

# DEVON LABOUR BRIEFING

No. 27

NOVEMBER 1987

## FIGHT THE ALTON BILL!

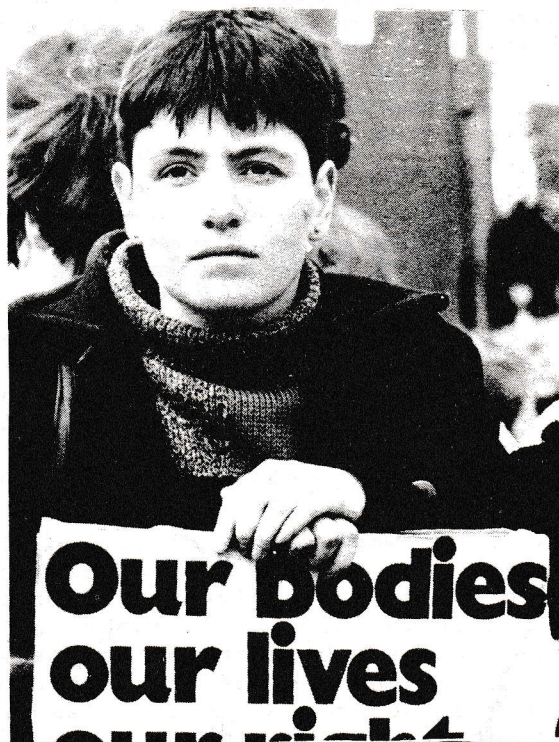
Women must always be vigilant about attacks upon their limited rights to reproductive freedom. Barely has one attack such as the Gillick case been fought off (thanks to the benevolent intervention of the ageing Law Lords), than along comes the Powell Bill which luckily did not succeed before Parliament.

Now we are faced with the Alton Bill, and its calls to protect the "innocent" unborn child against the "selfish" woman who chooses to have an abortion. Nobody at all "enjoys" abortions, particularly not late ones, whether that be the woman whose body is at the centre of the trauma, or the medical personnel who perform the procedures.

The arguments against the Alton Bill, however, are clear. Less than 50 abortions every year are carried out over 24 weeks (the current medical point of fetal viability). The majority are carried out because the foetus is diagnosed as disabled, and the woman feels that she cannot in those circumstances carry it to term. In most cases of late abortion, the women involved consulted their doctor before 12 weeks, and the lateness of the abortion is due either to obstructiveness and delay in the NHS or to the fact that the most effective test of foetal abnormality, amniocentesis, cannot be carried out before 16 weeks, with the results available at 19 weeks. In cases where women consult their doctor later, this is generally because they are in some way isolated and alienated by the intimidating medical structures, or because they do not realise they are pregnant either usually because they are relatively old or relatively young.

Reducing the time limit to 18 weeks will solve no problems. It will not make the NHS more responsive to women's needs and ensure that safe early abortion is available. It will not improve contraception or access to contraception. It will change none of the discrimination and oppression faced by disabled people in society. It will simply cause a lot of suffering, and women will inevitably be the main sufferers.

But the Alton Bill should not be seen in isolation. It is simply a frightening illustration of how women's bodies and through these, their sexualities are viewed in general as objects freely at the disposal of and in the control of a patriarchal society. There are numerous examples: Gillick and Powell have already been mentioned. Others include



**LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!**

the Oxford abortion case; Jeannette, the mentally handicapped young woman sterilised without her consent; the practice of restricting fertility treatment and resources such as AID to stable heterosexual couples (preferably married ones). What is astonishing about many of these cases is the financial resources which organisations such as Life and SPUC have been in a position to devote to these campaigns. Contrast the pitiful state of the Express and Echo's Lifeline campaign for money to fund a recall system for cervical cancer screening. Of course that facility should be publicly funded. But it is a revealing indictment of attitudes to women's health rights that so little financial support has been forthcoming.

All of this reinforces once more how perilous are the few gains which women have been able to make. Women are fighting back. A local demonstration was held on October 27 and 28 and a petition is circulating which is receiving wide support and will be sent to John Hannam. A grouping of women meeting on an ad hoc basis to campaign against the Bill can be contact c/o The Women's Centre, 94, Sidwell St. A national group, Fight Alton's Bill can be contacted c/o London Women's Centre, Wesley House, 4, Wild Court, London WC2. Tel. 01-405-4801.

