

... AND DECLINE:

The SDP reached its high point in 1985. From then on it was largely downhill, with Tory political recovery from their midterm nadir and rows within the Alliance.

This third selection of **Chris Radley's** cartoons from the *Social Democrat* illustrates the major political controversies of the period: unemployment, riots in the inner-cities, the Westland crisis that almost brought Mrs Thatcher down (and Neil Kinnock's speaking style which helped save her), and insider dealing and scandals in the City. The Alliance tried to make its mark in these debates, but was frequently distracted by internal rows, over policy positions and joint selection. Commentary by **Mark Pack**.



Market forces unleashed (18 October 1985)

During Margaret Thatcher's second term, much of the economy recovered, and issues of inequality and the continuing high levels

of unemployment came to the fore. Inner-city riots in Toxteth, Brixton and Tottenham were seen by many as the outcome of these economic problems and the government's undue reliance on



**Economic boom
(14 February 1986)**

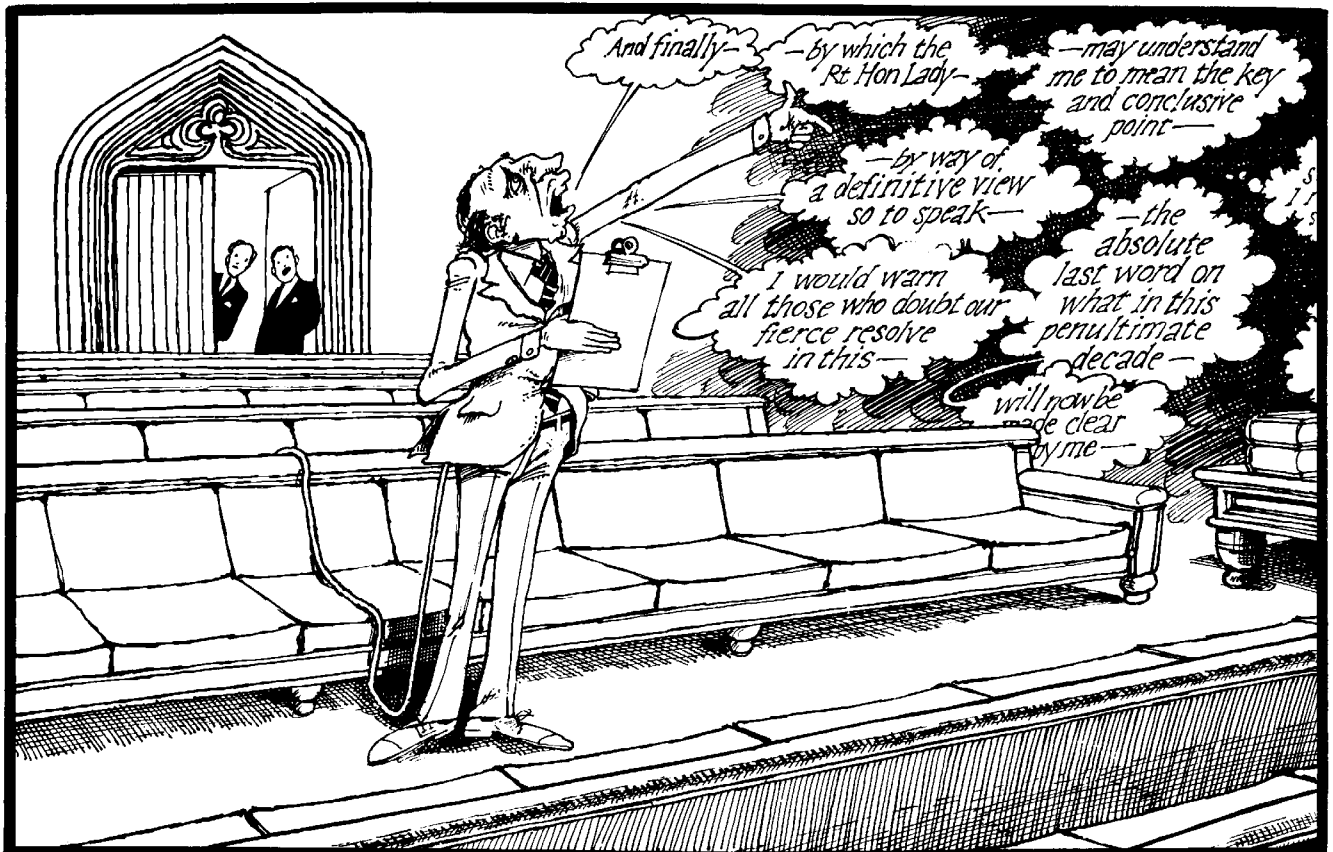
During the late 1980s, economic growth took off, with increasing concerns about the economy overheating.

