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BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

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- Benn v Charter 88
- Routing the racists



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Cover design by Gary Drostle

Stop Press

'Working together' was the title of a conference on 19th June organised by *The Guardian*, for Labour and the Liberal Democrats to debate a "common agenda" on employment. Martin Kettle, Will Hutton, Victor Keegan and Malcolm Dean were among the conspiring columnists present. Labour MPs Frank Field and Calum Macdonald, MEP Carole Tongue; LibDem MPs Menzies Campbell and Simon Hughes; John Monks, Jack Dromey and Dick Taverne were also among the speakers attracted by the media manipulators intent on creating calamitous coalitions.

Timex strike solidarity

Timex strikers voted by 247 to 1 to reject the management's derisory offer of allowing half the sacked workforce to return to work, under the new conditions, until the Christmas closure of the plant. Another massive demonstration was staged on 19th June, and the strike committee aim to step up the campaign, spreading the dispute to other Timex plants.

The London Timex Support Group can be contacted on 071 733 5670.

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Public spending cuts: time to draw the line



NO ONE KNOWS for sure just where the axe will fall in this year's round of public spending cuts but there can be no doubt they will be deep and painful for millions. Already Chancellor Kenneth Clarke is being dared by the Tory right: do you have the guts to go the distance, to savage pensioners, children, the ill, the disabled, the unemployed? Britain's public sector deficit is the largest in the industrial world; its stagnant economy means there is little chance of the gap being plugged by increased tax revenues. Whatever happens this year, before long we will see proposals for ending universal state pensions, means testing child benefit, time limits for claiming social security and ever-increasing charges for virtually all public services. This year's public sector pay limit could become a permanent freeze. Privatisation, opt-outs and contracting out will spread through the entire public sector. In short, the Tories intend to resolve their crisis at the expense of the entire working class - not just the worst off but the majority *who will become* worse off.

All of this will fit neatly into the Maastricht deflationary process. To challenge it politically will require a break from that process and a repudiation of the Treaty.

To face up to the coming onslaught on the welfare state, the Labour Party and the and trade union movement will have to speak out on behalf of majority whose standards of living will be damaged by it. Even more important, it must mobilise that majority in a broad campaign of protest which will include industrial action. The aim must not be merely to score parliamentary points against the Tories but to stop them in their tracks.

This is the key to the next general election. If our leaders' pathetic performances on the miners and Maastricht are repeated, we are doomed.

It will not be possible to mount effective resistance to spending cuts unless we reiterate our commitment to universal benefits. Any welfare state worth defending must be based on a social recognition of shared, universal, non-negotiable needs, not the poor law logic of 'targeting'.

Already our leaders have hamstrung our counter-attack by setting up the Commission on Social Justice - with a specific remit to re-examine the role of universal benefits. The Tories have not been slow to exploit this idiocy. Every time a Labour spokesperson launches into the latest outrageous proposal for spending cuts, a Tory reminds him or her that Labour is itself equivocal on protecting existing benefits.

The Commission was John Smith's knee-jerk reaction to criticism of his shadow budget after last year's general election. It was an attempt to reconcile Labour's new-found commitments to fiscal conservatism and market forces with its bedrock commitments to a minimum standard of state provision. We have no faith in the will of this Commission to respect those bedrock commitments, especially as some of its leading figures are not even Labour Party members.

Odd this, given the fuss the 'modernisers' have made about non-Party members participating in selections and leadership elections via their trade unions. But this is only one instance of the hypocrisy and double talk which has permeated the modernisers' attack on the trade union link.

To meet the challenge of the coming public spending massacre, Labour needs a strong base in the trade unions. Only in conjunction with the collective structures of the trade unions can Labour mobilise the depth and breadth of public protest needed to preserve even a remnant of the welfare state.

Of course, a precondition for arousing this level of protest is a politics that sees public spending not as an embarrassment but as an essential tool of democratic government. We have to declare unashamedly that our goal is the redistribution of wealth and power, not its entrenchment.

Though such beliefs are elementary to most Labour Party members they are not shared by most of our front bench spokespersons and National Executive members. The basic values which led most of us into the labour movement - equality, solidarity, social justice - are under threat from a parliamentary clique whose only interest in democracy is as a rhetorical cover for the advancement of their own career interests.

On the NEC Blunkett, Blair, Cook, Kinnock and Brown have persistently failed to reflect the interests and beliefs of rank and file Party members. On the miners, Maastricht, defence cuts, full employment, public ownership and universal benefits, they are out of tune and should be replaced. Don't forget to vote for the Socialist Campaign Group slate for the NEC: Diane Abbott, Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, Ken Livingstone, Alice Mahon, Dawn Primarolo, Dennis Skinner.

Everything you always wanted to know about *Labour Briefing*...

***Labour Briefing* is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. It is managed by an elected National Editorial Board whose meetings are open to all supporters. The next EB will meet on September 5th. We are happy to offer a right to reply on the usual basis to all members of the labour movement. Please note: there will be a 3 month gap before the next issue. Subscriptions will be extended accordingly.**

All articles published in *Labour Briefing* reflect the opinions of the authors alone unless otherwise indicated. *Briefing* welcomes criticisms and contributions. Deadline for the next issue is September 13th.

***Briefing* is the only magazine on the left which is not funded by any part of the labour hierarchy nor by any organised grouping. To survive and thrive we need the support of our readers. Why not take copies to sell at your local Labour Party, trade union or campaign meeting?**

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The monolith cracks

Our Class Traitor of the Month for April 1991, John Edmonds, urged the 1989 Party conference to "sound the death knell of the block vote". Amazingly, in recent weeks, he has emerged as its most staunch defender. **Mike Marqusee** probes the row over the Party's links to the trade unions.

ON THE EVE of this year's GMB conference, John Edmonds launched a full-scale media blitz against the Party's 'modernisers'. In an article in the *Sunday Mirror* (originally offered to the *Guardian*, which, typically, dithered over it) and in an appearance on BBC TV's *On the Record*, the man *Briefing* once dubbed a "demagogic double dealer" insisted that the union voice would remain in the selection of candidates and election of Party leader.

His immediate targets were Blair, Brown, Kinnock, Blunkett and Cook, whose pro-OMOV letter to all Party branches was a shameless attempt to pit constituency members against trades unionists. "Giving every member a right to vote is clearly the most democratic way of choosing candidates," declared the fatuous five, who are themselves the only ones proposing to disenfranchise members, that is, some 4 million plus affiliated trade unionists.

Even more startlingly, Edmonds let fly at John Smith's politics and leadership. "Caution and prudence have their place in politics, but we should never allow the limits of Labour's ambitions to be set by the Tories' economic framework. The moment for bland timidity is past. This is the time to tell the British people what we stand for...it seems as though we are tolerating a situation that the labour movement should never tolerate."

The normally staid GMB conference was an extraordinary spectacle. "Unless they are very careful, the supporters of one member one vote will create a narrow and exclusive party limited to those who can stump up £18," warned Edmonds, to applause. His deputy and Labour Party Treasurer Tom Burlison chimed in ominously: "Those who can't see a role for the trade unions need to be given time to see the error of their ways."

Once Edmonds lifted the lid, delegates queued to air long-held grievances against the Parliamentary Party. Labour MPs were accused of looking for a deal with the Liberal Democrats. "If they don't want our members to have influence, then they can't have our money," was a repeated cry.

As so often in recent years the GMB has proved the bellwether of the movement. USDAW, NCU and MSF have voted to keep a trade union say in selections and leadership elections, as has NUPE, despite Tom Sawyer's attempt to sell them out on the former.

UCW conference overturned its leadership's support for OMOV, leaving the union without a policy. In July, the TGWU will doubtless endorse its Executive's support for keeping a corporate union voice in all Party decision-making.

What's it all about? Why are so many of the people who backed Kinnock uncritically for years now digging in their heels?

Clearly, union leaders, unwilling or unable to take on the employers or the government, want to preserve their remaining sphere of influence (and patronage) - the labour movement. People like Edmonds and Burlison are machine men. They have no political interests apart form those of the bureaucracy which has nurtured them. But this bureaucracy is not insulated from the pressures that affect its base, especially the crucial layer of shop stewards and branch officials. Something is stirring beneath and Edmonds and the others are responding to it.

OMOV has become a totem for something larger. There is dissatisfaction about the Parliamentary leadership's failure to exploit the Tories' multiple crises. Union leaders could hardly believe it when the front bench let the Tories get away with a last-minute amendment to the Trade Union Bill giving employers the right to discriminate against union members. The Party's endless drift to the right no longer seems to be leading anywhere. Trade unionists see no reason why they should cede power in the Labour Party to John Smith's 'Horlick's leadership' or submit any longer to the groundless arrogance of the 'modernisers' and their media supporters.

The votes at the trade union conferences and Edmonds' break with the 'modernisers' open up debate in the Party and offer the prospect of the first major setback for the leadership at conference for years. A broad alliance within the movement against the 'modernisers' is now a real possibility and the left should work to build it.

However, we should remember that much of the current discontent reflects demoralisation and a sense of impotence at the base of the movement - in both CLPs and unions. The bureaucracy that has sold out trade union rights across the country is hardly likely to defend them in the Labour Party without substantial, sustained and organised pressure from below. Between now and conference, it is possible that a deal will be struck around some version of the register of supporters scheme.

The bottom line for socialists should be the preservation of the Party's federal, affiliated structure and the continuing enfranchisement within it of collective trade union structures. Unlike Smith's 'levy-plus' ruse (just a streamlined version of the Party's dismally unsuccessful special trade union membership rate) the register does at least ensure that a distinctive trade union voice is heard in selections and leadership elections. It is, however, cumbersome and bureaucratic - more so even than the current arrangements. The danger is that it will be a dog's breakfast, paving the way for a counter-offensive by the 'modernisers', who will claim that only pure OMOV is workable.

For this reason, the left should couple its alliance with the trade union leaders against OMOV with a programme for enhancing union and Party democracy within a federal structure.

The big lies of OMOV are beginning to unravel, but we still have little to offer as an alternative. ❑

Miners

abandoned...again



Women Against Pit Closures demo, High Court. PHOTO: Paul Mattsson

MARKHAM MAIN, Houghton, Betws, Bolsover, Taff Merthyr, Silverhill, Bevercotes, Cotgrave, Trentham, Parkside, Vane Tempest...this is the roll call of shattered communities, only eight months after huge protests greeted

Mike Marqusee
Political Correspondent

Heseltine's pit closure plan.

17,000 out of 40,000 British miners have been forced out of their jobs since October. British Coal's policy of rumour, intimidation and blackmail has taken its toll - especially in the absence of support from the TUC and Labour leadership.

Miners at Parkside, Trentham and Vane Tempest, where resistance to the closures had been fierce, were singled out for victimisation. In the end 1,200 miners were sacked in the first compulsory redundancies in the industry since 1947.

The closures were met with resistance by Women Against Pit Closures, who occupied a winding tower at Parkside for four days. Like so many recent protest actions, it was ignored by the media. As one journalist explained to the women, "We've been told not to touch you with a barge pole."

The Tories' stalling tactics worked - because Labour and the TUC leaders let them work. With the help of the Select Committee compromise, Parliament, which ought to have resounded with the public outcry, was used instead to smother it.