However, the organised attempts to restrict women's freedom make it all the more urgent that the PLP take heed of the overwhelming wish of Party Conference in 1985 (Composite 40 passed by over 5 million votes to 600,000 votes) and abandon conscience votes on this matter. As socialists, Labour MPs should consider the plight and rights of the women affected in real life situations, not whether they (as mainly men) in the inevitable abstract feel strongly about the "right to life" of the "unborn child". Their choice removes choice for others, a profoundly unsocialist action.

Jo Shaw,  
Exeter CLP.

## CHESTERFIELD

The weekend 24th and 25th of October 1987 saw over two thousand representatives of the socialist left of the Labour Party and other socialists met in Chesterfield to discuss the re-establishment of socialism on the British political agenda.

Eric Heffer summed up the situation in his address when he said that socialism had been on the defensive in Britain since the arrival of the Thatcher government; and had been on the defensive in the Labour Party since the election of the so-called "dream ticket" leadership of Hattersley and Kinnock.

The complete bankruptcy of the the Labour Party leadership was revealed in their remark that the discussions at Chesterfield would have zero influence on the

"policy review". Even after all the attempted democratisation of the Labour Party in the early 1980s, Kinnocks idea of a policy review is fifteen men in a smoke-filled room, ditching socialist policies in order to satisfy the appetite of Fleet Street. Kinnock must regret that he cannot sack the Party membership and appoint another.

It was clear from the size of the conference with delegates from the constituency parties, with socialist MPs present and speaking and with the leadership of the NUM on the platform that there is extensive opposition within the Labour Party to Kinnock's "new realism" and revisionism. The fact that many socialist groups not inside the Labour Party answered the invitation to come to Chesterfield illustrated the growing awareness of the need for socialist unity in the fight against Thatcherism and the struggle against revisionism in the Labour Movement.

The three main themes of the conference were:

1. If we are serious in our desire to end imperialism, to combat racism, fight for peace and to provide the space for socialist transformation in Britain, there must be a break in the military alliance with US imperialism. In particular that means an active prioritisation of the struggle to get Britain out of NATO.

2. The organising base of the British economy is advanced capitalism, which leads to mass exploitation, poverty and crisis both inside and outside Britain. Socialism is, therefore, meaningless unless it socialises and democratises these massive centres of capitalist power.

3. Progress cannot be made unless the state is transformed and democratised. That means injecting popular power into every institution of the state; the civil service, the judiciary, the military, the organs of popular planning etc. Democracy means not just choice and accountability, but ridding society of all all forms of sexual and racial oppression.

These themes were seen as axioms for a socialist movement. There was an understanding, also, that the existing leadership of the Labour Party could not and would not realise these objectives. It was thus vital that people organise themselves on the ground to fight in campaigns as well and struggle against the Labour Party bureaucracy. The conference decided to establish a "socialist network" to put socialist and progressive groups in contact with each other.

The conference gave a massive practical and psychological boost to the socialist left. Chesterfield challenged to the grey tide of Kinnockite revisionism and provided the basis for a sustained struggle against Thatcherism.

Peter Bowling,  
Exeter CLP

# WHAT FUTURE FOR LABOUR?

**DAYSCHOOL  
SAT. 31st OCT**



**WORKSHOPS**  
on Ireland,  
Education,  
South Africa,  
Sexual Politics,  
the Working Class.

## THE AGENDA

- 11.00 General Introduction  
THE LEFT IN THE CURRENT PERIOD  
by Graham Bash
- 11.45 Workshop  
THE VALIDITY OF CLASS POLITICS  
led by John Wilton and Geoff Barr
- 11.45 Workshop  
SOCIALISM AND EDUCATION led by  
Tim Price
- 12.45 LUNCH
- 13.45 Workshop  
SEXUAL POLITICS led by Ros Young  
and Jo Shaw
- 13.45 Workshop  
THE LEFT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT  
led by Keith Veness and Chris Churchward
- 15.00 Workshop  
IRISH POLITICS led by Stuart  
Richardson and Fran Jenkin
- 15.00 Workshop  
SOUTH AFRICAN POLITICS led by a  
South African revolutionary and  
Steve Reicher.
- 16.00 Plenary Session  
An open discussion on the way  
forward for the socialist left.