Critics of the Chancellor, Nigel Lawson (pictured), argued that economic success was only due to one-off benefits of North Sea oil revenues and income from

privatisation. They argued that these were being wasted on a short-term economic boom rather than invested for the long term.

**Welsh verbosity
(28 February 1986)**

His speech in the Westland debate (see 31 January 1986) was by no means the only poor speech made by





Labour leader Neil Kinnock. Although he had originally forged a reputation as a fine left-wing orator, he had a tendency to become verbose, repetitive and ineffectual in many of his speeches as leader. The sobriquet 'Welsh windbag' was frequently applied.

Misdeeds in the City (14 March 1986)

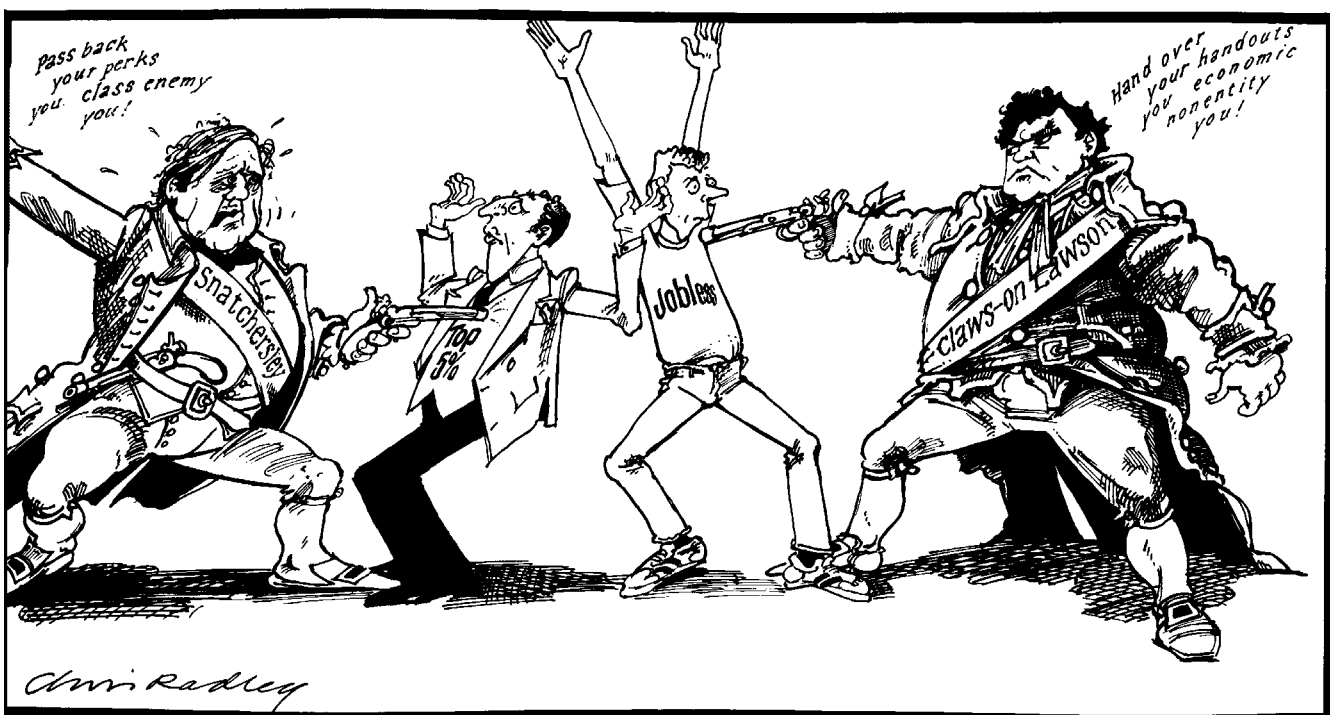
During the mid-1980s, the combination of privatisations – which greatly increased the number of shareholders in the country – and deregulation of financial institutions caused the City and its affairs to gain prominence. Its culture was of big financial deals, quick

