the decline. But this has already been disproved in the first week of the general election campaign.

The local government elections in Liverpool show exactly what the Alliance is about. They are no alternative to Labour. Here as elsewhere, their function has been to provide an alternative to Margaret Thatcher's government which is deeply unpopular. The purpose of the Alliance is to attract the anti-Labour vote. It is the junior Tory Party.

Media

And that shows the purpose — and the danger — of the tactical voting campaign that the media have run at full steam over the past few months.

In Birkenhead, Labour MP Frank Field has publicly joined the tactical voting campaign. But his efforts to persuade the people of Liverpool to vote against left wing Labour candidates have come to nought. The truth of the matter is that if

tactical voting took place on any scale it is his own seat which is danger.

During the local elections the local press did not support the tactical voting campaign. For the first time in my lifetime, the right wing *Liverpool Echo* actually called for a vote for Labour on the eve of the local election. The *Echo*, of course, was critical of Labour, but pointed out the achievements of the council, like its house-building programme.

The local government results for Labour in Liverpool also give the lie to the claim within the party and outside that left wing candidates and left wing policies loose Labour votes.

The main issue on Merseyside in the general election will be unemployment. We will be campaigning to point out that we need a Labour government that will back up the sort of policies pursued by Liverpool council and the local parties to bring employment back to this area and to defend the rights of those who are unemployed.

The health service, where Labour has a strong showing in the current opinion polls, is another important issue for the people of Liverpool. And so is the question of nuclear power



and nuclear weapons. What goes on in Sellafield directly affects Liverpool. The Irish Sea is one of the most polluted in the whole of Britain.

Ordinary working people on Merseyside want the sort of policies that a Labour government would pursue. If the Tories were returned to Westminster it would be a disaster for areas like ours.

Local government problems would continue and increase. So would the attack on trade unions. Areas like Liverpool are the living example of what a Tory government has in store for the working class communities of this country.

Voting Labour is the only way to get them out. Voting Labour is the only alternative to a system that puts profits before people.

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Eyewitness from South Africa

IN MARCH of last year, activists in the NUR formed a group called Rail Against Apartheid (RAA). NUR executive member, GEOFF REVELL, and London guard, DOREEN WEPPLER, became RAA's chair and secretary. Last May they met with Mike Roussos, a representative of the NUR's sister union in South Africa, SARHWU. They decided on a number of solidarity projects. When the rail strike in South Africa erupted, RAA turned to mobilising the broadest possible solidarity action.

Two representatives of SARHWU tried to come to Britain as part of the solidarity effort but were refused entry. So it was decided to send Geoff Revell and Doreen Weppler as an official NUR delegation to make contact with their South African comrades. They were tremendously well received and, as a mark of solidarity, were made honorary members of SARHWU. On their return this week, they compiled the following report.

'This is not the trade unionism we've been educated in'

WE MUSTN'T for a moment imagine that building a strike is the same in South Africa. It is totally different.

SARHWU came into operation in the main last year and even the leadership were caught, as the acting general secretary says, 'with our pants down', by the reaction to the disciplining of a member.

What had happened initially was that a worker whose job entailed some kind of cash payment handed it in late, and the worker was suspended.

If as strike occurred every time something like that happened at BR, there would never be a train running. I mean it is a simple misdemeanor. But it was against a background of continuing attacks on SARHWU. It was a spark. SARHWU, like the unions here, is a national union with a head office. But each area and district, while they have a central point, has much greater autonomy. It is very much left to get on with its own thing. So the way the reaction to the incident spread so rapidly kind of surprised everybody.

We were told about this group of what we call 'permanent way' workers. You know, workers who maintain the track, put gravel down, and so forth. They travel daily from the townships where they live in hostels and compounds. One day, they come into work and while they are working on the side of the track, on the bank there were these men there with

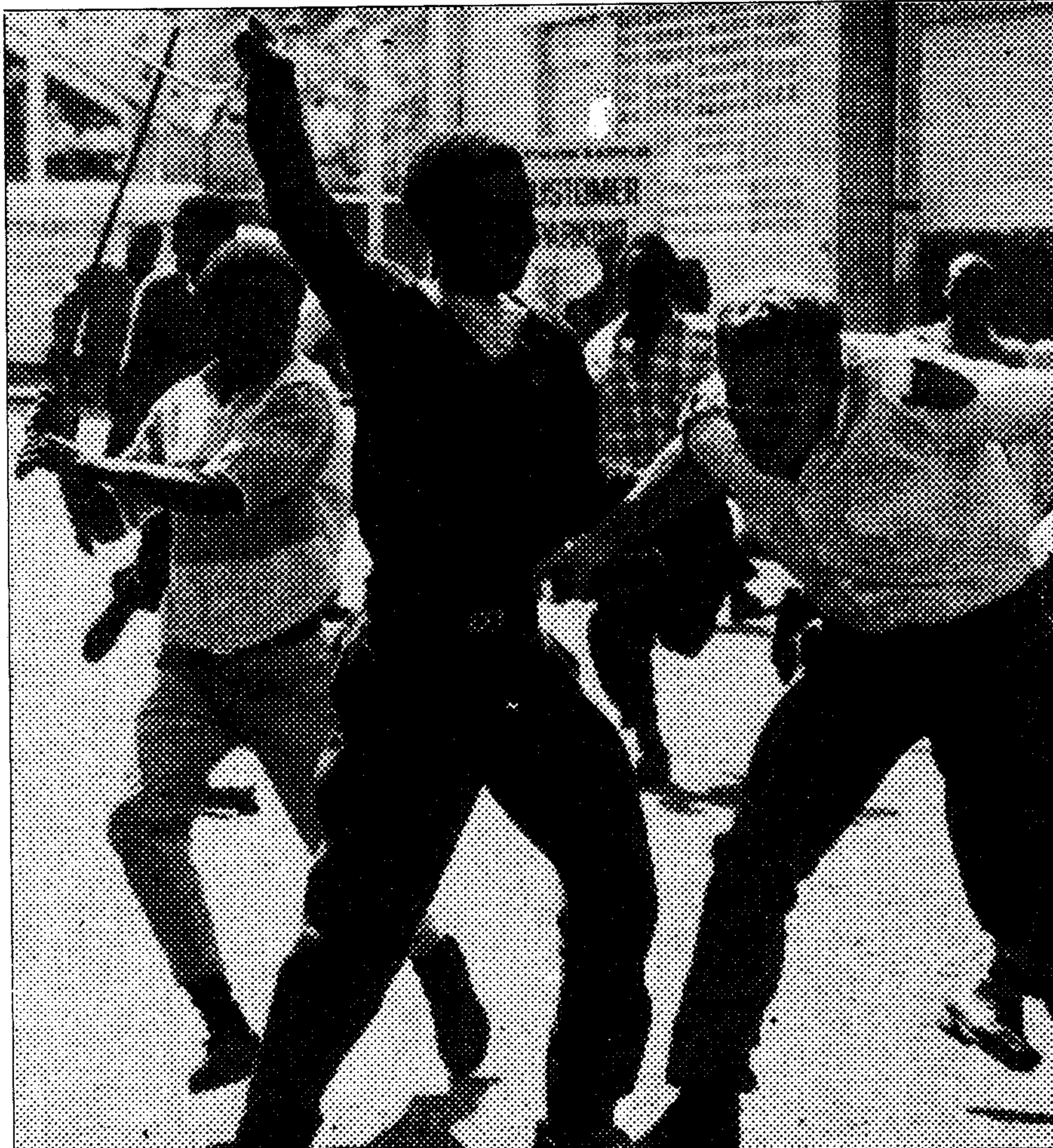
guns pointed at them. One of the senior black workers saw the white boss in charge and asked, 'What's going on? I mean you've got these people standing there with these guns pointing at us. Are they going to shoot us if we continue working, or are they going to shoot us if we stop working? What is all this?'