- 18.00 Meal at Gaia Restaurant (2 mins  
from Barts Tavern)  
£3.50 waged/£1.50 unwaged.  
Hummus or Veg Soup  
Cauliflower and Nut Crumble or  
Cottage Pie  
Fruit Crumble or Treacle Tart.
- 19.00 Social and gig at Barts Tavern  
Featuring Jerry Cahill

## THE WORKSHOPS

The following contributions indicate some of the outlines of the debate to be taken up in the Workshops at the Briefing Day School on October 31st. They are also intended to provoke further debate on these important issues.

### WORKSHOP ON IRISH POLITICS

The partition of Ireland in 1920 by Britain, directly flouting the results of the 1918 Irish general election, represented a fundamental violation of Irish self-determination. This violation formalised Britain's colonial politics in Ireland over the previous 800 years, endorsing in law, discrimination against the native Irish and the supremacy of the Unionist/Loyalist ideology.

The creation of a gerrymandered artificial statelet, Ulster, has perpetuated intense oppression and discrimination and the political and socio-economic crises which together are the cause of the continuing civil war.

At its 1920 Conference, the British Labour Party for the first and last time gave unconditional support to Irish self-determination. Since then its policy has been conditional. One consistent condition has been that articulated by George Bernard Shaw in an official Labour pamphlet issued in the same year: "It is impossible to treat Ireland as a separate country from Great Britain for military purposes. An invasion of Ireland would be an invasion of Britain that the two islands should form a single unit for military purposes."

While the military/strategic condition is no longer made explicit, conditions are still imposed. In 1983, the condition was consent. The British Labour Party grants respect and support for the right of Ulster to remain within the United Kingdom, but argues that this does not mean Unionist leaders having a veto on political progress to a United Ireland. The latter must be on the basis of consent. So a United Ireland is conditional on Unionist consent. That position only serves to underwrite the ideological and material supremacy of Unionism and to deepen the crisis.

The British Labour Party needs to move rapidly to a policy commitment to Britain's withdrawal from Ireland within the context of a United Ireland. For this to happen positively, there needs to be open and wide-ranging discussion throughout the Labour movement. The discussions should 1) be non-exclusive and democratic, with no censoring or exclusion of Sinn Fein; 2) be directed towards unconditional renunciation of all claims to sovereignty and jurisdiction over Northern Ireland; 3) not lay down prescriptions as to the future government of Ireland.

The time for the debate is now: people are dying every day.

Fran Jenkin,  
Exeter CLP.

### WORKSHOP ON SOUTH AFRICA

Despite the media clampdown, it is clear that there is a massive growth in the challenge to Apartheid in South Africa. Support grows for the UDF, the ANC is able to operate ever more openly, but perhaps most significant is the growth of radical, non-racial trades unionism. The emergence of COSATU marks a new stage in the liberation struggle and the recent miners' strike - in which 300,000 workers held out for two weeks - shows an ability to organise under the most adverse circumstances.

This situation places a double responsibility upon the British labour movement. First, how, at a time when organisations are constantly springing up, can we respond to their appeals for training and resources while compromising neither the safety of individuals nor the security of the movement? With things changing so rapidly, we must be flexible in our tactics: old dogmas must be replaced by a willingness to indulge in open discussion.

Secondly, how can we undermine the deepening support given by British capital and the British government to the Apartheid regime? It is clear that we can neither wait five years in the hope of a Labour Government, nor rely on Thatcher: we must act ourselves. Everybody should boycott Apartheid, but Trades Unionists are in a particularly strong position to cut the economic lifeline thrown from Britain to South Africa.

We face exciting new opportunities and we must be creative in order to seize our chances. There is much to debate but all that we do must be guided by two criteria:

Maximum solidarity for all elements of the liberation struggle!

Maximum action against British support for Apartheid!

Steve Reicher,  
Exeter CLP.



### EDUCATION WORKSHOP

The Baker Education Bill offers the most enormous change to the education system in this country since the 1944 Education Act. Its somewhat confused fanfare has led to a rising tide of opposition from a variety of quarters. But how as socialists should we respond? The present system contains, arguably, many gains but these are patchy and uneven. The failure of previous Labour governments and the Tories more recent onslaughts hardly make it a system worth defending. How can we take the offensive? What should our programme be?