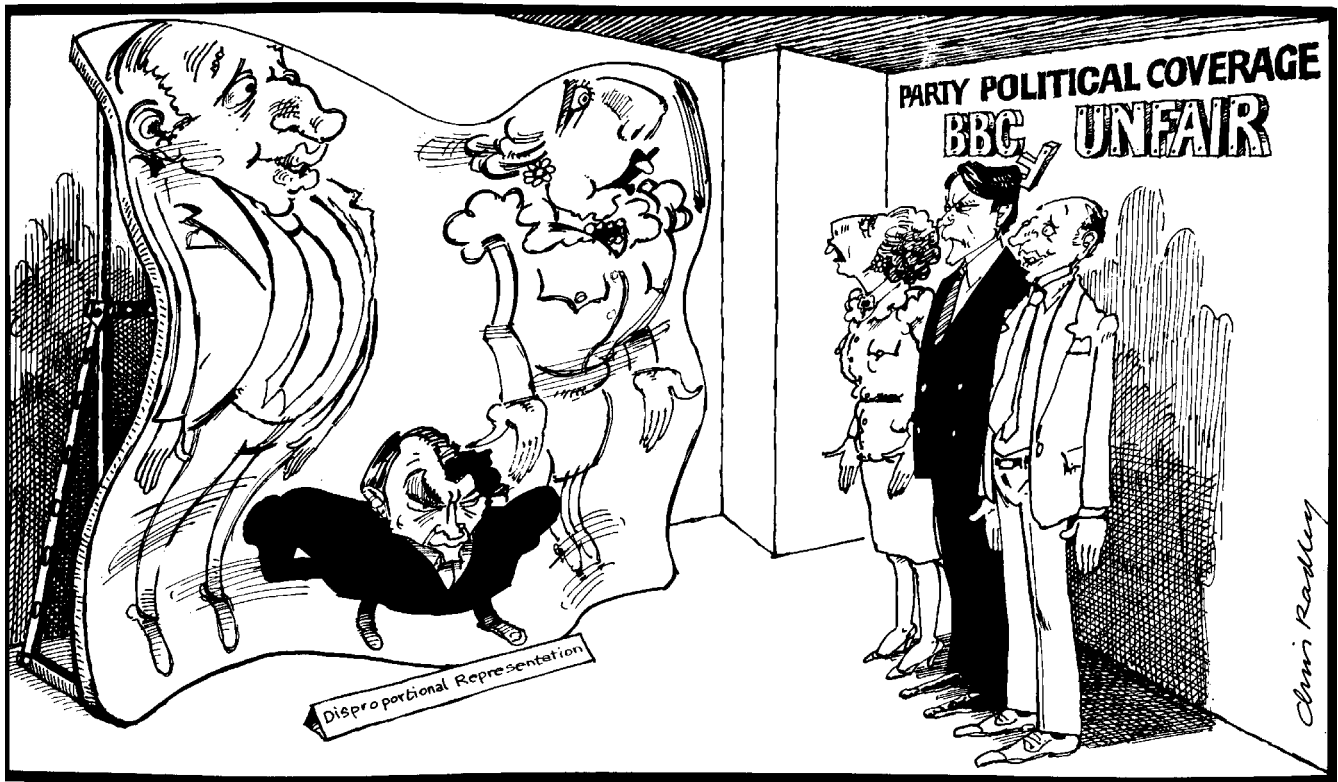
profits and large rewards for the deal-makers. With this came an increasing problem of insider dealing and debates over the extent to which the City should be allowed to regulate itself. Many critics of the government's approach drew contrasts between the relatively light sentences applied for insider dealing and

similar crimes compared with those handed out for offences such as social security fraud involving only a fraction of the sums.