The boss told them: 'Well, what's happened is that they are frightened that you might go on strike. And if you go on strike they will shoot you.'

The workers said 'On strike?' I mean they weren't even members of a union. 'What strike?' 'Well SARHWU are on strike in Johannesburg.' So they went back and carried on working.

That evening in the hostel they all came to a decision. On Sunday afternoon, when security at the hostel was most relaxed, they all sneaked out to the station, got on a train and travelled down to Johannesburg to find SARHWU. They ask what the strike is all about. It's explained to them, and they immediately join the union and all go on strike.

That's how the strike



Striking rail workers battle with police

gets built! And as they come together like that in struggle, they produce these incredible leaders.

They don't function the way unions do in this country. They cannot move without approval from the membership. They could not even talk to us without approval of the mass meeting.

It is that kind of democracy which allowed the raising of all their demands. The demands for a decent wage, for better food in the compounds, demands against all racialism, for promotion at work, job security based on non-racist criteria, an end to the compound system. This is a whole confrontation with apartheid and explains the brutal reaction of the state.

What the union is saying is that they want a settlement from which they can go forward to build. Their bottom line for a return to work is the reinstatement of all the sacked workers and a commitment to meaningful

negotiations, conducted by the union's negotiating committee, who are in prison. So their second minimum demand is for their release.

They believe they can win this. Contrary to reports here, the strike is building. They're using every avenue they've got — including involving the church. In fact they invited us to observe a meeting with the bishops of Johannesburg. Our presence as representatives of British railworkers they thought would be an additional pressure.

Their first demand is that the bishops sit in on the negotiations to witness what's going on. SATS, the railway company, keep on moving the goal posts so they wanted to have the bishops there to state publicly what the company was doing.

The church leaders indicated their willingness to perform this role, so then the acting general secretary of the union says: 'by the

way, we have trouble meeting'.

Because of the bombing of COSATU House, their only meeting place is a building on three floors which can accommodate about 300 workers on each floor. So they have to have their mass meetings in shifts. They can't meet outside. Two people together outside can be picked up under the emergency powers. So they ask one of the bishops for his cathedral for a mass meeting.

After some toing and froing, the bishop finally agrees.

So then another bishop says that there's another problem. 'We agree that it's a sensible proposal for us to sit in on your negotiations and we're willing to do that because you're part of our congregation. But what are we supposed to do if the employers say they are not willing to cooperate?'

'Well, you take their names and excommunicate them!'

security forces and we cannot do that' and he told a story of a meeting he'd had with the secretary of state for security or some such.

While he was there, making an appeal for decent behaviour, a colonel in the security forces overrode the decision of the secretary of state! The secretary of state — hiding behind the state of emergency — turned to the bishop and said 'you see my hands are tied'.

The Anglican bishop told of this scene out in one of the townships and a brigadier in the South African police said there's nothing going on here, we're withdrawing' and a captain in the security forces instructed him to go in and the brigadier followed this captain's instructions!

Union leader 'sleeps in car boot'

DESPITE the obstacles, we managed to make our contacts. They were marvellous people. Their underground existence is difficult to appreciate. When they escort you round, their eyes are everywhere. They live like that all day, all night. The union leader sleeps and travels in the boot of a car.

Out in the townships it's even worse. The world cannot see what's going on. There have been many, many murders.

Indeed there have been many murders inside the police stations. Since the declaration of the state of emergency, there have been 68 people die in detention in John Vorster Square police station alone. It's in that place that Mike Roussos — who we originally had contact with a year ago — is being detained.

Mike is under a murder charge. He's being stitched up for the murder of railway workers! The

media and the state have launched a big campaign claiming that these workers were victims of necklacing by trade unionists. Mike has been interrogated naked. He has been humiliated in the process. And all for murders that were really done by the security forces.

One day when we were there 15 SARHWU shop stewards were arrested. The entire leadership of SARHWU has been detained. And when you're detained under the emergency powers, you disappear. The security forces are under no obliga-

tion to say where you are.

Against this background the young leaders of the rail strike are incredible. Their humour and their strength. One of them told us that the night before they had been spotted by the security forces who pulled out their guns.