The debate will focus on Baker's proposals and raise questions about the nature of a socialist education programme. The contradictions faced by socialists involved in the education system will be examined. Baker has said that education is about behaviour rather than academics. Is this in fact not correct? What part could education play in bringing about positive change? Is it a forlorn hope that education can be used to advance the cause of socialism in a capitalist society? Does the widespread opposition to the Baker proposals offer the possibility of mobilising an anti-Tory campaign of sufficient magnitude to bring them down?

Tim Price  
Exeter CLP





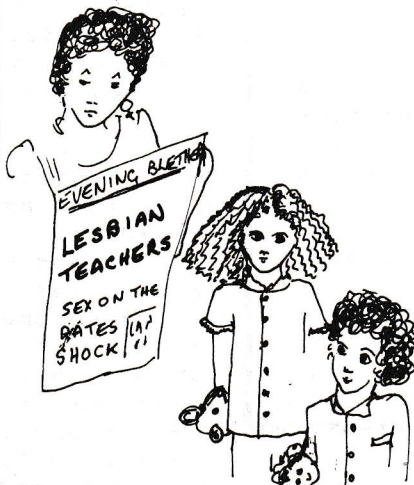
A little Learning

# Praxis

I'm seriously thinking of keeping my kids off school



What is the point of education these days?



They just learn how to read all this racist heterosexual reactionary filth

## CAN LABOUR MEET THE NEEDS OF WOMEN? (or any other oppressed group for that matter...)

A controversial question, and one which has tended in the past to cause division and difficulty within the Women's Movement. A whole generation of women have come into a Women's Movement where the mention of the words "socialist feminism" provokes a reaction either of laughter about the capacity of the Labour Party to change its profoundly oppressive structures, or of anger, that women could be so treacherous as to collaborate and work within men's structures.

This year a number of developments have taken place which attempt to rehabilitate the idea of socialist feminism as a powerful political force.

First, a number of books have been published, by socialist feminist authors such as Lynne Segal, which examine the challenge of radical feminism and the options and strategies for change which it offers, and have found them wanting. Second, a conference organised by Labour Women for Ireland and the SWAPO Women's Solidarity Campaign was held in London before the summer, which considered in some depth the challenge of building an anti-racist, anti-imperialist women's labour movement.

Finally, and most recently, at the Socialist Conference in Chesterfield, a new organisation was launched: "Women for Socialism". This aims to be a broad based grouping which provides structures

through which socialist women can organise collectively in order to build their campaigns and to intervene in struggles as an autonomous force.

Perhaps the most important part of this development was the involvement of Women against Pit Closures in the launch of the organisation. Although not part of the original initiative, these women had themselves been seriously debating their future, and had been thinking along many of the same lines about the need for a broad-based grouping to represent socialist women, possibly a women's union affiliated to the TUC. At the Conference, they came together with the Labour Women (themselves a broad and diverse grouping) who sponsored the launch. With the breadth of experience and interests represented at the meeting to launch "Women for Socialism", and given the political will to cooperate and campaign together, this could be an exciting new development.

So, socialist feminism is back on the agenda with a vengeance. It has listened, we hope, to the demands of Black women, lesbians, working class women and others. But if it is to survive as a force it must have learnt that a movement that for many years reflected, by neglect of others, the interests of white, middle class women, cannot hope simply to "incorporate" other demands, but must re-examine and restructure itself anew. This is the challenge which faces us, and this is what we hope to begin to look at in the workshop on sexual politics.

Jo Shaw,  
Exeter CLP.

# WOMEN for SOCIALISM

Women interested in joining the "Women for Socialism" grouping, and, in particular, in being part of the planning and development of the organisation should write to it

c/o Mandy Moore, 89, Woodside Gardens, London, N17 6UN.

A donation of £5 waged/£2 unwaged is requested to cover the costs of administration.

## THE LEFT AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Essential to Thatcher's plans to bring about an irreversible shift of power away from ordinary working class people and their institutions, such as the trades unions, has been the centralisation of state power.