Back in October, Norman Willis warned, "Don't underestimate us!" We should be so lucky! The TUC's contentless "Jobs and Recovery Campaign" proved in the end nothing but an excuse for inaction. In March, Heseltine's White Paper, which made no real concessions, was greeted with half-hearted protests from a Labour leadership clearly eager to be rid of the embarrassment of having to support the miners. The joint NUM-RMT strikes on April 2nd and 16th were the miners' last chance. Willis refused the NUM's request that TUC affiliates be urged to join the action. Labour's NEC declined to give even nominal support.

No wonder the Tories now felt confident enough to mount their big assault. The High Court gave the green light and British Coal moved in for the kill, closing 19 of the original 31 threatened pits in a six-week killing spree that elicited not a word of protest from John Smith or Robin Cook.

Now it transpires that even the dozen pits promised a reprieve by Heseltine in March are not safe. Only 1% of the £500 million subsidy offered in the White Paper will ever materialise. 50% of white-collar staff are to go. The prediction of the Rothschild Report, leaked in 1991, that the British coal industry would be reduced to a dozen pits employing 10,000 workers, looks set to become a reality.

Could it have been any different? Back in autumn 1992 Scargill proposed that miners occupy the threatened pits but the NUM Executive feared the members would not vote for it. It was only the unexpected public protest which enabled the miners to fight back at all.

Was there ever a chance to circumvent the Labour Party and TUC and mobilise some kind of 'general strike from below'? I doubt it. What we saw in October was a labour movement just beginning to flex its muscles after years of stasis. It simply did not have the strength to burst the bureaucratic chains.

Aside from the cost in jobs and human lives, the closures represent the loss of a tremendous political opportunity. This was the culmination of a twenty year ruling-class vendetta against the NUM, in pursuit of which successive Tory governments have squandered £billions and distorted the country's entire energy policy. In this context the only option for the NUM was to seek a political response from the movement as a whole. The isolation which had bedeviled the NUM during the '84-'85 strike was always going to be the key problem - and in the end it has cost not only the miners but all of us dear.

Still, opinion polls continue to show majority opposition to pit closures. Trade unionists are growing impatient with Smith's spinelessness. There is still an NUM with 20,000 working miners. There is still a coal industry. 70% of British electricity output is generated by domestic coal; 80% of that is mined by NUM members.

Privatisation looms and with it the threat of more closures and a return to brutal exploitation in the remaining mines. Women Against Pit Closures are maintaining camps at Parkside, Trentham, Grimethorpe and Vane Tempest. They also promise renewed direct action in the near future.

The NUM still has a massive struggle on its hands. The National Miners Support Network will continue to offer practical solidarity. We have to take the miners' case to the TUC and Labour Party conferences and hold to account those responsible for this wholly avoidable tragedy.

"For months, the leaders of the Labour Party and the TUC played the Parliamentary game, and deliberately allowed the biggest anti-Tory movement since the 1920s to be dissipated.

"As the NUM worked to build up a united campaign by trade unions against the Tories, the leaders of the TUC did everything they could to undermine this unity. They rejected the NUM's repeated calls for Days of Action.

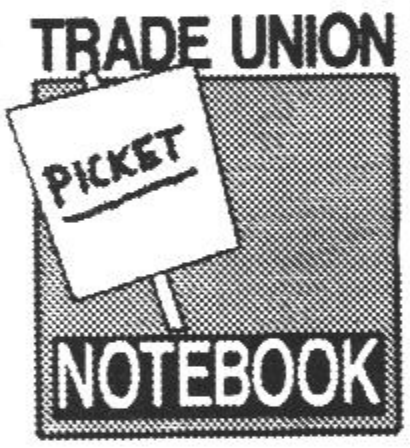
"Despite all this, the miners and the mining communities have fought on. Despite the Labour and TUC leaders dragging their feet, thousands of ordinary trade unionists have responded to our appeals and supported our campaign. Literally millions of ordinary people, many not even in trade unions, have backed our campaign against pit closures.

"We have suffered setbacks. But we are not defeated."

- Arthur Scargill

Solidarity with the miners —
now more than ever!
National Miners Support Network
213 Eversholt Street,
London NW1 1DE
tel. 071 388 7961
fax. 071 383 0956

Burnsalls - one year on



THE BURNSALLS' management launched a vicious attack on pickets outside the factory almost one year to the day that the dispute began. Some scabs came out of the factory wielding knives, iron bars and wooden staves and laid into pickets and supporters. One striker, Kuldip Dhahival, was held by one scab whilst another attacked him with a knife, resulting in two fingers being severed. Kuldip underwent emergency surgery to save his hand. A supporter of the strike, Kevin Hayes, was struck over the head with an iron bar. Fortunately x-rays revealed there was no permanent damage to his skull.

As a consequence of this outrageous assault, the GMB produced a 4-page leaflet containing photographs of Kuldip in hospital, entitled 'Your management do business with people who did this'. This was circulated to workers for firms which trade with Burnsalls. These companies are among the most influential in the West Midlands: Wilcox, Rover, Land Rover, Kenham Tool and Sturmey Archer.



PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

At the GMB Conference in Portsmouth, £2,000 was raised for the workers in dispute.

Jo Quigley of the GMB told *Briefing* "There is no avenue we shall leave unexplored in our quest for victory. One year on workers remain as determined as ever."

● Please send messages of support (and donations payable to the GMB Burnsalls Strike Fund), to Will Thorne House, 2 Birmingham Road, Halesowen, West Midlands B63 3HP.

Nursery occupations update

THE OCCUPATION of Harvist and Springdale nurseries by parents and staff, reported in the last issue of *Briefing*, looks set to continue through the summer.

Islington's Labour Council wants to close the two under-fives centres but support in the community for direct action to preserve what is seen as an essential local service is strong. To the dismay of Labour right-wingers, who have had it all their own way for too long on the Council, 13 of the borough's 20 Labour Party wards have opposed the closures, as has the Local Government Committee and MP Jeremy Corbyn.

Campaigners received a major boost when the NALGO conference in Brighton voted to support the occupations despite resistance by the national leadership.

● Contact: Springdale, 15A Springdale Road, London N16 (tel. 081 254 7937); Harvist: 100 Hornsey Road, London N7 (tel. 081 609 0319).

Reed's dirty deeds

SINCE THE GIANT Reed Business Publishing ended union agreements on April Fools Day, management has tried to chuck union reps off the company's health and safety committee, and has made half the staff redundant at the Birmingham *Metro News*. It has even tried to introduce a spy-in-the-screen system to monitor individual journalists' 'productivity on the subs desk'.

A Big Brother style 'editorial computer monitoring system' would record the number of words produced by a reporter and the number of articles processed by a sub-editor.

'Postal' ballot ended

A UNIQUE PIECE of democracy in the trade union movement has been lost following the UCW conference decision to introduce a permanent editor for the union's journal *The Post*. Until now the paper's editor had been elected - the only such post to hold any degree of accountability in the trade union movement.

Water sell-off victory

WATER WORKERS in the North of Ireland have won an important battle in the proposed privatisation of the industry. The government has announced it is to delay the sell-off due to technical reasons.

In fact, the AT&G (The British TGWU's section there) is pointing to the real reason - the massive community and workplace resistance to the sale.

Packed public meetings were followed by intense media pressure on unionist MPs in the province. No longer assured of their support, the government has come up with 'technical reasons' that the sale cannot continue.

Miserabalism breaks out at Brighton

Jon Rogers reports from NALGO's final conference: Taking place two weeks before the merger with NUPE and Cohse to form UNISON, the conference was originally set to become a week long jamboree.

An initially light agenda confirmed activists' suspicions that the bureaucracy would be unlikely to observe NALGO mandates in UNISON. However, a massive number of emergency motions were submitted by delegates immediately before and during conference. Among these was a successful attempt to revoke the commitment of £250,000 to subsidise parties celebrating "the end of NALGO". In response to this motion a petulant National Executive accused the conference of "miserabilism" and threatened cancellation of end-of-conference junket. The mood of delegates was critical and hostile to the self-congratulatory nostalgia which the National Executive had obviously intended to be the theme of conference. The week started badly with a recommendation from the national local government committee to the local government group meeting (representing 500,000 of NALGO's 750,000 members) that delegates accept a 1.5% pay offer. Unfortunately, the group meeting did not feel sufficiently confident to ballot on strike action. Nevertheless, delegates rejected the recommendations of the top table and voted to ballot the membership on the offer with a recommendation to reject. Later in the week the full conference made an important decision - opposed by the National Executive -to call for a UNISON rules conference to take place. This will be essential since the rule book of UNISON has never been debated at any conference. However, it won't be surprising if the NEC try to wriggle out of this.

One major victory for the NEC which left delegates hurt and angry was the narrow defeat of a lengthy motion from the national black members conference concerning racism at the womens conference, which had been the subject of long debate and eventual agreement between the four officially recognised self-organised groups in NALGO. The decision of conference, at the behest of the NEC, to reject this motion was tantamount to denying the right of black people to define their own experience of racism. This attack on self-organisation was part of the attempt of the NALGO bureaucracy to demonstrate to its new partners in the hierarchy of NUPE that 'troublesome elements' will be kept in line in UNISON. It is therefore welcome that a conference has been called to form a Left organisation in UNISON. NALGO's last conference exhibited sectarianism between various Left groups. We can't afford the luxury of such divisions in UNISON.



NALGO on the march PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

Shakin' Scarborough

Andy Malcolm reports from NUPE conference: Anger at, and more especially fear of, job losses pervaded the entire conference. The composite which we (Hackney General Branch) contributed, called on the leadership to win the support of COHSE and NALGO "for a ballot on national stoppages by all UNISON members in the public services to break the government's pay limits. Encourage all branches to liaise with other trade union workers and public service users, to continue to build resistance to the ongoing attacks." This was defeated after a card vote by only 800 votes. If all the delegates who sit in the bars and cafes all day instead of taking part in the business they were sent to conference for had actually been present, this could have been passed. On the final evening, NUPE laid on a fireworks display which cost a small fortune, and a cabaret featuring Shakin' Stevens.

Political link and lead needed

David Harris previews the TGWU Conference in Bournemouth: There seems little doubt that the T&G Conference will reaffirm the need for the role of the unions in the Labour Party to be strengthened, not weakened.

What will it decide on the economy though? Bill Morris (*T&G Record*, April 1993) says "Clinton's victory demonstrated that it is possible to put an alternative before the electorate and win."

Clinton's alternative , however, will not solve the problems workers face in America. It is not enough to say Labour must "intervene to give hope for recovery and jobs".

The TGWU should be advocating a clear socialist programme. Only the implementation of such a programme can protect our members from the attacks they face from the Tories and their system.

Executive sartorially slashed

Clive Walder reports from the NCU Conference at Blackpool: This year's conference met against a background of the vicious attacks our members have faced from management. Executive proposals on major issues such as attendance patterns and job reduction schemes were passed. But they were mostly vague and open to favourable interpretation by the new left executive. All the executive's callous cost-cutting plans were rejected. Its most brutal proposal was to reduce the death benefit paid to retired members. One measure conference didn't oppose was axing the £260 per month executive allowance. Despite pleas from some executive members that they had to meet management in a certain 'style', the allowance was abolished. Conference re-affirmed the principle of merging with the UCW, but insisted that full-time officers should be elected and not have voting rights on the executive. It is now up to the new executive to develop the union's progressive policies.