Stand and deliver (28 March 1986)

During this period, the Alliance criticised the Tories





(represented by Nigel Lawson) for harsh policies towards the unemployed and those on benefits and Labour (represented by Roy Hattersley) for wanting to over-tax the rich.

**The BBC
(27 June 1986)**

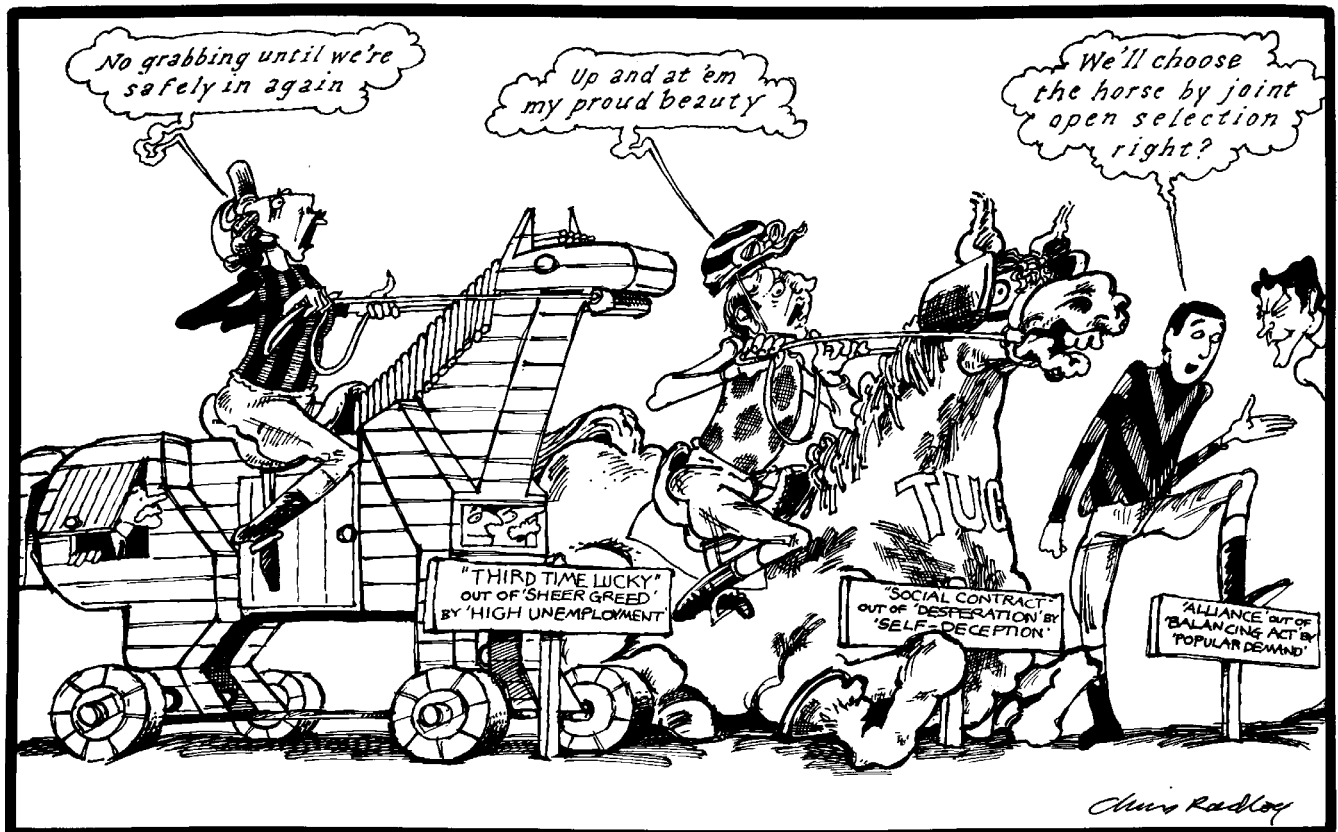
The level of Alliance press coverage was a regular source of complaint and dispute. Based on number of MPs, the Alliance was a minor party. Based on occasional periods