To retain its independence, and to maintain its services, local government needs secure and adequate sources of finance. The source has been the rate levied (on a notional rateable value) upon buildings whether in domestic occupation or used for commercial purposes, together with "rate support grant" from central government taxation. The latter could be regarded as being for the national services, e.g. education, police and fire brigades, which the central government requires local authorities to provide. Beyond that local authorities should be free - in responding to the expressed wishes of their inhabitants as reflected in the electoral support given to the various political parties - to levy a rate at whatever level is required to provide the level of services preferred and demanded.

In recent years the level of rate support grant - and so the proportion of local government expenditure financed by the central state - has been progressively reduced and action to limit local rates has been taken. Intimidatory penalties have been imposed upon those "loony left" local authorities who have tried to maintain jobs and services.

So it is by finance that central government will control, defeat and frustrate local government and as a further step towards authoritarianism, it is proposed that rates be abolished and a "community charge" be introduced, which is in all but name a poll tax; that is a tax on human heads.

You are to register to pay this tax and it places a price on the head of every person in the land over the age of 18. It is indiscriminate and treats all alike regardless of ability to pay; rich and poor, young and old, rich landowner or homeless person; all will pay the same amount which will vary between one locality and another, but can be, in the region of £700 in "high-spending socialist local authorities." £350 is estimated to be the common average. It is a vindictive measure that will punish the poor, the sick and the old whenever a local authority seeks to help them.

There are also the sinister implications of "registration" and you must re-register as you change your place of residence. Tabs will be placed on all of us, and our freedom of movement thus controlled and restricted. Officials, if they doubt the returns for the 'register, will be able to enter premises to establish who resides there. Those who will not or cannot pay the poll tax will keep themselves off the electoral registration roll because of the probability of cross-reference of the two registers. Soon the question will be "can you afford to vote?"

There must be a fight back and this must take the parties of the left to organise non-registration campaigns. Councils should instruct local government officers not to compile the poll tax registers and there must be no cooperation with Whitehall Civil Servants.

Chris Churchward.

## WORKING CLASS WORKSHOP

Society has changed. The working class is dead. Today, the labour movement has to live in the real world of mass share ownership, computer technology and the decay of traditional industries.

The new workers own their own homes and work in modern non-union sun-rise industries. Today's world needs old fashioned socialism like a whole in the head.

The labour movement cannot win anything without getting the share owning new man and women onto its side. A policy review must junk Clause IV, ditch nationalisation and soften up the "hard left". The media and the opinion pollsters have it right.

The modern labour movement must see that class exploitation is over. The real problems are race and gender, not shaking Karl Marx's bones at modern reality.

If you don't agree with the above, but doubt that the left can beat it, the workshop on "the validity of class politics" will thrash the issues out.

Geoff Barr

# FREE MOSES MAYEKISO

Moses Mayekiso, General Secretary of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa ("NUMSA"), the second largest union in COSATU and Chair of the Alexandra Action Committee ("AAC") is on trial for treason along with four other activists of the AAC. If found guilty, they will face the death penalty. A campaign for Moses' release, the "Friends of Moses Mayekiso" was set up on his request by British trades unionists, after his visit to Britain and Europe in 1986; Moses had realised that with the declaration of the State of Emergency, it was inevitable that he would be detained on his return to South Africa.

The campaign has raised the issue of Moses' detention within the British trades union and labour movement, and has raised funds which have been channelled through NUMSA for disbursement through the union's relief fund. Money sent most recently was used to help support the five families involved in the case. A "Friends of Moses" full page advertisement in the Guardian received support from several hundred trades union branches, about 70 MPs and MEPs, including Left wingers like Dennis Skinner through to Right wingers like Dennis Healey, and several other organisations and local AA Groups.

Yet the campaign, as reported in the Observer on Sept. 13, does not receive the support of SACTU and the Anti-Apartheid Movement leadership, although as reported in the Observer on Sept. 20, the AAM Chair, Robert Hughes MP, did raise the case with Mrs. Lynda Chalker, the Foreign Office Minister of State on Sept. 9. Hardly a mass campaign!

SACTU have made it clear in a statement circulated to union branches that "there should be no affiliation to the Friends of Moses Mayekiso campaign". It seems that to organise support for Moses Mayekiso is somehow to help the forces against the ANC and the South African revolution! We must surely ask ourselves, "how can this be?" To answer this, it is useful to look at the activities of Moses on the one hand and the politics of the SACP on the other.