Reclaim our schools

The latest government attempt to disrupt the education of our children (otherwise known as the Standard Assessment Tests -SATs) - has been thwarted by the solidarity of the three main teachers' unions in boycotting the tests. Teachers must now go on the offensive to defend the state education system, urges **Geoff Mann**.

THROUGHOUT THE country headteachers have reported that the tests have not been carried out, due to the vast majority of teachers taking action to ensure that children have continued with their normal lessons. Most schools considered the tests irrelevant and were planning to use their own methods of assessment.

David Kershaw, headteacher of Coundon Court School, Coventry, said that he had been unable to carry out the tests because the boycott covered every member of staff.

Pat Taylor, branch secretary of Barnet NUT, was delighted that the boycott held firm. She stated "I have never seen anything as stultifyingly boring as the proposed English test. We don't object to testing, it's just the way it's been done." Hazel Taylor, headteacher at Whitefield School, Hendon, observed, "The tests impose an unreasonable workload on teachers, but more importantly have flaws in them. It would be wasting the children's time. It is not educationally sensible for the children to take the tests."

Mike Kivi, an English teacher with over twenty years' experience, said "The quality of English teaching and the motivation of children are spiralling down the spout because John Patten insists on driving his pantechnicon down a blind alley. The walls are bound to collapse before it reaches the dead end."

Patten's reaction is to threaten to make the boycotts illegal and at the same time further dilute the professionalism of teaching by allowing parents to become qualified teachers after a twelve months course. The only requirements now needed to enter teaching are child-minding experience and an ability to cope with mindless bureaucracy and form filling.

You have to give Patten credit for planning ahead, preparing for a mass exodus from the teaching profession. Already the Teachers Pension Agency is overwhelmed with requests from ex-teachers for the refund of their pension contributions - these young, highly qualified professionals clearly have no intention of returning to teaching in the foreseeable future. Patten wants to devalue the professional status now to ensure that a ragbag of unqualified child-minders and clerical workers are available while highly valued, experienced teachers quit under the intolerable pressure of SATs and the National Curriculum.

Patten & Co are so stubborn that the only way to save our schools is to secure the overthrow of this pathetic excuse for a government. The labour movement needs to reclaim our schools — for they are *our* schools, the bosses don't educate their children in the state sector.

The fight for our children's future depends on the united action of the teachers' unions in conjunction with all other workers involved in struggle against this government. The ultimate aim must be to bring down the government and replace it with a Labour government committed to reviving the morale of teachers. Maintaining solidarity in the struggle should not prevent the teaching unions from taking the kind of direct action which may be needed when faced with threats of legal action. There is a tremendous amount of sympathy amongst the general public for the teachers, which needs to be harnessed to ensure that Patten is discredited at every opportunity. Teachers must now go on the offensive to protect the state education system. We have seen nursery workers and parents occupy nurseries threatened with closure. The time may be near when we occupy our schools and declare them 'SAT-free zones'.

Decision-making in education must be restored to those who know best - highly qualified, experienced teachers who understand that pupils achievements should be measured according to their own capabilities, and not set against artificial levels of attainment concocted by civil servants. ❑



Illustration: Dave Lockett

Year 2 teachers speak out

THE FOLLOWING comments are published in 'Testing and Assessing 6 and 7 Year Olds', the report of the research into last year's Key Stage 1 tests by Leeds University School of Education and the NUT:

"I feel frustrated that these tests are supposedly more valid than my professional judgement. At the end of the SAT period I felt totally drained. I had gathered little or no added information about the ability of my children."

"There is a great deal of pressure on Year 2 teachers to get through a tremendous amount of work with the children. The testing adds severely to this and is of no value whatsoever."

"I feel frustrated that the time and huge amount of money spent could have been channelled into helping children with special needs, making classes smaller and giving teachers the time to work at a reasonable pace for individual children."



Post-graduate academy. PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

Sad grads

With the Conservatives set to crack down on squatters, many students may merely graduate from redbrick university to cardboard city. **John Rogers**, Hackney South & Shoreditch CLP, writes from personal experience.

AS A STUDENT I marched, occupied college buildings, wrote angry letters to newspapers, and generally made a lot of noise to the effect that students had never had it so bad. Grants had diminished considerably in real terms, there was poll tax to be paid (or resisted), rent rises, ever increasing debts, along with the general underfunding of the education system. But the light at the end of the tunnel was the reassurance that as a graduate the world would be my oyster: I would be able to choose my career and the hard study and accumulation of a large debt would finally pay off. Some hope.

My initial confidence that I would be able to land a graduate position quickly evaporated as the rejections slowly rolled in along with the giros. Nepotism finally landed me a temporary eight-week job as a mortgage assistant for £100-a-week. This did little to reduce my debts. It became clear to myself and four fellow 'sad grads' that we just didn't have the money to lay down on rent and deposit whilst we awaited Housing Benefit. So we decided to find a squat.

We had a friend already squatting in Hackney so they had an idea of what flats were empty and habitable. Hackney is notorious for its squats and large number of empty flats. Hackney Council estimates that it has 3,000 empty flats - 1,300 of which are inhabited by squatters. We found a suitable flat, moved in and spent a week decorating, cleaning and repairing defects such as broken windows and the central heating. Luckily Housing Services had decided not to smash up this particular flat. They often do this to deter squatters from moving in, further delaying the possibility of the flat being brought up to legal standards for habitation and housing council tenants. The cost of this wanton vandalism by the council of its own properties runs into £millions - a cost blamed on the squatters who often spend hundreds of pounds on repairs to their flats. We painted our metal squatters' door and attached a notice stating our legal rights as laid out in the 1977 Criminal Law Act. After 24 hours' constant occupation these rights came into force.

Although we settled in and felt comfortable in our new abode, every knock at the door was met with a surge of paranoia telling you Housing Services is about to kick you out. But thankfully that has now abated. As the neighbours watched us through their curtains, we attempted to consolidate our tenancy by getting an electricity account. No go. The electricity board has entered into a 'gentleman's agreement' with Hackney Council and was refusing to give squatters electricity accounts. "Illegal", we cried. "Sorry", replied the LEB.

As the job situation deteriorated the situation became clearer. Nobody wants to employ graduates. You find yourself caught in the trap between being over-qualified and having insufficient experience.

The common opinion amongst employers is that three years of study on a degree course do not constitute any kind of relevant experience. The interest on the loans mounts up as this mass of unemployed graduates fight for jobs in shops and pubs. Of course everyone I went to Poly with wants to 'travel-round-the-world' - but you can't without any money, and with a hefty debt to repay.

I now find myself reflecting on how well off I was as a student, as I cash my fortnightly giro for £67.20. The option of postgraduate training is also being closed off for many, as competition for places has intensified. Over 65,000 have applied for the few thousand post-graduate teacher training courses available, and with course fees for a one-year Masters degree starting at around £2,200, financing your own training is also out of the question.

The result of this desperate situation is that many graduates - myself included - now turn to offering their services as volunteers in the hope of gaining some experience and maybe even a job. But it seems as though it's even getting tough to get a job on a voluntary basis.

So for now I'll sit tight in my squat, reeling off the job applications, seeking a funny side to this sad situation, and hoping we don't get evicted. ❑

In need of social(ist) policy

There is a desperate need for a forceful political campaign for social justice. How will Labour's Commission measure up to the task? **Michael Furst** fears the worst.

PERHAPS THE timing was just unfortunate, but when both Labour and the Tories announced a few months ago wide-ranging reviews of public spending, the fabled person on the top of the Clapham bus must have felt a conspiracy in the air.

Both parties are preparing plans for Maastricht-induced restrictions on public borrowing, and therefore spending. And both give the appearance of expecting relatively little growth in the economy for the rest of the '90s - a point which the mass media have started to pick up, but without seeing fit to make the link with European economic and monetary union.

To date, Labour's Commission on Social Justice has been coy about any agreed direction, though it says that the first job is to 'map' current and future social trends. It's understood that these are likely to include family make-up, trends in retirement and the ageing population, patterns of caring for disabled or chronically ill people, and housing needs. All well and good, but where is the politics, the ideology?

The Commission is headed by that well-known socialist Sir Gordon Borrie, who made life immeasurably better for the working class by his long stint at the Office of Fair Trading. It includes SDP luminaries alongside academics of varying political hues. It is based in the Institute for Public Policy Research (proprietor Patricia Hewitt). These facts lead any reasonable person to conclude that Labour's future social justice policies are going to be bloody hard to campaign around: 'Fight now for an adjustment to state pensions to take account of those with occupational or private pension income!' is hardly going to get the blood boiling.

Perhaps we're being unfair, after all no less a person than Frank Field suggests that there's no reason to pay state pensions to those who have a substantial private retirement income. And on the surface there's no logical argument with that. But does he make as much noise about the breakdown of the social contract between individual and state, which continues to cut the value of the state pension? Does he campaign to make all occupational pension funds a resource under the control of workers and dependants, rather than unelected fund managers?

There are some basic political choices to be made. Social policy is of course a technical matter in part, but Labour's official line - that it's largely a matter of re-thinking Beveridge in the light of the 1990s - is almost criminally wrong. For example, the front bench campaign against the imposition of VAT on fuel is right, but where's the challenge to the commercial regimes of the privatised fuel industry? Gordon Brown's call for an extra tax on the supernormal profits of privatised utilities is hardly an adequate substitute.

In the real world there's been a fivefold increase in dysentery, and a major rise in the incidence of hepatitis A - diseases of basic poverty. Public health officials admit that the cause is water deprivation caused by massive price rises which have led, since water privatisation, to a trebling of households disconnected from water. There's also untold hardship among high essential users, such as the one million households which contain someone with incontinence. Where's the campaign to bring this natural monopoly and fundamental resource back into proper social control? Answers on a postage stamp please.

In the real world there's hypothermia and massive amounts of fuel debt, with some claimants paying £20 a week from already meagre Income Support to pay for gas and electricity arrears. There is a 'right to fuel' campaign, but apparently no broad political policy on how to abolish the existence of widespread fuel poverty. High fuel and housing costs give rise to most of the serious multiple debt problems faced by nearly three million low income households.

Not surprisingly, degrading and dangerous choices about whether to eat, heat or flush face low income households - commonly accepted to be at least one in five adults and some three million children. A recent study in Oldham revealed one in three pregnant women on low incomes had deficient diets. This is thought to contribute to the high rate of miscarriage among low income mothers, and to higher mortality rates of children in their first year.

These and psycho-social factors associated with relative deprivation mean that children in low income families have a lifespan of seven or eight years less than others. The degree of income inequality in a society has serious and proven health consequences for all those with a below-average income. The massive transfer of resources to the rich has resulted in a downward slide in Britain's health as compared with other developed countries. Do Labour's anodyne tax policies address this most basic subject? I think not.

It really is back-to-basics time. Social policy has to deal with fundamental values, and therefore needs powerful political and economic measures, not just technical tinkering. With the Tories intent on curbing social security, housing and disability benefits, scapegoating and resurrecting the idea of the 'undeserving poor', there is a paramount need to express a deep and broad sense of outrage. The Commission on Social Justice doesn't seem to fit the bill. ❑

Nationalisation — is it enough?

Nationalisation under workers' control is by no means the simple socialist solution that is often claimed. In the light of past failures the Left should recast its programme, argues **Mike Phipps** (Brent South CLP).

AT MY LAST local Campaign Group meeting, a discussion broke out on the need for the Left to come off the defensive and develop a programme for the next century. "But we already have a programme," objected one comrade, "I'm for the nationalisation of everything - under workers' control."