The railway workers immediately drove up a one-way street the wrong way, ditched their car, ran through a shopping centre — all this to meet up with us!

Another told us of a 'terrible time' he had the previous week. They were driving along a road and were spotted by the security forces. A car drove in front of them and forced them to stop. The security forces put pistols against their heads, opened the car doors and forced them out.

Rail strike spreads

JOHANNESBURG is a tense city today. Last week the magistrate's court was bombed. Meanwhile thousands of sacked and striking railway workers every day mill around the blacks-only parks near the city's major line station, waiting to be summoned to a mass meeting over their dispute.

For over two months, these railway workers have withstood an unrelenting attack by the South African Transport Services (SATS) and the entire arsenal of the apartheid security forces. But the workers won't budge from their demands. And so the strike, which is the largest and most disruptive dispute ever seen in South Africa outside the mines, continues to deepen and spread.

SARHWU, South Africa's fastest growing union, with queues of black workers waiting outside makeshift offices to join up daily, has faced every onslaught the government has come up with.

And as the dispute continues, the union is also faced with desperate pleas for aid from workers whose families are being driven to stark destitution. A railway worker's wage supports on average over ten other family members who are forced to remain miles away on the barren bantustans.

Yet every day, after the union's co-ordinating committee meets with the shop stewards, a series of mass meetings are convened. The workers are informed, blow by blow, of developments in the disputes. And when the meetings draw to a close, workers can be seen filing away with fists held high, chanting and singing liberation songs.

The dispute has now evolved into a major confrontation with the apartheid regime. It continues to provide a focus for the anti-apartheid forces throughout the country. It takes place at a time when the trade union movement is registering major advances. Last week, the merger of the metal and car workers unions produced a 100,000-strong union, second in size only to the miners union.

The dynamic of the dispute is conditioned not only by advances in other sections of the liberation movement. Union leaders explain how the antics of the state forces have spread the dispute into the communities, and amongst railway workers in other parts of the country beyond the Transvaal. The latest workers to join the strike last week came from the East Cape region.

It is this spreading of the dispute into the community which is at the root of the decision by Johannesburg's major Church leaders to become involved in the dispute. They hope to be seen as a force capable of helping to get a government backdown. They recognise that the dispute is growing into a rapidly developing explosive situation. And they fear, rightly so, that continuing intransigence by the authorities will unleash an upsurge of uncontrollable action which will spread will beyond railway workers.

It is not difficult to see why they have drawn this conclusion. Management is using every device at its control to crush the workers determination. Workers who have joined the dispute at depots outside of Johannesburg have been served with eviction notices from their living compounds. Food supplies have been cut off from the compounds. Last week, even the first delivery of food by the relief organisation Operation Hunger was turned back by the security forces.

The union is resisting on several fronts. This week, the union tried to press ahead with three test cases in the courts to establish that SATS had acted outside apartheid's own laws in sacking the 18,000. Legal moves are also being made to stop the compound evictions, and to get the union's property released from COSATU House which is under occupation by security forces. SATS response to these moves has been to simply delay and postponement tactics.

Free Justice Langa!

THE president of the South African Rail and Harbour Workers Union, Justice Langa, was picked up by the security forces at 4am on 25 May.

This is the latest in a wave of arrests and detentions of rail strike leaders under the emergency powers.

Emergency letters and telegrams protesting Langa's detention and

demanding the release of all the detention SARHWU leaders should be sent to PW Botha, Union Buildings, Pretoria 0001, South Africa, and to the South African ambassador, South Africa House, Trafalgar Square, London WC2.

Copies should be sent to Rail Against Apartheid, NUR, Unity House, Euston Road, NW1 2BL.

British support for coup

Fijians mobilise against new government

A MAJOR wave of mobilisations is reported to be taking place in Fiji. Mill workers and shop keepers have gone on strike. Cane cutters have set fields ablaze. The new government has been unable to stabilise the situation. JON SILBERMAN reports on recent developments.

The Queen's representative in Fiji has put his full weight behind the destruction of the democratically elected government of Timoci Bavadra. He has sworn in coup leader lieutenant-colonel Sitiveni Rabuka as premier, backed proposed changes to the constitution, and announced that fresh elections will be held following the constitutional changes and backed the repression meted out against the new mobilisations.

This is the real meaning of his struggle to 'resolve' the 'constitutional crisis' that the press told us was so upsetting Her Majesty.

By marching into Fiji's parliament with 20 soldiers and placing the newly elected government under arrest, coup leader Rabuka had apparently snubbed the Queen's authority. She is still nominally head of state of the 300 islands which gained their formal independence in 1970.

Monarch

The coup thereby created a 'constitutional crisis', which governor-general Ratu (chief) Sir Penaia Ganilau had no difficulty in sorting out.

By asking to be sworn in by Ganilau, Rabuka recognised the authority of the distant British monarchy.

Ganilau then gave his support to the council of ministers convened by Rabuka and supported by a meeting of the great council of the islands' Melanesian chiefs.

His endorsement of Rabuka's proposal to 'amend' the constitution, and announcement of fresh elections thereafter was nothing more than the Queen's representative using the authority of British ruling class power to 'legalise' the coup.

Such machinations were

made necessary by the mounting opposition to the coup. Shop keepers, transport workers and others went on strike and mobilised in their thousands as Timoci Bavadra refused to participate in the new 'government'.

The media has attempted to portray these mobilisations as inter-communal conflict between the indigenous Melanesian population supporting the coup and the country's constitutionally landless Indian population — descendants of people wrenched by the British from the Indian sub-continent and brought to work on plantations.

Community

Rabuka has certainly attempted to encourage such communal strife. The changes he is proposing to the constitution are designed to prevent the Indian community from decisively affecting the formation of a government.

But it is quite false to characterise the toppled government of Timoci Bavadra as an 'Indian' government. The reverse is the case. It was the first time in Fiji's history that people had not voted strictly along communal lines. Bavadra himself is Melanesian.