Moses Mayekiso, having worked in the metal industry for several years and having organised, as a shop steward, many strikes for union recognition, became a full time organiser of the Metal and Allied Workers' Union ("MAWU") in 1979. MAWU was involved in some of South Africa's most militant struggles in some of South Africa's biggest metal working factories, and throughout this period, Moses played a leading role in the battle to establish COSATU. Moses had become General Secretary of MAWU before his visit to Europe and was elected, whilst in detention, General Secretary of NUMSA which formed from the merger of MAWU and other smaller unions.

On its formation, NUMSA adopted the following resolution:

"Noting:

1. that the vast majority of the working masses of our country recognise the Freedom Charter as containing the basic minimum demands for a free and democratic South Africa.
2. that the Freedom Charter enjoys mass support amongst organised metalworkers nationally.
3. that the Freedom Charter has majority support amongst the natural, and most reliable, allies of the working class - the women, the unemployed, the youth and the students.

Believing:

1. that only the working class masses, under the leadership of organised industrial workers, can truly liberate our country from the chains of capitalist exploitation and apartheid oppression.
2. that organised workers and their allies have a common interest in the creation of a worker-controlled, socialist society where there will be no exploitation, oppression or discrimination of any form.
3. that the national democratic struggle against apartheid oppression and the socialist struggle against capitalist exploitation are complementary parts of the uninterrupted struggle of organised workers for control over the industry and government of a liberated South Africa.
4. that only under the leadership of organised workers over the mass democratic struggle of today and the government of tomorrow, will the demands of the Freedom Charter be fully and completely exercised in the lives of the working masses of our country.

We therefore resolve:

1. to adopt the Freedom Charter as containing the minimum political demands that reflect the view of the majority of the metal workers' vision of a free and democratic, non-discriminatory South Africa.
2. to develop amongst metal workers in particular, and the organised working class and its allies in general, a coherent understanding that the demands of the Freedom Charter, and all other demands of organised workers, can only be realised in the lives of the working class masses through the practical leadership of the industrial working class in the struggle for the establishment of a socialist society where workers' control of government and industry will be enforced in the practice of a liberated South Africa.
3. to struggle to uphold and advance the leadership of the working class in all spheres of society.

This resolution clearly differs from the politics of the SACP and the ANC. They see the liberation struggle as being a

struggle for "democracy" with socialism being relegated to some unspecified time in the future. Such a struggle as they envisage, encompassing liberals, the church and other so called progressive tendencies cannot accommodate genuinely socialist tendencies which demand workers' control of industry and government. Hence the leadership of the ANC and SACTU under the domination of the ideas of the SACP has no choice but to try to isolate all solidarity campaigns with leaders such as Moses Mayekiso.

This becomes all the more clear when we look at the AAC. Alexandra is the second biggest "township" of Johannesburg. Unlike townships such as Soweto, the majority of people living there are workers. With much experience of democratic trades union structures behind them, the people of Alexandra formed yard, block and street committees leading up to the AAC. These structures effectively run Alexandra, acting as courts, organising transport, child-care, co-ops for the unemployed and so on. The AAC is dominated by trades unionists from Moses Mayekiso the Chair down to the activists in the yard committees. It is workers' control in the community, linked to the workers' struggle in industry. It is hardly surprising that the South African government has clamped down on the AAC.

Moses Mayekiso is only one of 13 Alexandra activists who are facing treason charges. We can organise in defence of all of them by supporting the Friends of Moses Mayekiso!

Get your trades union branch, or other organisation to affiliate to the Friends. Or join them yourself.

Friends of Moses Mayekiso, c/o Acorn House, 3140320, Grays Inn Rd., London WC1P 8DP.

Dave Parks,  
Exeter CLP.



## EXETER

### ANTI FASCIST ACTION

for a united front against racism & fascism

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NEITHER HAVE WE**

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## Education

## For Exeter

## PUBLIC MEETING

Thursday 12th November

7.30pm St.Georges Hall

Market Street

### SPEAKERS

**FRED JARVIS**

(N.U.T.)

**RICHARD PRING**

Professor of Education, Exeter University

DEVON LABOUR

# BRIEFING

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