An extreme position, you might think. Or is it? In fact it's very common on the Left. The last three words - "under workers' control" - are the crucial bit: they provide the alibi which is necessary to exonerate genuine socialists from any responsibility for the failure of existing nationalisations.

I do not suggest that the Left should be held to account for Labour's post-1945 nationalisations, which had nothing to do with socialism. Almost invariably these targeted bankrupt industries, starting with rail and coal, where state takeover and funding was inevitably a first step to drastic rationalisation and job loss. No coherent overall planning took place in, for example, energy or transport policy, where separate 'businesses' were run in competition, and the monopolistic bureaucracies created were not accountable to either Parliament or the consumer. Any attempt to nationalise anything profitable, such as steel, led to a press furore and rebellions from Labour's right wing.

Soviet-style nationalisation at least resembled genuine socialist confiscation in intent: the takeover of the 'commanding heights' in order to use their resources to plan the economy on the basis of human need. The problem was that under the Soviet dictatorship there was even less accountability and no integrated planning. Heads of different industrial sectors aimed at self-sufficiency to cut their dependence on other departments with conflicting sectoral interests - so coal managers would run their own freight train system to transport coal, and rail managers would open their own coal mines to power trains. The result was bureaucratisation, duplication, mismanagement and corruption.

Maybe the Left is not responsible for the Soviet experience either. But it has been slow to put forward positive alternatives and in the face of our rulers' solution of blanket privatisation, calls to simply renationalise fail to strike a chord. This is especially true in poorer countries where nationalisation is synonymous with the most flagrant governmental corruption and asset-stripping by politicians.

The Left's panacea, 'under workers' control', is also little more than a slogan. Originally 'workers' control' was understood by communists to be a crude check over capitalist managers, similar to the commissar system of watching over career officers in the Red Army, not an end in itself. It was seen as a preparatory step to full-scale workers' management.

But even this does not make things any clearer. Are the workers in a particular industry meant to manage it, or, in the interests of integrated planning, should the industry be managed by representatives of the whole workforce? How would sectoralism be overcome, where the job interests of one section of workers might conflict with broader social interests? How would these arrangements help reconcile major areas of potential conflict, such as that between heavy industry and an ecologically sustainable energy policy?

How would services be made accountable to the consumer? Would alternative services in the same sphere be available in the interests of consumer choice - or does this smack too much of the market and seem hostile to the interests of the workers involved? Above all, what is the scope of transformation? Nationalisation of everything in the field of production, distribution and exchange, even under workers' control, is just plain wrong. Even if the Left is not responsible for the failures of bureaucratic nationalisations, is there nothing we can learn from these that might throw light on our own plans?



Three very basic lessons seem to emerge. First, whatever the form of control or management, the smaller the easier. The logistical difficulties of running a vast enterprise have been common to all systems, irrespective of the degree of consent or coercion employed, and are not going to disappear with the introduction of fully accountable structures.

Secondly, experience suggests that the provision and organisation of services is more likely to be successful if it is based on what a community is actually asking for. In that sense the primary goal is empowerment and forms of ownership may be secondary.

Thirdly, we have to come to terms with the market. Replacing the anarchy of the market is achievable; decreeing its relations of supply and demand out of existence is not. Ignoring these relations inevitably leads to their breaking through in an unplanned way. The result in all hitherto existing attempts has been the unplanned emergence of a powerful informal economy, often based on the worst forms of personalised relations, sucking resources out of the official economy. The Russian socialist Boris Kagarlitsky has written at length on how a controlled, regulated market can be used to counter bureaucratism.

The way in which goods and services are produced and allocated is the big question for socialists. If the Left is to be relevant over the next decade - let alone century - it needs to think hard about what it really wants, and then fight for it. ❑

Semantically challenged by the National Policy Forum

AT VARIOUS TIMES in Labour Party meetings when the question comes up about why so few people actually attend, there is always that creep who comes out with the truism that new members are often put off by the mystifying use of jargon at party gath-

John McDonnell
Representative to the Forum
Greater London Labour Party

erings. To be honest I've always thought that if the new members are so cretinous that they can't understand simple expressions like 'what the PRO of the CLP did to a member of the EC of the LGC at a meeting of the GMC', then I'm at one with Patten on this, they shouldn't be trusted with the enjoyment of leafleting for Labour in the pouring rain.

However I must admit that after twenty years in the Party I have recently been forced through a whole new educative process on the semantics of the organisation.

This re-evaluation was forced upon me by my election to and attendance at the first and possibly last meeting of The Provisional National Policy Forum.

The semiotic challenge I faced was to come to terms with, even if I couldn't answer, the following questions:

1. What is the difference between a committee and a commission?

Answer - A committee generally comprises members elected to serve on it in order to discuss an issue leading to a decision largely by democratic means.

However, I now know that a commission is a body set up by Walworth Road consisting of unelected members of the Labour Party's great and the good dinner party circuit, which produces reports to be circulated to the National Policy Forum less than a week before it meets and which the Forum is not allowed to amend or reject.

2. When is a conference called a forum?

Answer - When, although it is an elected body entrusted with the task of preparing the final policy papers of the Labour Party to go to Party Conference, its members are not allowed to submit resolutions on, or amendments to, or even reject in total the papers it is supposedly responsible for considering prior to the annual conference.

Further explorations in meaning: I hope that this has been the valuable etymological lesson for you that it has been for me. I am now moving onto explorations in the concepts of 'democracy', 'participation' and even 'power'.

At the Forum I was described by Jack Cunningham as "a lone voice in the Party" when I asked a question on the role of planning, control and public ownership in the development of Labour's economic policy.

Somehow I don't believe I will be alone this winter when the firefighters, the local government workers and the health workers will be looking for pledges from Labour on the restoration of public services and the need to revive public ownership of their services and industries.

What future for the women's organisation?

SINCE THE financial crisis at Walworth Road began, no one in the Party centrally or in the regions has had a clear idea of what is going on. One of the most stupid proposals to come out of the crisis management

Loraine Monk
Chair
London Regional Women's Committee

cuts was that to save money all support for regional women's committees from officers at regional level should be ended.

The support actually provided always varied from region to region, but without any support it is difficult to see how regional women's committees are expected to survive.

It was suggested individual committee members could do voluntary work to keep them going. First, this ignored all the hours already put in by regional committee members. Secondly, it seemed to be taking yet another leaf out of the Tories' book that women have money and time to spare to run committees.

It seems a strange time when the Labour Party is supposed to be 'listening to women', trying to increase women's training and implement quotas, that it chooses to cut the ability of regional women's committes to continue and expand this work.

It is essential we make women's issues a top priority if we are to tackle the reluctance of women in Britain to vote Labour. The regional women's committees, made up of trade union and CLP women, are uniquely placed to work on issues related to women within and outside the Party.

The London Regional Women's Committee is an organisational body with a brief to support individual women and women's sections, providing them with information and training while setting up events promoting equality issues within the Party (which currently means supporting the implementation of quotas). We would like to contribute formally on policy-making areas and to target campaigns that particularly effect women in London. This work is essential to promote the Party and get more women involved. Why then aren't we being given support?

In the 1920s the Labour Party realised it had to involve more women if it were ever to achieve power. Women's Sections were set up and women's membership grew to 100,000 in 1922 and 150,000 in 1924. The membership subscription was 1/- for men but only 6d for women, denoting our separate status within the Party. The Party made the push to recruit more women, afraid that if it didn't, a separate women's party would come into being, as a result of the large number of politically active women the Suffragette campaign had produced.

Now is not the time for the Party to turn its back on the women's organisation. We need to work together to recruit women and attract women voters. We need more resources, not fewer.

Jack Straw scapegoats Lambeth Left



Expelled and suspended Lambeth councillors are having to resort to legal action to defend themselves against serious allegations made by Labour's environment spokesperson Jack Straw.

Steve French
Expelled Lambeth Labour councillor

In January, Straw issued a press release following the allegations about Lambeth's DLO. He stated: "We defer to no-one in our determination to ensure that public services operate to the highest standards, that fraud, corruption and mismanagement are rooted out wherever they occur - and those responsible are brought to book. Labour has acted decisively where the evidence has been available. This we did in Liverpool, and in Lambeth in 1991 when 13 members of the council were expelled from the Labour group, and a new leadership was installed, which then ordered the current investigation and report from the Chief Executive."

When we threatened legal action, Straw offered an apology that was unacceptable to us. He regretted any distress that he may have "inadvertently" caused, saying that it was not his "intention" to suggest that any of the thirteen were guilty of illegality. However, two days after the press release an interview appeared in *Tribune* in which Straw said: "I'm damned if we are going to be tarred with the brush of Lambeth, especially as we cleared out thirteen semi-Trotskyist councillors. It is since the new leadership has been installed that action has been taken. We'll be using Lambeth to remind people of the error of ultra-left politics. It is no surprise to me that, in both Liverpool and Lambeth, corruption and Trotskyism went hand in hand." Straw's defence is that he was justified in what he said!

The suspensions and expulsions had nothing to do with corruption. The NEC witch-hunted councillors who voted against the poll tax, cuts and the Gulf war. We are both not guilty of illegality and have a record of opposing mismanagement and alleged corruption in the council.

At my NCC hearing, Larry Whitty declared that he recognised my "important achievements" in rooting out alleged corruption when I was Chair of the DLO. The local Tories said that they "could not fault my efforts". Even the District Auditor (no fan of left-wing councillors) suggests that the witch-hunt was part of Lambeth's problems. His recent report states "...in March 1991 a number of members were suspended from the ruling party. This left the political balance of the council in an unstable situation and has increased the difficulty of managing the authority."

We have no alternative but to take libel proceedings to force Straw to make a full retraction which restores our reputations.

Following Lamont's funding by the Treasury and the Tory Party to evict his tenant, a letter from Larry Whitty reveals that "Mr Straw's costs are indeed having to be covered by the Labour Party". Reliable sources suggest that Straw has clocked up a £6,000 bill.

Whilst our costs have been covered so far by local donations, to pursue the case we now need to appeal to the broader movement. Confident of victory, loans will be accepted! Donations and requests for speakers to: 'Lambeth Against the Witch-Hunt, 56 Ashby House, London SW9 7SL.

Networking

Dorothy Macedo
Hendon South CLP

FOLLOWING APRIL'S Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network Recall Conference in Sheffield, the Network has now published its first *Supporters Bulletin*. This summarises the decisions taken at Sheffield on both policies and the structure of the Network, and lists the agreed model resolutions for Labour Party Conference and the SCG slate for the NEC elections. This is Abbott, Benn, Corbyn, Livingstone, Mahon, Primarolo and Skinner.

Because the NEC elections are conducted on the basis of 'one member one vote', it is important that we start campaigning now at the grass roots for the SCG slate. Our number one priority must be to get Dennis Skinner back on the NEC, but if the phasing in of the quota for women starts this year (as it should), it won't be enough for him to come 7th - he will need to finish at least 6th.

The Network is planning regional rallies for the SCG slate in addition to local meetings organised by SCG Network groups.

The first meeting of the Network Forum is at 1pm on Saturday 17th July at the Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1. The Forum consists of the regional and group representatives elected at Sheffield, but all paid-up Network supporters are welcome to attend as observers.

It is vital that all left activists make sure their names are on the SCG Supporters Network mailing list. Send £5 waged (£2 unwaged) to the SCG Network c/o 3 Blades House, Kennington Oval, London SE11 5TW, cheques payable to SCG Network.