The real objection to the government which underlay the coup was not that it was a government of the Indian community, but that it was the first time since independence that Fiji had a government which wasn't a simple pliant representative of imperialist interests.

The coalition government of the newly formed Labour Party and the National Federation Party was moving to taking Fiji into the Non-Aligned Movement and had banned ships carrying nuclear weapons from docking in the islands' ports.



Ganilau: Oxford educated servant of British imperialism

ports.

This also explains the actions of the governor-general. Ganilau is a key figure in Fijian politics. He is one of the island's high chiefs. Owner of a trucking firm and a government-sponsored pine plantation, Ganilau was involved in drafting the country's constitution in 1965.

Educated at Oxford, Ganilau has been a loyal servant of British imperialism and was awarded

the DSO for his part in leading the Fijian contingent in support of Britain's brutal suppression of the Malayan independence struggle in the 1950s.

He was appointed governor-general in 1982 when he failed to vote against a proposal in parliament that two-thirds of parliamentary seats be reserved for Melanesians. Five years later and it looks as though he and Britain have got their way.

Victimisations — key issue for NCU conference

ON 31 May the National Communications Union opens its annual conference in Blackpool. It is the union's first opportunity to take stock since its three week national all-out strike earlier this year. NCU member IAN GRANT reports.

John Golding, general secretary of the NCU faces fierce criticism at this year's conference both for the terms of the return to work, and for his conduct during the dispute. No less than 12 motions of censure and calls for his resignation have been tabled by a cross section of union branches.

The strike, which defeated BT's plans to smash the union decisively, failed to win the rank and file's demand for 'No Strings' pay claim. In a deal which tied the workforce to a two year pay settlement, NCU leaders also signed a far reaching 'return to work agreement'. This package adopted overwhelmingly in ballots at mass meetings, brought an orderly end to the dispute, but opened the door to sweeping changes in job demarcation and grading agreements.

Agreement by local branches of the union to these new working practices is a condition of an 0.8 per cent pay increment payable from the end of this month. The effect of these attacks on working practices will accelerate job loss, and pave the way for massive redundancy.

In line with engineering employers BT is also pressing ahead with the introduction of short term contracts under an agreement signed by the union's executive prior to the strike.

However the most important issue facing NCU conference will be its response to BT's campaign of harassment and intimidation of union activists since the end of the strike.

Reprimands carrying the threat of dismissal if a further 'offence' is found proved; management refusal to reopen certain union offices they closed at the outset of the strike; union negotiators refused time off to carry out their duties: these are just some of the attacks.

Despite a 'no victimisation' clause in the return to work agreement, individual union members have found themselves arbitrarily removed from their normal duties and workplaces and subjected to determined management harassment. In the key City of London branch, a traditionally militant section of the union, this has culminated in the sacking of two union members.

Building a campaign in defence of these victimised workers must be a priority for the NCU conference.



John Deason, victimised NCU member, addresses a mass meeting during the strike.

TWO MEMBERS of the London City branch of the NCU have been sacked. Their sackings are a direct result of BT's offensive against the union in the wake of the strike. Management have used sophisticated tactics in an attempt to divide union members and weaken the branch that covers the strategic financial district in London. A national response is vital to defend what is the largest and, economically, the strongest engineering branch in the national union.

Following the return to work management disciplined members in the City branch itself, moving them off their jobs, giving them a 'record', etc; and other members in the City area were suspended. This was part of a wider campaign of victimisations and attacks on conditions nationally.

The ex-City branch secretary, and former leader of the union's broad left, Jock Campbell, now a member of management, intervened into the branch's affairs by fingering and witch-hunting union activists in an attempt to effect the outcome of the branch AGM. A letter written by him was quoted extensively in the London paper, *Evening Standard*, adding to the witch-hunt

atmosphere.

At stake in the AGM was what attitude to take to BT's campaign. Officers opposed to mounting strike action in the event of sackings won the majority of positions. Nevertheless, the majority of the branch committee endorsed a proposal to forge a campaign in the union and throughout the labour movement in defence of victimised members. Such a campaign would have been a useful springboard to strike action in the event of any future sackings, but it never really got off the ground.

And when BT sacked John Treadaway for alleged verbal abuse against a strike-breaker's wife, seven officers resigned their positions rather than mount a fightback. Management seized their opportunity and sacked another branch activist, John Deason, and transferred a branch leader, Fred Clarke, out of the district.

The officers refused requests to rescind their resignations; nor were they prepared to stand for reelection. Taking advantage of the divisions within the branch, BT has now refused to allow new branch chair, Fred Clarke, to enter the union office, let alone negotiate on behalf of the branch.

Branch activist, Anne

Fiander, herself disciplined for her part in the strike, said that united action in defence of the sacked and victimised members is key to rebuild the branch.

'A branch incapable of defending its members cannot be effective on any question. Our task is to create the conditions for mounting strike action to win reinstatement. This means building a broad campaign in the labour movement.'

'We have to learn the lessons of the miners' strike. Arthur Scargill has said many times that only through industrial action can the victimised miners win reinstatement. To create the conditions where such action is on the cards, they've built the Justice for Mineworkers Campaign.'

'Drawing up a similar NCU campaign for reinstatement of victimised telecom engineers — which can win the united support of all leaders of the branch — is the first step; and winning the ex-branch officers to rescind their divisive resignation letters and publicly back the united campaign will be vital to forging a new unity within the branch.'

'The union conference will be an opportunity to win national backing for such a campaign, vital to its success.'

Stop the Tories Support our fund drive

THIS is our second weekly issue of Socialist Action coming out during the general election campaign. And with the carefully controlled Labour campaign, which has kept left policies well out of the limelight, it is crystal clear why Socialist Action needs to be coming out every week.

However if we are to keep it up we need a fast and furious response from you. We don't just need your money, we need it fast.

In the first week of the campaign we have already had a good response with a total of £177 in extra donations specifically for the election fund. This sum includes £100 from supporters in south-east London, £12 from supporters

in Leicester and £35 from Bristol. This is good, but not good enough. Keep it coming in.