in the opinion polls, the Alliance was the most popular political group on offer.

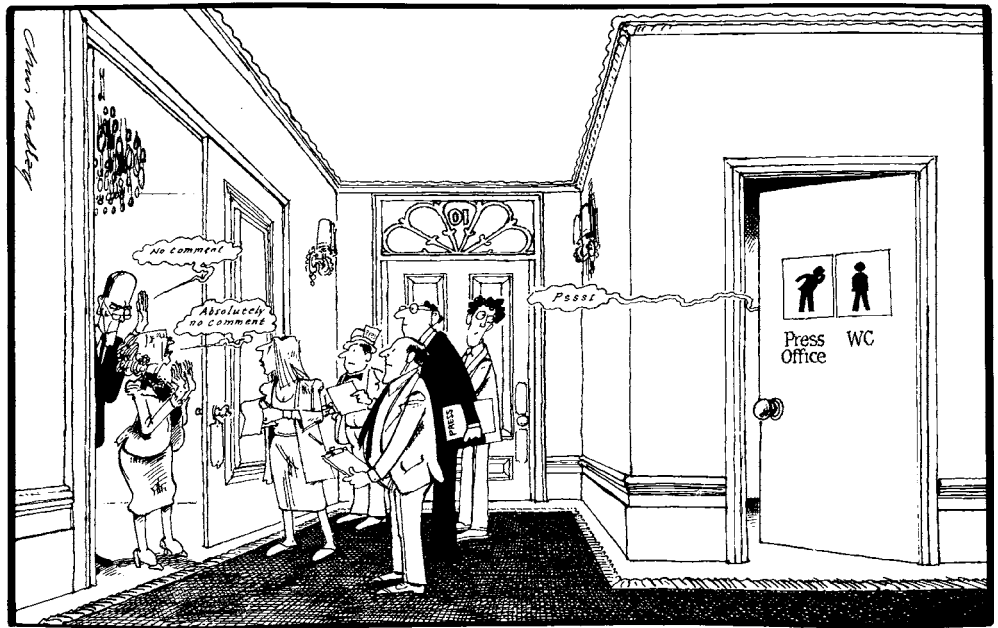
**The self-destruct button
(12 September 1986)**

The ability of the Alliance

to be its own undoing was reflected again in this cartoon produced during the final party conference season before the 1987 general election. The Conservatives set out their stall for a third election victory in a row,