Fall out

Lament not for Lamont, but beware the bullying Clarke - and the Labour leadership's lack of substance and socialism, warns **Harry Cohen** MP for Leyton.

LAMONT AND Major's thuggery towards each other was a case of the gangsters falling out. They have been operating a successful scam - for them and their rich friends - for years. Yet as they were rumbled, Major sacked his Chancellor not for his 'favourable economic and financial skills', but for his lack of 'political presentation skills'. 'Refreshing the Cabinet' means a new thug (Clarke) to extort more money from the poor. After all, Clarke's bullying of the ambulance workers, low paid health staff and the teachers is the perfect track record for the job.

The pay-off for Lamont was supposed to be vast earnings for no work in the City (other than manipulating a few government contacts), but he refused to go quietly. His Commons statement was a history re-write in an attempt to clear himself from blame. Damning Major for weak, manipulative, short-term government - "for the pollsters and party managers" - he laid the blame squarely upon the Prime Minister for the policies which have resulted in the nation's current economic plight.

It did not need John Smith's speech, good on scathing jokes as it was, to show everyone what a feeble mix of mediocrity and malice the Tory government is. No one in their right mind thinks Major's any good. The likelihood is that in due course the Tories will dump him, but whether they do or not they have virtually lost their legitimacy to rule.

It was good for Labour, but apart from Smith's speech, it was all of the Tories own making. The Labour leadership still shies away from principled approaches and alternative policies to present to the people. Major's pathetic response still concentrated on Labour's alleged 'scaremongering'. It does not need any, especially when Portillo is detailing a whole range of social cutbacks, including the NHS and invalidity benefits.

Clarke, though, concentrated on Gordon Brown's lack of substance in terms of relevant economic policies to get out of the current mess. I am afraid he was on much more dangerous ground as far as Labour is concerned. As I walked through the voting lobby one Labour MP (not a left-winger) commented "that was the same one and only Gordon Brown speech - a good attack on the Tories but nothing to offer." The game's up for that particular approach and if it is simply repeated Labour will be increasingly punished by bully-boy Clarke.



I don't think, Mr Major, that a stab in the back warrants Invalidity Benefit

Recently Tribune MPs Roger Berry and Peter Hain produced a paper which called for an end to what it described as "the Lamont minus one per cent" approach of Labour's economic front-bench and for a temporary borrowing commitment of between £10-15 billion specifically for rapid job creation to get the economy moving. It was crushed by a campaign emanating from the front bench. It was purely Keynesian, but that was too much for Brown, Harman and Co.

What Labour really needs is socialism. But the Brown approach is to shadow and tinker with whatever the Tories do. I would not be surprised if some time in the future he echoes Lamont's call for an independent central bank, despite it being ludicrous for unelected, unaccountable bankers to run the show. It is a state development bank we should have.

This policy shallowness of the leadership is becoming clear to an increasing number of trade unionists. There is a realisation that this timid leadership approach was a significant factor in last year's election defeat, and finds expression in anger that Labour is not doing enough to bring down the Tories now.

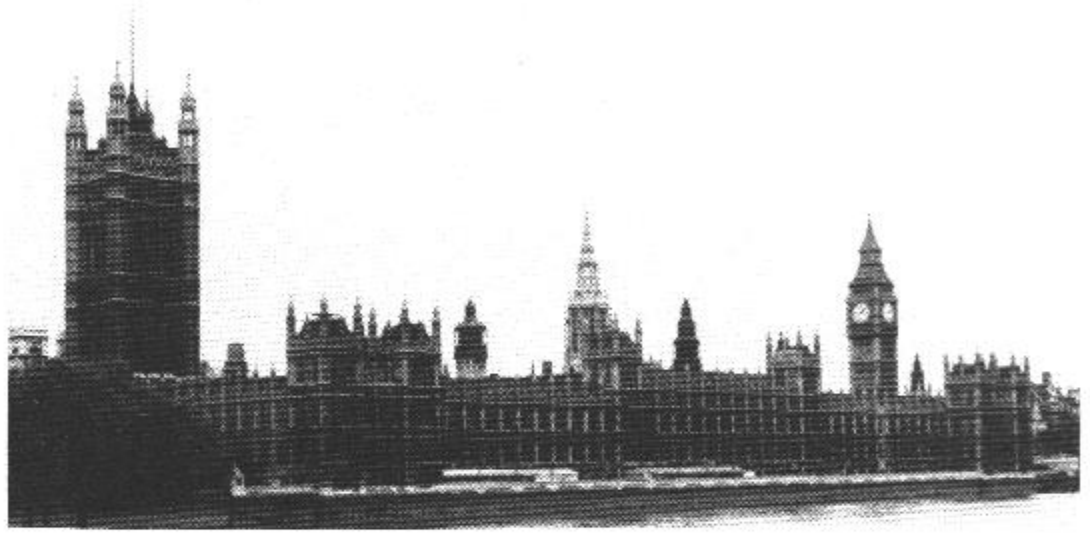
There is also, quite rightly, anger at the attempt of Smith, Cook, Blunkett, Blair and Kinnock to break the institutional link between the Labour Party and the trade unions. They do not, of course, object to MPs having a block vote in the elections of leader and deputy so their interpretation of one-member-one-vote is peculiarly partial. Stopping trade union involvement is their aim.

The crazy Smith idea that anyone can join the Party and vote straight away for candidates (at the moment there is a twelve month rule) has angered many MPs, as it could lead to buying selections and short term gangs of membership for selection purposes only. It seems likely Smith will have to backtrack.

He should also do so on trade union involvement. ❑

Rights not rites

In a new book, *Common Sense*, Tony Benn, aided by Andrew Hood, advances detailed proposals for an alternative "Commonwealth of Britain" and "Commonwealth of Europe". **Mike Marqusee** contrasts Benn's genuine radicalism to the sham version on offer from Charter 88.



Parliament. Magistrates will be elected and High Court judges subject to Parliamentary confirmation - and, if need be, removal. Local government will be liberated from central control, given control over police and made accountable to local electors. Scotland, England and Wales will have their own parliaments with extensive powers.

FOR TONY BENN and Andrew Hood, British economic decline is inextricably linked to the unaccountable institutions propped up by Britain's unwritten constitution. Constitutional reform, they argue, is necessary if we are to throw off the "stagnant feudalism which seeks to subdue the country and make it an instrument of the demands of international capital".

This diagnosis of the British disease is shared by a number of left (and not so left) supporters of Charter 88, but the remedy proposed by Benn and Hood is quite different.

To begin with, they do not see a written constitution as a panacea. "A constitution is only a means to an end, the mechanism to advance people's interests and goals collectively." They are aware that written constitutions can simply impose the prejudices of one generation on another. Principles and rights, they argue, should be at the core of any new constitution; structures must be responsive to pressures from below and open to continual reform.

Towards this end they propose the abolition of the monarchy and the crown prerogative which legitimises the "permanent government". For Benn and Hood the purpose of democratic government is to enable people to assert control over their own lives. Unlike many advocates of constitutional reform, who seek only to check governmental power, Benn and Hood aim to enfranchise and empower the currently excluded majority. Their secular, federal republic is a tool for wresting power from "the golden triangle of the City, Whitehall and Parliament" and "diffusing it downwards and outwards".

In Benn and Hood's new democracy, political parties will be a necessity - as will internal democracy within them. Indeed, they link the powers of patronage available under the crown prerogative to the autocracy and general flabbiness of the current Labour opposition. They warn of the dangers of a technocratic approach to reform which dismisses contests between parties as mere 'factionalism' and sees political organisation at the grass roots of society as an obstacle to 'modernisation'.

In their Charter of Rights, they not only extend and deepen many of the 'procedural' rights which civil libertarians have long demanded, but insist that social and economic rights must be given equal weight. Hence the right to work, to health care, education, housing, childcare, dignity in retirement, to a clean and safe environment and the right of women to control their own fertility stand alongside trial by jury, freedom of information and protection from discrimination.

Benn and Hood insist that Parliament, not the judges, must remain responsible for enforcing these rights. They empower citizens to claim them through a variety of accessible judicial mechanisms as well as a National Legal Service.

> *"To undermine the House of Commons by subordinating it to judges, commissioners and bankers and paralysing it with endless coalitions through proportional representation would be to undo centuries of struggle by the governed against the governors, and thereby inflict a grave defeat upon the very idea of democracy."*
> — from *Common Sense*, by Tony Benn and Andrew Hood

The aim of the Charter is not only to prevent government abuses but also to encourage citizens both individually and collectively to use their government to remake their society according to their needs.

Benn and Hood are committed to the supremacy of Parliament but their Parliament is a radically reformed one: elected for a fixed term by all those over 16 permanently residing in the country. Equal representation of women will be guaranteed by having each constituency elect two MPs - one woman and one man.

The House of Lords is replaced by a House of the People composed of elected representatives from the three federated republics - England, Scotland and Wales (British jurisdiction in Ireland will be terminated). The monarch gives way to a non-executive president elected by

For Benn and Hood the separation of powers and the need for checks and balances is not, as it is for so many self-styled reformers, a means to entrench privilege and inhibit change but a way of fostering participation, accountability and responsiveness to pressure from below.

One could argue endlessly over the detailed proposals in *Common Sense* but their sheer boldness is a refreshing contrast to the minimalist approach of Charter 88, which organises expensive conferences on 'monarchy and the imagination' but cannot bring itself to call for a republic; and which keeps a cautious silence on church and state, asylum rights and racism, abortion, the right to strike and anything to do with Ireland.

Benn and Hood observe, "Charter 88 does not campaign for social and economic rights which might cause friction in its political alliance". By omitting these issues, Charter 88 bolsters the 'end of history' assumption that capitalism is the necessary framework for democracy, that subordination to the market is an objective necessity, not a political choice.

In reality, Charter 88 is nothing but a campaign for PR, seen as a cure-all by different groups for different reasons. Both the Lib-Lab coalitionists and the rootless socialists who cohabit in Charter 88 shares an hostility to the labour movement and an assumption that the working class is conservative and incapable of independent action. It is left relying on a minute 'radical' fraction of the middle class as the agent of change. Charter 88 is a stab at a post-modern politics which, like most things post-modern, ends up accommodating to the status quo rather than challenging it. ❑

A new type of anti-fascist movement

Anne Kane of the Anti-Racist Alliance defends the organisation against recent criticisms, believing its approach deserves full support from the Left.

ON SATURDAY 12th June the ARA national march against racist murders was led by the families of murder victims Ruhullah Aramesh and Stephen Lawrence. They were joined by Richard Adams, father of Rolan Adams, by national black organisations such as the National Black Caucus and Labour Party Black Section, as well as by anti-racists from all over the country, representatives of national trade unions, the Anti-Apartheid Movement, students, local Labour Parties and many others.

Serious choices over not only tactics but principles, confront those who today wish to oppose effectively the growth of racism and fascism. The decisions made will determine the degree of success we have in driving back racism, racist violence and the rise of the ultra-right in the polls, as well as the degree to which the Left as a whole is able to advance.

These choices lie behind the opposition which the Anti-Racist Alliance has faced since it was launched and which has meant that much time has had to be spent defending the ARA and educating people whom one would hope might know better.