In this issue Linda Bellos explains how the Tories' plan to destroy local government by privatising housing, services and cutting the rate support grant. If we don't get that 'newspaper support grant' from you, our readers and supporters, then we can't keep going

either. And we already practise creative accounting and deficit budgeting!

Labour has had a good first phase of the election campaign, it's up to you to make sure that Socialist Action does even better.

Send your cheques to 'Socialist Action', PO Box 50, London N1 2XP.

ASTMS debates merger with TASS

THE 1987 ASTMS conference, held on 16-18 May was dominated by the proposed merger with TASS and the impending general election. The conference voted to take the next steps in the merger. This was clearly supported by the overwhelming majority of delegates who understood it would greatly strengthen both unions' members positions in industry.

The proposals for the merger would result in the new 700,000 strong union being in place by January 1988. They would create the third or fourth largest union in Britain, the sixth largest in Europe, and the largest white collar union in the world. The union would have a presence in every sector of the British economy and be a major force in the Labour Party and TUC.

By Phil Paxton,
ASTMS no 3 Divisional
Council (personal capacity)

There is no visible move against the merger within ASTMS so far — although both the Tory Party and SDP are calling for opposition to it and despite some concern in non-engineering sections of ASTMS about TASS's lack of understanding of their problems. A special ASTMS conference was called for 19 September to discuss a postal ballot of the membership. The ASTMS NEC has been instructed to try and reach agreement with TASS's executive on some of the main features of the new unions.

Ballot

The outcome of these negotiations will be reported to the special conference. It will play a big part in deciding whether a full ballot of the membership is called. TASS will hold a parallel conference. If it is agreed to go to a ballot, and the result is a simple 'yes' majority the merger will go ahead.

Differences which emerged were about the type of structure and decision making processes

within the new union. TASS and ASTMS have very different conferences. TASS had 135 divisional delegates at this year's conference. ASTMS had nearly 1000 branch delegates.

Delegates

ASTMS delegates clearly want, and voted almost unanimously for, the retention of a branch based conference, maintaining the right of branches and divisions to 10 per cent and 3 per cent respectively of dues, for divisions to have delegates on the Labour Party and TUC delegations, and for electing the union's representatives to the TUC general council. The platform did not oppose these proposals, and agreed to seek agreement with TASS on them. These votes reflected disbelief in Ken Gill's claim that TASS is more open and less centralised than ASTMS.

Votes

The issue the platform wanted to win was endorsement of the agreement with TASS for each

union to have 330 delegates to the first rules conference of the new union. This would be held within six months of the merger. This number would be double the delegates who normally attend TASS conference.

The ASTMS conference, on a card vote of 160,240 to 63,780, supported against the platform a resolution calling for a branch based rules revision conference which could involve 1200 delegates from each union. The ASTMS NEC will now have to discuss this with TASS.

Diluting

The reason for this vote was that a larger conference is seen as one way of diluting the influence of TASS's powerful 'Broad Left' at a gathering that will decide the character of the new union into the 1990s. In ASTMS no broad left exists. TASS's 'Broad Left' is a closely knit leadership organisation which restricts rank and file participation in conference.

Democracy

ASTMS and TASS members should strongly support the merger — but fight for every measure which increases the democracy in the new union. The development of an organised left alternative to the present leadership of the two unions has to be a goal of union activists as the merger is being carried through and after it is completed.

● We will report other decisions of the ASTMS conference in our next issue.



Clive Jenkins — general secretary ASTMS



Ken Gill — general secretary TASS

Communication workers in conference

THE ANNUAL conference of the Union of Communication Workers continued the trend of the union to the left on some policy questions, while the national leadership displayed a hardening of its stance behind Kinnock.

Mostly the message from delegates was that supporting a return of Labour is complimentary to supporting our own demands. There was however an element of 'postponement' introduced into the decisions taken on privatisation, the shorter working week, and our opposition to the 1984 Trade Union Act.

Perhaps the most remarkable decision of the week was the decision to launch a campaign among the membership to cut communications with apartheid. The decision of general conference was declared unanimous. Tiffin in his speech accepted the tour by striking South African postal workers.

The technical difficulties of postal workers storing South African mail, and telephonists blocking phone lines are not great. The main dif-

ficulty is one of an organised campaign to carry the membership, and this conference decided to commit itself to that. A 'Friends of Moses Mayekiso' leaflet was distributed to delegates shortly after the debate.

By Stephen Bell,
Delegate, Cardiff
Uniform Branch
(personal capacity)

The Postal Group conference adopted some challenging policies. It was agreed, despite EC opposition, to claim a 3 hour reduction in the work week with a ballot for industrial action in September if no acceptance is forthcoming. The delay in balloting may be unnecessary, but delegates argued for time to secure a majority for strike action in the membership.

The Postal Group also

voted to end co-operation with new time and motion studies of the service. Last year the union had been on the verge of a major national dispute on job definition procedures in the main sorting offices. A lock-out in the Leeds office was prompting supportive strikes. Eleven major offices were balloted and revealed an average 75 per cent majority for strike action. The Post Office backed down, and a new deal was drawn up.

Conference rejected the deal. The EC opposed this decision strongly but lost to a massive majority on a card vote.

This decision puts management plans in a spin. The new procedures are a major plank of the Post Office plan to establish a two-tier workforce, in anticipation of later privatisation.

The Telecoms Group generally showed a far less confident mood. Two thousand telephonists' jobs have been lost this year. Contract labour has undermined the domestic cleaner grade, and

threatens the general assistant grade. Delegates showed caution, but also some real fight.

Conference agreed to support the 'Save Our Operator Services' campaign launched by the London District Council. The campaign is aimed at preventing BT switching all operator services outside the district. Technically feasible, this was stymied by the decision of the provincial delegates to refuse to handle diverted traffic. This decision is doubly creditable as many exchanges outside London are being closed.