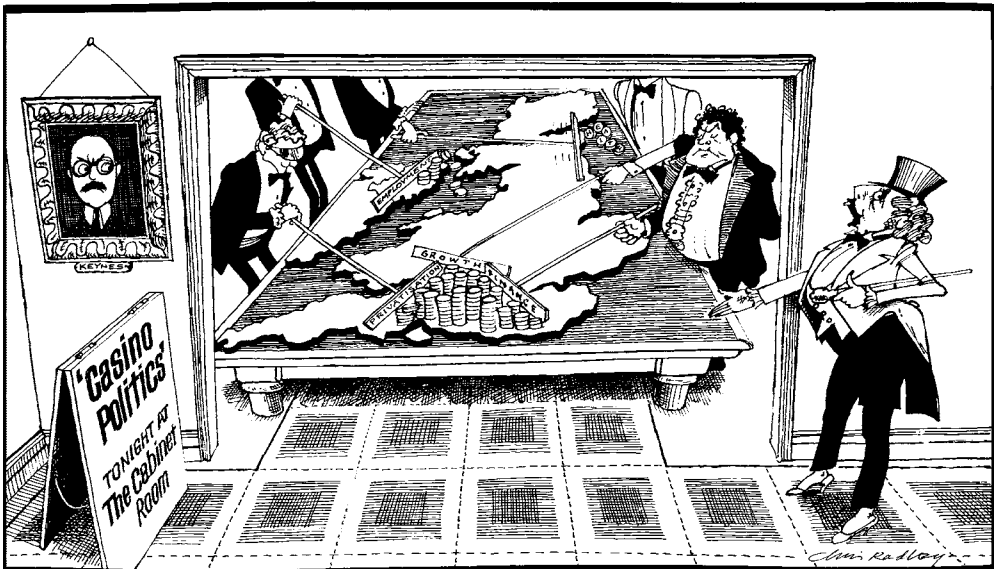


whilst the relationship between Labour and the unions continued to be a major issue for Neil Kinnock. The differences of view over the future of the Alliance (merger or separation?) were reflected in continuing disputes over the selection of candidates for the general election. 'Joint open selection' – whereby Liberal and SDP members in a constituency voted together to select a candidate, who could be either Liberal or SDP – was seen as precursor to merger and so supported or opposed by many on that basis.



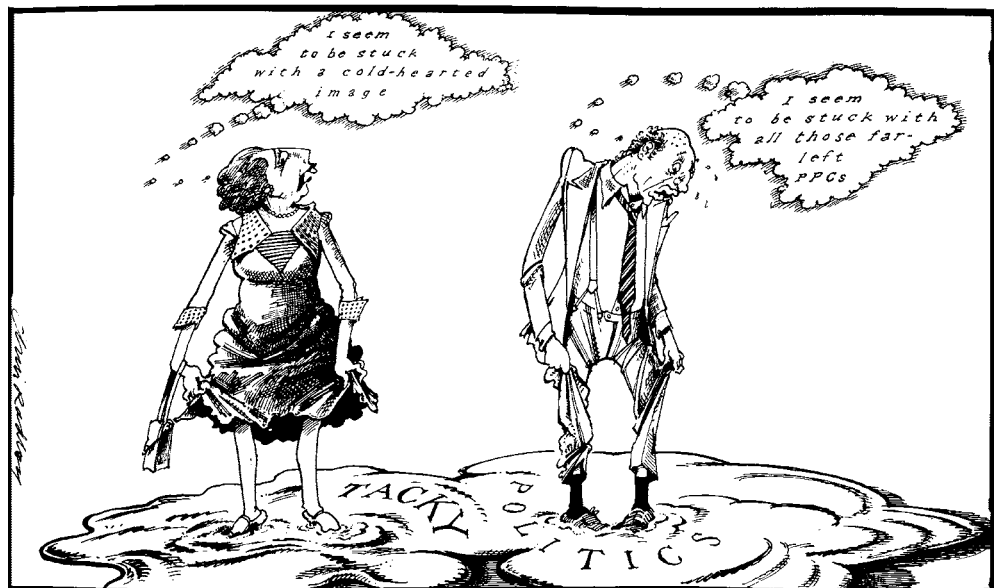
**Spinning and leaking
(21 November 1986)**

Mrs Thatcher's press secretary, Bernard Ingham, was frequently accused by critics of anonymously briefing against Cabinet members. However, as one of them pointed out, he was only 'the sewer, not the sewage'.



**Casino economics
(24 January 1987)**

The Conservatives' reliance on economic growth fuelled by the service sector, North Sea oil and privatisation proceeds made critics accuse them of only benefiting the south of the country. They saw economic growth produced in this way as inferior to – and riskier than – the more tangible outputs associated in the past with manufacturing.



**Greenwich
(6 March 1987)**

In the immediate run-up to the 1987 general election, the SDP snatched a dramatic by-election victory in Greenwich, winning a safe Labour seat after Neil Kinnock was saddled with a 'hard left' candidate.