Europe is today facing the worst rise in racist violence and support for fascist organisations for fifty years. In Britain last year there were at least eight racist murders and (on Home Office figures alone) 7,793 racial attacks. Of these 3,227 were in London. This year has already seen several racist murders and attacks, including the murder of Stephen Lawrence in Eltham, the fourth person to be murdered by racists in that area in two years. In Europe racist attacks and the growth of neo-fascism is aided by the increasingly racist policies of national governments, most recently the racist asylum and immigration policies introduced in Germany and France.

In order to defeat racism on this scale the broadest possible anti-racist movement is needed, organised on a national scale and linked to others across the continent. The ARA has succeeded in articulating such a breadth of opposition to racism.

In addition to this however the ARA is founded on an advanced political principle, namely that the victims of racism and those who are today in the front line of attack by fascists and the far right should play the leading role in the anti-racist movement.

For that reason it was Black organisations which took the initiative to establish the Anti-Racist Alliance, supported by other anti-racists on the Left. Black organisations were able to take this step and win wide support primarily because of their success in fighting for Black self-organisation in the labour movement, as registered in the establishment of the TUC Black Workers Conference and the Labour Party Black Socialist Society, in the course of which the labour movement was forced to go through a fundamental education about the nature of racism.

However this principle of Black self-organisation sticks in the throat of many of those who would claim to be anti-racists.

We have had the Socialist Workers Party re-launching the Anti-Nazi League three months after the establishment of the ARA, using the excuse that a separate organisation was needed to fight the nazis. More recently we have had Militant purporting to lead the way in fighting racism and setting up Youth Against Racism in Europe and Panther UK. Added to this *Searchlight* magazine has over the last few months attacked the very idea that Black people are in the front line of racist attacks!

It has to be asked what these organisations find so objectionable about the ARA. As well as the sheer opportunism of the SWP and Militant, who see anti-racist organisations as a good recruiting vehicle for the moment, these attacks all stem from deep opposition to self-organisation and specifically Black self-organisation. Groups which have had to learn to accept the right of women to lead the struggles of women and of lesbians and gay men to lead struggles against homophobia still feel able to attack the importance of the victims taking the lead in the struggle against it. Hostility to Black self-organisation has led to some grotesque actions, including calling demonstrations in the name of victims of racist murders without the permission of the families concerned.

At the same time the ARA has won absolutely overwhelming support from Black organisations and individuals and in the trade union movement, from MPs, community organisations, students and elsewhere. Every ARA event in the last eighteen months has been boycotted by those on the far Left who reject or merely pay lip service to Black self-organisation in the fight against racism.

The record shows that there is no contradiction between community organisation and building a national anti-racist movement, nor between the campaign for legal reforms and resistance on the streets. The ARA works with families of racist attacks, local communities and organises to make every racist murder and racist attacks in general a national political issue - through Parliament, media publicity, national demonstrations, and linking with other movements in Europe. All of these are essential elements necessary to create the scale and breadth of movement needed to combat what is the biggest rise of racist violence since the 1930s.

The ARA is based on a new type of politics, building on the strengths of the anti-racist struggle, the labour movement and others but joining that to the principle that the victims of racism and those today on the sharp edge of the attacks by fascists should be in the leadership. It deserves the united and full support of the Left. ❑

Black groups target police racism

PLANS ARE UNDERWAY to set up a national network of black community organisations to monitor and challenge police abuses of power. The initiative has come from the Liverpool based Campaign Against Police Abuses of Power (CAPAP), following a one-day seminar on 'Community Action for Positive Policing'.

CAPAP was formed in 1981 by local mothers in the Liverpool 8 area, following a series of incidents involving the police - including one where a baby was thrown to the ground as officers attempted to arrest the parent. CAPAP now sees the need for a national network to counter the rising tide of police racism across the country.

According to CAPAP Chair Alan Gayle, this includes "police action such as the harassment of black youth, verbal and physical abuse and the continual attempts to fabricate evidence against people simply because they are black. It also involves police inaction in refusing to deal with the increase in racial terrorism across the country...".

● CAPAP has produced a report from the seminar. Copies available, £1, from CAPAP, c/o Liverpool 8 Law Centre, 36 Princes Avenue, Liverpool 8 (Tel. 051 709 7222).



ARA national demonstration: 'Remember Ruhulah Aramesh — march against racist murders', 12th June, Croydon. PHOTOS: Bryn Griffiths



ARAFEST 93

The Anti-Racist Alliance & The Voice newspaper present a free open-air anti-racist festival.

8th August 1993, 2-8pm
Burgess Park, Southwark, London SE5

Top bands, DJs, celebrity comperes, PAs and sound systems
For further information contact ARAfest hotline - 071 837 3797.

● Winston Churchill MP claimed (June 2nd) that "immigration represents the one serious threat to harmonious race relations in this country".

Racist violence: victims remembered

• Panchadcharan Sahitharan - 28 year old Tamil refugee. Attacked by a gang on 29th December 1991. Died in hospital on 2nd January 1992.

• Saddik Dada - murdered on 23rd January 1992 in Manchester in a machete attack by a racist gang.

• Mohammed Sarwar - beaten to death in an attack on 26th January 1992 in Manchester.

• Rohit Duggal - 16 year old schoolboy. Died as a result of an attack on 11th July 1992 in Eltham, South London. Several members of a gang attacked him but only one was arrested. He was charged and given a life sentence for murder.

• Ruhullah Aramesh - 24 year old Afghan refugee. Died as a result of a racist attack on 31st July 1992 in Thornton Heath. Died in hospital on 2nd August 1992. Attacked by a gang of up to 15 youths who were heard to shout racist abuse. Nine people arrested, charges on two subsequently dropped. All others released on bail. Five people committed to trial for murder - likely to begin Autumn 1993.

• Ashiq Hussain - 20 year old taxi driver. Died on 1st September in Birmingham as a result of an attack by three white passengers.

• Khoaz Mia - 66 year old male. Died in September three weeks after a brutal beating by three white males while on the way to his mosque. One charged with murder. Trial in May 1993 resulted in one person receiving life imprisonment.

• Sher Singh Sagoo - murdered in Lewisham following a dispute with another market trader.

• Stephen Lawrence - attacked and killed by a gang of around six white youths on Thursday 22nd April in Well Hall Road, Eltham. Stephen was 18 years old and the fourth young black person to be killed in the last two years in this area - which is where the BNP has its national headquarters.

• Iftiqaar Malik - 23 years old, murdered in Newcastle, June 1993 in the same area where Khoaz Mia was murdered.

Counting the cost of Clarke's clangers

The new Home Secretary should refer the Bridgewater Four case to the Court of Appeal immediately. **Paul May** of The Bridgewater Four Campaign explains why.

ON 8TH JUNE, a 100 page dossier of new evidence in the case of the Bridgewater Four was delivered to the Home Office. The evidence further establishes their innocence of the 1978 murder of Carl Bridgewater.

Four months earlier, the then Home Secretary Kenneth Clarke announced he would not refer the case to the Court of Appeal. His decision came after a 20 month Home Office review and a Merseyside Police inquiry into powerful new evidence submitted as long ago as June 1991.

To justify his absurd decision, Clarke was obliged to perform feats of irrationality and intellectual dishonesty which even Lord Lane might have considered over the top.

The sole evidence against Jim Robinson is from former prisoner Mervyn Ritter who claims he overheard Robinson confessing to the murder. Psychiatric reports describe Ritter as a pathological liar.

At the Four's 1989 appeal hearing, the Lord Justices conceded Ritter was indeed an habitual liar but found in this instance he was "a witness of truth". Their Lordships offered no supporting arguments for their eccentric conclusion.

Retired prison officer Frank Gibson states that following the 1989 appeal, Ritter admitted he lied on oath. In a letter rejecting the case, Kenneth Clarke's Private Secretary discounted Gibson's evidence because Ritter "continues to stand by the testimony he gave at trial and on appeal". In other words, Clarke preferred the account of a former prisoner who is a proven liar to a retired prison officer with a 24 year unblemished service record.

The letter also stated "Other prison officers do not support Mr Gibson's version of events". Since Gibson never claimed any other officer was present during his conversation with Ritter, this point was fatuous and irrelevant.

Crucial to the case is a 'confession' signed by the late Pat Molloy while under interrogation by the late DC John Perkins. Molloy maintained this statement was dictated to him after he was beaten and terrorised by Perkins and other officers.

Even by the breathtakingly low standards of the West Midlands Police, Perkins was probably the most corrupt officer ever to enter the ranks of Britain's worst police force. From the mid-1980s onwards, a series of cases in which Perkins assaulted suspects and then compelled them to sign fabricated confessions came to light.

Further evidence to support Molloy's account came from analysis by four linguistics experts. This shows the language used in the statement could not have been Molloy's own words as police alleged.

Kenneth Clarke stated that "seven years elapsed between the investigation of the murder...and the misconduct of which DC Perkins was later found guilty". He did not "consider that Perkins' misconduct at this much later date provides of itself a sufficient reason to doubt the propriety of any actions by Perkins in the Bridgewater investigation".

Clarke claimed the linguists' reports were "fully and carefully considered but nothing in them has been found which would appear to touch the safety of Mr Molloy's conviction".

On 28th May, Dr Eric Shepherd, a leading forensic psychologist, told ITN he was commissioned by Merseyside Police to examine Molloy's statement. Not only did he uphold the defence experts' findings, he went even further by concluding "this whole run of statements and the confession are wholly unreliable".

In making his results public, Shepherd says it is now unlikely he will ever again be commissioned by the police or Home Office. He could no longer remain silent in the face of continuing Home Office suppression of his findings.

On 2nd June, Tim O'Malley, jury foreman at the Four's 1979 trial, told ITN he had been predominately influenced by Molloy's 'confession' in deciding the Four were guilty. He now strongly believes in their innocence. In September 1992, he wrote a detailed private letter to Kenneth Clarke. In reply, he received only a standard acknowledgment.

Where does this leave Kenneth Clarke's claim that he "carefully considered" the linguistics evidence but "nothing has been found"? It seems Mervyn Ritter is not the only pathological liar associated with the Four's case.

On 3rd June, the new Home Secretary Michael Howard pledged to look "carefully" at the case if more new evidence was submitted. Five days later his wish was granted when lawyers and relatives turned up at the Home Office with their extensive dossier.

The new evidence consists largely of testimony from witnesses who came forward following Kenneth Clarke's dismissal of the case. The evidence:

- Further destroys the credibility of Mervyn Ritter.
- Confirms Hubert Spencer, a prime suspect in the original investigation, bought a shotgun before Carl Bridgewater's murder (and not afterwards as he claimed to police).
- Shows successive revisions to police accounts of interviews with Pat Molloy.
- Proves DC John Perkins' long-standing corruption and dishonesty during his entire career (and not just from 1985 as Kenneth Clarke alleged).
- Shows that the prosecution withheld vital evidence at the 1979 trial.

During fifteen years of wrongful imprisonment, these innocent men and their families have endured five 'independent' police inquiries, two Court of Appeal hearings and innumerable Home Office reviews. It would be an outrage if the Bridgewater Four were made to suffer a sixth police inquiry. Only public pressure will persuade the Home Secretary to take decisive action to end the injustice.