The Telecoms group also agreed to seek the reinstatement of a number of staff suspended at Wren House in London. In a powerful debate delegates drew out that BT had used a fraud action in the establishment to suspend 90 members of staff. Delegate after delegate explained how BT was using racism to force through hidden redundancies. Of these 90 members only six are white people.

The first work place

ballots this year confirmed the executive previously elected by annual conference 1986. The newcomers are filling vacancies, rather than displacing EC members. The results are in their way a refutation of the 'democracy' imposed by the 1984 TU Act.

The EC appears, and made much to appear, 100 per cent in line with Kinnock, with no internal opposition. There are obviously different views in the EC, but the real opposition was led from conference floor. Communication Workers Broad Left (CWBL) supporters played a prominent role in the successes on South Africa, the shorter working week, time and motion studies, and opened up debates unsuccessfully on the Labour women's organisation and the youth proposals — although this clearly struck a response among delegates.

The CWBL will be holding an open meeting in July to follow up the progress it made at the conference.

Inside the unions

Teachers decide on strikes

THE two TUC-affiliated teacher unions, NUT and NAS/UWT have named 52 areas where their members will take strike action in the ten days leading up to the election.

Half the education authorities in England and Wales will be hit by the stoppages which will involve 50,000 teachers.

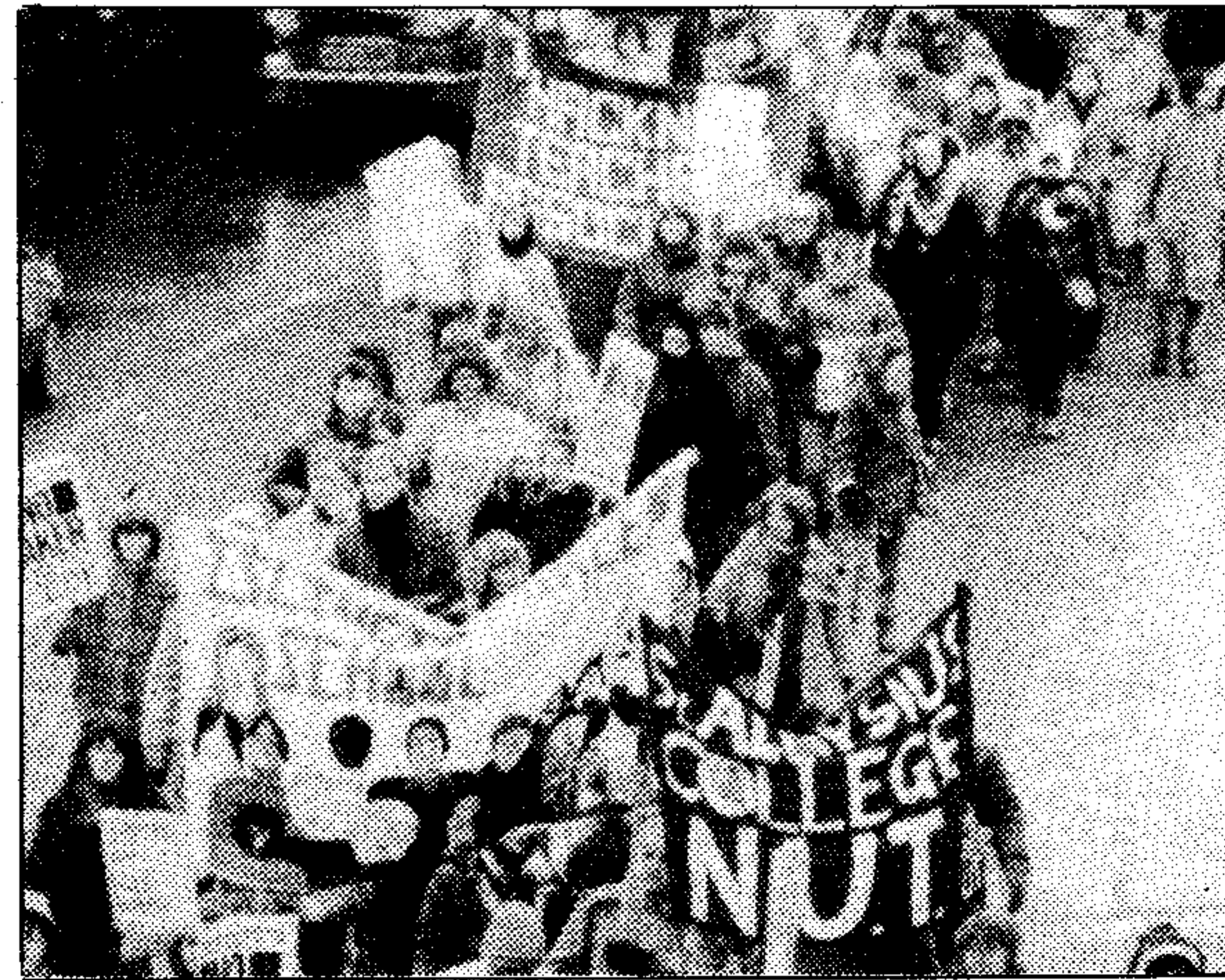
Of the 52 areas, 28 have not yet been involved in the campaign of half-day strikes against the Tory government's withdrawal of teachers' negotiating rights.

The union leaders have said that they will seek a meeting with the leaders of the incoming government before deciding whether to continue with the strikes.

They have pledged not to 'disrupt' GCE and CSE examinations, but the NUT has advised its 200,000 members not to attend annual parents' meetings as required under the 1986 Education (No 2) Act.

The NUT leaders say they will attempt to unite with other teacher unions on this non-attendance, decided in response to education minister, Kenneth Baker's refusal to give an assurance that the meetings will not be used for complaints or criticisms of individual members of staff.

Teachers in inner London are still posed to take strike action 4 June in opposition to proposals for compulsory redeployment. The IEA is refusing to negotiate.



Civil servants action ballot

RESULTS of the ballots by civil servants over strike action on 8 and 9 June will be announced on Thursday.

Union leaders are anticipating a big vote in favour of action. General secretaries of the two major civil service unions, John Ellis of the CPSA and Leslie Christie of the SCPS, said that a yes vote will allow their members to do three things.

'Ensure that the appalling low levels of pay, morale and quality of service to the public becomes a central issue in the election campaign.

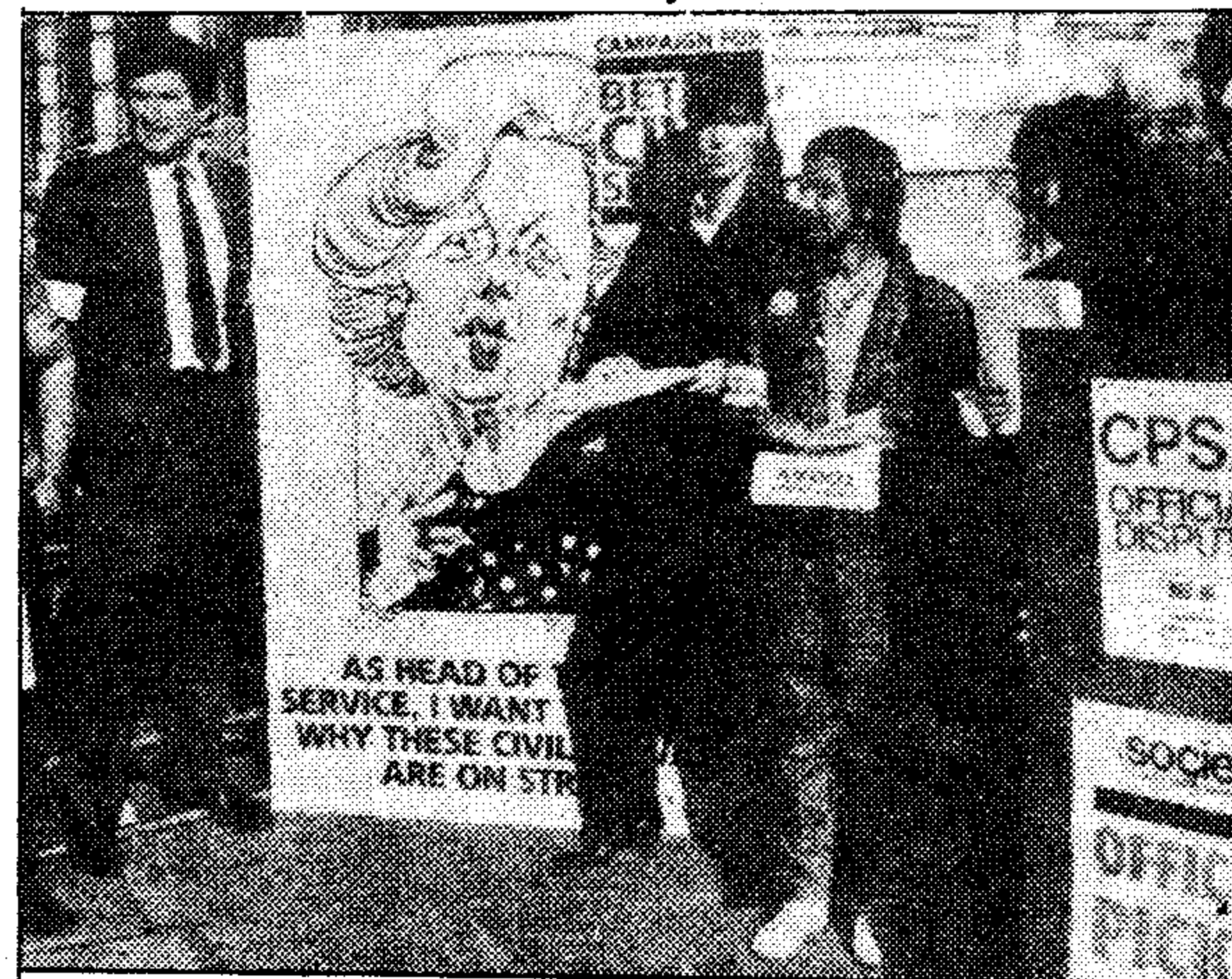
'Show the depth of our frustration and

determination to win a decent civil service from a new government.

'Allow our members to lobby all candidates in their constituencies to win a commitment for a negotiated settlement immediately the election is over'.

The national strike on the eve of the election will be followed by regional strikes on 18 and 19 June in Scotland and the north; 25 and 26 June in London and the south; 2 and 3 July in Midlands and Wales.

The CPSA is calling for a Labour vote in the election and will be balloting its members over Labour Party affiliation later this year.



A Socialist ACTION

RED-HANDED!