● **How you can help:**

- An Early Day Motion tabled by Robin Corbett MP calling on the Home Secretary to refer the case has already been signed by 97 MPs. Ask your MP to sign if s/he has not already done so.
- Write to Rt Hon Michael Howard MP, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1 urging him to refer the Four's case now and ask your MP, MEP, CLP, trade union and other organisations to do likewise.
- Contact The Bridgewater Four Campaign, Houndsfield Lane, Wythall, B47 6LS for further information on the case of these four innocent men.
- Write to **Michael Hickey**, Ashworth North Hospital, Maghull, Liverpool 3; **Jim Robinson**, HMP Winson Green, Winson Green Road, Birmingham; **Vincent Hickey**, HMP Parkhurst, Isle of Wight letting them know you support their fight for justice.

A young socialist at 80

INTERVIEW

Over sixty years a Trotskyist, **Charlie Van Gelderen** was present at the founding conference of the Fourth International. Now approaching his eightieth birthday, he retains a youthful enthusiasm for socialism. *Briefing* chatted to cheerful Charlie at his Cambridge home.

LB: Can you outline your early political development in South Africa?

CVG: My first incursion into left politics was in the Fabian Society in Cape Town where I got rid of the racist notions which I had inevitably accumulated at school. This was in the early 'thirties when Hitler was rising to power, and I was looking for a more positive solution than Fabian social democracy. The International Socialist Club included people expelled from the Communist Party, anarchists and all sorts, and I went on the committee as a representative of the moderates! At the first meeting someone sold me a copy of the American *Militant*, with Trotsky's article on Germany on the front page, and this made a tremendous impression on me.

One meeting was held in hotel with a colour bar, and I queried this use of a venue where black people couldn't attend. The chair told me that black people should be in the Communist Party.

I was drawn towards Marxism, and in 1932 we formed the Marxist Educational League, the first authentic Trotskyist group in South Africa, in direct contact with the International Left Opposition. Many became active in the Independent Labour Party, a left-wing breakaway from the South African Labour Party which had a colour bar. We went on to form the left-wing intellectual Lenin Club in 1934.

I had joined the Commercial Workers Union and was elected as one of the organisers, a post which was to be financed by the Trades & Labour Council (TUC equivalent). But when I was elected to the leadership they withdrew the offer of financial assistance!

I became frustrated by our lack of progress in South Africa and lack of contact with the working-class movement. Looking back now I see the situation was quite unreal, because our main subject of discussion was not South Africa, but the Soviet Union.

LB: When did you come to Britain?

CVG: I came to London in 1935, to get away from South Africa for a brief period - and I've been here ever since. I asked the International Secretariat which group I should join. There was CLR James' Marxist Group inside the ILP, but I was told to go straight in to the Labour Party, to which most of the Marxist Group were about to transfer. The Labour League of Youth, very active at the time of the Spanish Civil War, was led by the Stalinist Ted (later Lord) Willis. The North Islington (Stalinist) branch had over a hundred members, I was in (Trotskyist) East Islington which had about sixty. We published a bulletin called *Youth Militant*.



I first met Ted Grant (his name was Blank then) in South Africa. When I came to England he was violently opposed to entryism and described the Labour Party as "moribund". Really there was no alternative to entry into the Labour Party then. But I recognise now that his group, the Workers International League, was the first to establish strong working-class roots.

In 1941 I was called up into the army. I spent my most fruitful years in Italy, where we formed the first Italian Trotskyist group, publishing the journal *Il Militante*. Shachtman and Cannon provided funds and American Trotskyist seamen supplied us with cigarettes for sale on the black market. This period was probably my most useful contribution to Trotskyism.

I became good friends with Bordiga, but he was hopelessly sectarian. He was so sectarian he wouldn't even join the new Bordigist party!

LB: How did you come to be present at the founding conference of the Fourth International?

CVG: This was held in Paris, in 1938. I was in England and some South African comrades asked me to attend as their representative, paying my expenses: £5 for the week. Twenty-two attended, half of whom were Americans. I think Pablo and I are the sole survivors. I met Trotsky's assassin, 'Jacson', ...I took photographs of him. I wish I had had a gun instead of a camera. Plotting to kill Trotsky all that time, he was there to woo Sylvia Ageloff, and gain entry to Trotsky's household. He had plenty of money to spend, taking us to expensive restaurants and nightclubs, to impress her.

LB: How do you view the significance of the Fourth International today? Do you support Tony Benn's suggestion of a Fifth International?

CVG: I see a future for an international organisation of the working class. I think you may have to return to the First International, and an elementary educational role. Workers in the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union are tearing themselves to pieces on grounds of ethnicity, the whole idea of internationalism has disappeared from working-class consciousness.

LB: Given the demise of Stalinism, and social democracy, is there still potential for a Trotskyist movement?

CVG: I don't think for a Trotskyist movement as such. Trotskyism has a role to play in a new international movement. I believe there is a future for socialism, because capitalism is too disastrous. It is either socialism or barbarism, and at the moment barbarism is winning. Without socialism the world will perish, by blowing itself up or tearing itself to pieces. But I still believe that the human race will not allow that to happen.

LB: Are you disheartened by the divisions and defeats, and lack of progress for Trotskyism?

CVG: I'm much more disheartened by what's happened to the labour movement in Britain. There is no core, no focus, no force any more. In South Africa, the Communist Party is tied to the ANC and the idea of national liberation. Now the ANC is on the brink of taking office, not power, and in danger of being drawn into coalition government. What sort of a country would emerge? There may be equality in voting rights, but how will they bridge the enormous economic gap? I support the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action, which has a tremendous struggle, but is growing. It is on talking terms with the Communist Party. There is not that enmity that used to exist between the Stalinists and Trotskyists.

LB: What advice would you give young socialists today?

CVG: Study the books, but don't get stuck on dogma. Always question. Doubt everything, as Marx taught us. Unless you can build a youth movement, you cannot achieve socialism.

The recent actions of the UN in Somalia are part of a wider process of growing UN engagement across the globe: Bosnia, Somalia, Cambodia, Angola are just a few of the names that appear on the list of countries which now qualify for UN intervention or policing. **Paul Field** (Newcastle Central CLP) traces the history of the UN, exposing its true imperialist nature.

UNMASKED

THE UN has never "acted as a custodian of social justice" (Benn) for the world's oppressed. This needs to be said because much of the Left is still under the illusion that intervention under the flag of the UN is somehow preferable to a direct US assault on a recalcitrant state. In truth they are often indistinguishable.

The war to have ended all wars as far as any socialist faith in the UN is concerned took place on the Korean peninsula between 1950-3. Limited by a defence budget of $12 billion and preoccupied with Greece and Turkey as the focus of their containment policy, the US State Department was forced to take the issue of Korea to the fledgling UN, which was still an unknown quantity in 1947. It was to pass its first major test in US subservience with flying colours. Within months of being approached the UN had set up a commission to oversee elections in Korea that was comprised almost entirely of representatives of US client regimes like the Philippines, Nationalist China and Costa Rica. This body was immediately denied access to North Korea, thereby allowing it to confer legitimacy on the fraudulent elections in the South.

The subaltern response of the UN from the outset allayed the fears of the Truman adminstration, when it became clear that responsibility for the region had been handed over on the eve of the Chinese revolution and northern invasion of South Korea. Under the UN's seal of approval, the US was unrestrained in its command of the allied coalition and free to prosecute one of the most bloody counter-revolutionary wars the world has ever seen. By 1953 over three million Koreans had been killed. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea was more devastated than any country had been in World War Two, and more than North Vietnam later during the Vietnam War. By the end of the first year alone the US air force had dropped 7.8 million gallons of napalm on the north as well as 97,000 tons of bombs. Dozens of towns and villages were burnt to the ground by US and British troops during the retreat from Yalu in 1950.

The UN was to continue to play a subordinate role. Its loyalty to the US over and above British and French imperial concerns during the Suez crisis, and its failure to stop the carve up of the Congo in 1960, further underline the UN's acquiescent position to US imperial supremacy at this time.

But the world was changing quickly. Decolonialisation and the entry of a number of non-aligned African and Asian countries into the UN diluted US influence in the General Assembly and together with the Soviet veto ended the US's near monopoly of the Security Council. By 1965 and Johnson's large-scale deployment of troops to Vietnam, the UN could no longer be relied upon to provide a cover of legality for the US to intervene wherever it pleased.

Moveover, as the long wave of expansion in the imperialist countries came to an end and the world economy was thrown into prolonged crisis, the UN almost seemed to offer an abstract reflection of the new international balance of forces. The formal positions it took on many issues appeared proof of this. In addition to Security Council resolutions demanding an end to South Africa's occupation of Namibia came General Assembly support "for the armed liberation struggle" of SWAPO (1978). Resolutions 242 and 338 calling for the withdrawal of Israeli forces from the occupied territories were followed by UN condemnation of Zionism as racism (1975). The impression that a revolution had occurred inside the UN was strengthened by the New Right's hostile response to its born again 'anti-imperialism'. Burton Yale Pines of the Heritage Foundation described the UN in 1984 as "an organisation out of control". In support of his complaint that "it has become exceedingly anti-US, anti-West and anti-free enterprise" Burton pointed to the fact that "terrorist organisations" like SWAPO and the PLO "enjoy near official status" while "Israel, South Africa, Chile and the Shah's Iran... are or have been treated as pariah states". If some of the Left maintained a healthy distrust of the United Nations, others saw it as the voice of sanity and reason in a world gone mad with the jingoism and militarism of the 'second cold war'. The irony is that whenever the UN has been seen to act most in accordance with its charter, the fundamentally rotten nature of the institution has been just as clearly exposed. This is because the UN has always been much more effective at 'policing the world' (killing people) than it has at 'keeping the peace' (stopping bloodshed). When the UN force in the Lebanon (UNIFIL) was created in 1978 it was done so to prevent a repeat of the type of operation mounted against this former French colony by Syria two years before. The abject failure of UNIFIL not just to stop but even to delay or temper the ferocity of the 1982 Israeli invasion was a graphic demonstration of the UN inaction. Further testament to its impotence includes the inability of the resident UN force to prevent the South African Defence Forces massacring hundreds of SWAPO guerillas during the 1989 Namibian elections and the current powerlessness to deal with UNITA, whose thugs have killed 50,000 Angolans under the watchful gaze of the UN's troops since October. Uselessness in this area continues to be the most serious threat to UN credibility - a fact acknowledged by its Secretary General in a report last summer.