Envelopes reveal source of smear campaign against Livingstone

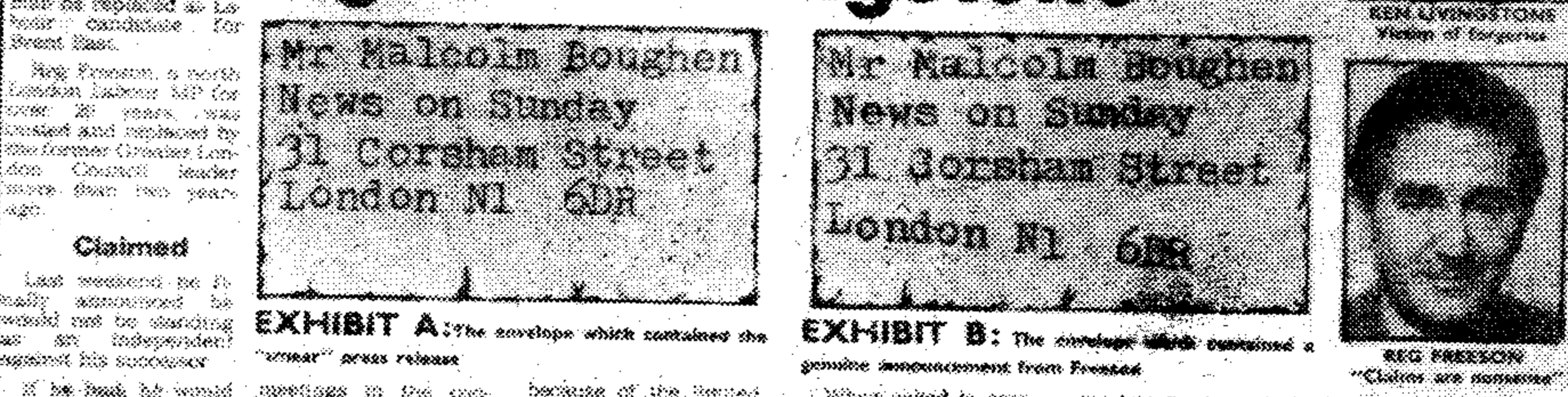


EXHIBIT A: The envelope which contained the "smear" press release... EXHIBIT B: The envelope which contained a possible announcement from Freeson...

News on Sunday exposed forgery campaign against Livingstone

Dirty tricks machine in high gear

THE CONSERVATIVE leadership spent the first week of the campaign bashing the Alliance. The Tory publicity department, otherwise known as Fleet Street, after an initial sally at the Alliance, spent its time on the real task of the election — sticking the knife in the Labour Party.

The first direct libel of the election therefore came in the smear campaign against David Steel, the *Star*, and its publisher, Express newspapers, were forced to pay Steel a large sum in damages — reported in one newspaper at £100,000. The Murdoch press, the *Sun* and the *News of the World*, put off settling the matter until after the election.

The *Express*, however, was determined to press on. Its target for the campaign was Ken Livingstone. The *Express's* page headline on Friday 22 May was 'Our conspiracy by Red Ken'. On Saturday its front page was 'Neil denies truth about left plot'. On Monday it returned with a centre page article 'The lies of Livingstone'.

These stories dealt with an alleged plot by Livingstone to seize the leadership of the Labour Party from Neil Kinnock after the election and were chiefly written by Peter Hitchens — a one-time supporter of the SWP who

culars sent out by deselected right wing Labour MP, Reg Freeson.

Also being smeared was Roy Hattersley — who figures on the front page of the *News of the World* and the *Sun* in relation to a woman friend and appearing on the electoral register twice — evidently an administrative blunder. Hattersley has committed many political crimes but voting twice is certainly not one of them.

Material released by Peter Wright has shown the way in which MI5 interfered in the 1974 general elections to oppose the Labour Party. Other revelations have shown the way the Ministry of Defence was used in the 1983 general election against CND. All this is in addition to the usual lying carried out by the press at the behest of Tory central office — as with the stream of material, now proved to be totally fabricated, against local councils.

With the Alliance turning to direct its main fire against Labour, and Tebitt announcing that this week the order of the day is 'bash the looney left', the Tory press campaign, which started in the gutter, is going to be swilling around in the sewers by 11 June.

Why Labour is vulnerable on 'defence'

LABOUR SCORED the first serious 'own goal' of its campaign with what has now become termed Neil Kinnock's 'Dad's Army' interview. Asked on a TV-AM show of Sunday 24 May how Labour's conventional forces would combat a nuclear war in Europe, Neil Kinnock replied 'you've got to make any occupation totally untenable.' This led to immediate ridicule by the Tory press. 'Dad's Army Kinnock under fire' heralded the *Daily Mail*. 'Kinnock's arms policy savaged by opponents' crowed the *Times*. 'Attacks on "guerilla" Kinnock' jibed the *Telegraph*.

The reason Labour got itself in the mess, and Kinnock made his ridiculous remarks about 'occupation', is built into the very core of Labour's present defence policy. Labour's defence campaign is grounded in its support for NATO. That is, it actually believes the ridiculous nonsense, which is not believed by a single NATO general incidentally, that there is a Soviet threat to attack Western Europe or 'occupy' Britain.

Given that Labour's policy accepts Thatcher's starting point the Tories are able to tie Kinnock in knots. Their manifesto explains: 'The determination of Britain and other NATO countries to improve their defence — including the deployment of cruise and Pershing II missiles — has brought the Soviet Union back to the negotiating tables and made possible progress on arms control ...

Voting

'Labour's policy is to give up Britain's independent nuclear deterrent without asking anything in return. The Labour Party could require the United States to withdraw its nuclear weapons from our soil and to close down nuclear bases in Britain. It would remove Britain altogether from the protection of the United States nuclear umbrella.'

The scenario painted by Thatcher is clear. She is the new Britannia saving this country from the

threatening Soviet hordes. The lily-livered Labour Party would not only render us powerless before the Soviet threat but remove the protection of our 'friends', the peace loving United States.

Not only is Thatcher trying to present herself as a 'strong' leader of a party with 'strong' policies, but now she is beginning to develop a case that Labour's policies are not only 'weak' but lead to war. All these arguments, of course, are nonsense. The Soviet Union has never invaded anyone in Europe, although it itself has twice been invaded by the west — once by Britain and the United States after the revolution and then by Nazi Germany in World War II. Neither has the Soviet Union any purpose or motive for attacking Western Europe.

It is the Soviet Union which is trying to bring Reagan, Thatcher et al to 'the nuclear negotiating table' by offering to limit all types of weapons, nuclear and conventional, in Europe. The USSR is doing so against the tide of pro-nuclear propaganda which resurfaced in February of this year onwards in response to Gorbachev's offers. It is the West which is stocking up nuclear armaments and creating the war threat.

Alternative

The truth is that Labour will never get its 'defence' policies across so long as its main framework is pro-NATO and pro-American. Spokespeople like Denzil Davies have been reduced to ridiculous inanities in putting the nuclear disarmament case, like explaining that Ronald Reagan thinks nuclear weapons are immoral! He should be explaining that it is the United States which is the threat to peace.

In fact, despite 40 cold war years, Thatcher's anti-Soviet, pro-nuclear policies are far from popular. A *Guardian*



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