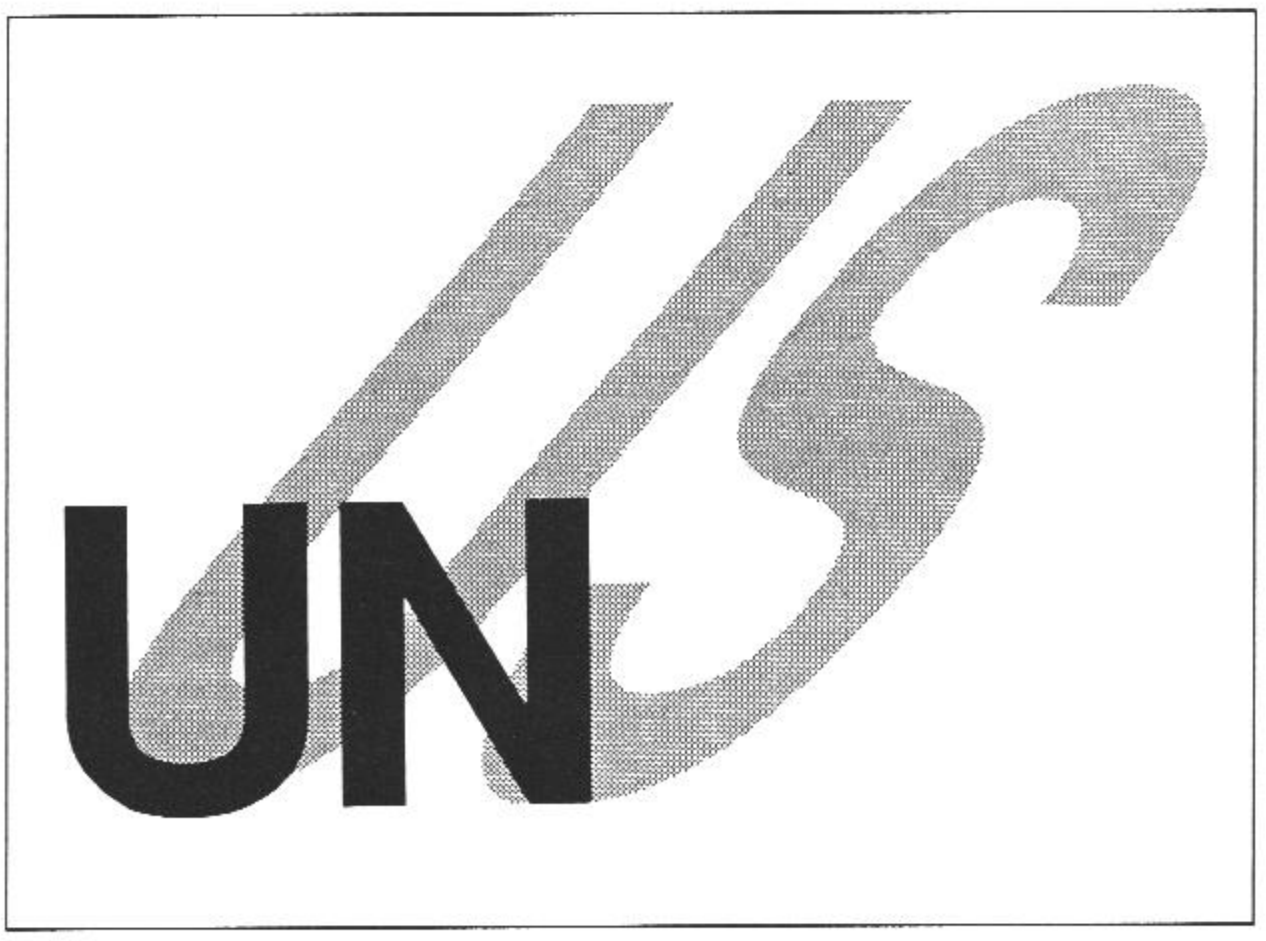
THE UN could never realise the platitudes about democracy and human rights inscribed in its charter any more than Wilson's League of Nations was in a position to uphold the right of nations to self determination.

Put simply any organisation is the sum of its component parts. In the UN's case these comprised exclusively of imperialist, semi-colonial and Stalinist regimes. The political weight and influence of the latter two increased within the UN during the '60s and '70s and prevented it from acting as a rubber stamp for the Pentagon. This made it more of a distraction than the direct threat it had once been. Nevertheless it would be foolish to mistake the distinct interests represented by the communist and non-aligned countries in this period as coinciding with those of the international working class. Just because a Syria or Jordan chose to use anti-Zionist rhetoric in the General Assembly in order to curry favour with

their oppressed masses, it never stopped them working overtime outside the UN to smash the PLO.

SIMILARLY the USSR's 'anti-imperialism' was so reliable that it chose to continue its boycott of the Security Council rather than use its veto to stop the UN sanctioning the Korean War. This was done with the knowledge that large-scale military conflict on the Korean peninsula was bound to spill over into mainland China and embroil the new communist power in a destructive war. China's eventual success in gaining a seat at the UN was dependent upon Nixon's recognition of Beijing at the expense of Taiwan. It was the first token of affection received by China's in its ongoing 20 year affair with US imperialism. To be fooled by these countries leftist posturing at the UN was always to assume a campist mentality and approach to the class struggle. The belief that an alliance of Stalinist and third world nationalist regimes would in Gramscian fashion lead "a long march through the institutions" of the UN was always so much fancy.

The relative ease with which the US has reclaimed the UN since the collapse of Stalinism highlights the vacuous optimism of those who saw its earlier internationalism in the previous period as anything but cosmetic. Next to the demise of European communism the UN's return to the fold of multilateral organisations (IMF, World Bank, GATT et al) which can be counted upon to serve the interests of US imperialism, is the single biggest factor in the birth of the New World Order. James Baker noted this on the eve of the Gulf War when he remarked "after a long period of stagnation, the United Nations is becoming a more effective organisation". With no serious counter-vailing political force left to oppose them, the US was free to entice bully or cajole a majority of the Security Council into support for "war" resolution 678. The 'inducements' that persuaded countries to support Desert Storm underscores the truth of Dylan's famous lyric "money doesn't talk, it swears". On this occasion its language was particularly obscene. In what John Pilger described as "the biggest bribe in history", Iran received its first World Bank loan since the 1979 revolution and China its first since Tianamen Square; Egypt received $14 billion in debt forgiveness from the US; Turkey at least 8 billion dollars in military gifts and the USSR $4 billion in aid from Saudi Arabia and Washington's other oil-rich client states.



That the UN is more under the control of the US and its allies than ever before is clear from the debate about its future. A recent leader in the *Economist* addressed the inadequacies of UN peacekeeping operations (as opposed to the success of the US run Korean and Iraqi campaigns) and solutions to these deficiencies. One solution is the UN subcontracting of jobs to regional alliances (NATO being the obvious example and one they have approached to consider military action in the former Yugoslavia). Should this prove unworkable — "The need is for a world cop and NATO is a North Atlantic Organisation" — then the creation of a UN standing army with "a command structure as clear as NATO" is, we discover, the other alternative under discussion.

The idea of a UN army loyal to US interests may gain favour with the Clinton administration as it struggles to overcome the legacy of the Reagan years. Certainly it is US fear of losing the economic war with Japan which explains the pressure it has mounted on the Japanese in recent years to overturn their 'peace' constitution and assume a military capacity. The UN, with its intervention in Cambodia, has provided a convenient medium through which the Japanese ruling class has been able to achieve this long-desired objective. The Peace Keeping Operations Bill became law on 15th June 1991 allowing Japan's formidable army (aka Special Defence Forces) to serve in UN operations overseas for the first time since the Pacific War. It was passed despite protests from the left-wing opposition parties (JCP, SDPJ) in the Diet, trade unions, tens of thousands of Japanese people and a majority of the governments of east Asia. The reality is that the UN is run by the US and its allies and always has been. It was established in San Francisco and has its permanent home in New York. The US has always paid one quarter of the entire UN budget.

If sections of the New Right and various militarist hawks have called for its replacement with a body better suited to a policy of 'rollback', more intelligent advisers never lost sight of the UN's value and importance. For the Stalinists, participation in the UN became the basis of the policy of peaceful co-existence with imperialism. Likewise the General Assembly provided a safety valve in which nationalist regimes could engage in anti-western invective aimed at winning the support of their own populations but do little to challenge imperialism itself. The UN 'contained' the real strength of communism and anti-colonialism with token gestures and redundant resolutions. This explains why Reagan and Bush never pulled the plug on the UN despite being consistently at odds with the general assembly. It also shows why the US has always attached so much importance to the position of ambassador to the UN, a post which also renders a seat on the Washington Cabinet and National Security Council.

If there was confusion before, then the end of the cold war has demonstrated beyond doubt that the UN Security Council functions as little more than an extension of the US State Department. Those who now call for humanitarian intervention by the UN to resolve conflicts around the globe should be clear exactly who they are appointing to act as 'world cop'. ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

A little warmth in South Africa's winter

Sometimes the negotiating process in South Africa seems little more than a contest between rival sound-bites. **Sean Coyne** delves into the realities of life without TV in a struggle that is far from concluded.

SOUTH AFRICAN activists travelling abroad are often surprised to find how many people assume that justice and freedom are just around the corner and that it is simply a matter of time before the ANC wins the elections and Nelson Mandela is installed as the figurehead of a new, democratic society.

But the day-to-day experience of most activists continues to reaffirm, sometimes quite brutally, that the balance of power in the country is still decidedly in favour of the white ruling class.

A COSATU officer recently regaled me with an everyday tale of workers taking industrial action against an employer who regularly rides roughshod over both union agreements and the minimal protective legislation existing in South Africa. A familiar situation to socialists in Britain, except that the South African boss has allowed firearms to be distributed to his 'loyal' workers and has even sanctioned their use to attack union solidarity.

To date, a least five union activists have been killed and many more injured and intimidated. And what exactly are these workers demanding? Nationalisation without compensation? The armed mobilisation of the masses to achieve majority rule? A pay increase in line with inflation? No, merely the right to belong to a recognised union.

Another revealing story concerns a young single mother of three dismissed following a strike. She was a highly respected shop steward and ANC sympathiser. She was recently visited at home by a group of young comrades who suspected that her house was being used as a base for Inkatha attacks on the community. No evidence was offered to substantiate the accusation. She offered to produce witnesses to testify to her good standing in the movement and pleaded with the youth to spare her family and her modest home. After shooting up the place, they burnt it to the ground. Now desperate and facing the bleakest of futures, she is grateful that the lives of her family were spared.

These are not isolated incidents. Every union official in every union can repeat a string of equally terrifying anecdotes. What is astonishing is that despite these terrible happenings, ordinary working people continue to organise, to express confidence in their collective abilities, to trust their own judgement and risk everything for the chance to make South Africa a place where their children can live in peace and freedom.

Sentimental, perhaps, but a more accurate reflection, I believe, of the South African reality than the reports regurgitated by the posse of well-healed foreign journalists whose stories help to mis-shape opinion outside. It is also a more accurate reflection of the reality which the negotiators must understand if they are to assess whether real change is taking place here.

Sub-zero temperatures in Johannesburg may have chilled the bones of many an activist but did not cool their ardour. Preparations continue for the decisive role the working class will have to play in the near future - and that's enough to keep anyone warm.

UN fails to "restore hope" in Somalia

THE UN's Operation Restore Hope in Somalia has had no impact on targeting food aid to the most vulnerable or to public health or rehabilitation, a new Africa Rights report concludes.

As they are now almost wholly excluded from the administration of the country, "Somalis have no channels at all to air their grievances or have their complaints investigated, except street demonstrations." One of these protests hit the headlines recently when it was fired on by UN troops and over 20 unarmed civilians were massacred.

Africa Rights (which split from Africa Watch last year after the latter tried to suppress criticism of the US-instigated military intervention) catalogues a history of confused aims and incompetent management in the UN operation.

While ordinary Somalis have been excluded from a say in their country's affairs, warlords, with the exception of Aidid, have been treated as legitimate local leaders by UN chiefs, thus prolonging a key source of the problem. No real effort has been directed at the long-term economic or political reconstruction of the country.

Africa Rights is calling for an international public enquiry into Operation Restore Hope, restricted rules of engagement for the UN forces, an independent tribunal to investigate alleged UN abuses and the full involvement of Somalis in the relief and rehabilitation programme.

● **Somalia Operation Restore Hope: a Preliminary Assessment, issued by Africa Rights, May 1993, £4.95 from 11 Marshalsea Road, London SE1 1EP.**

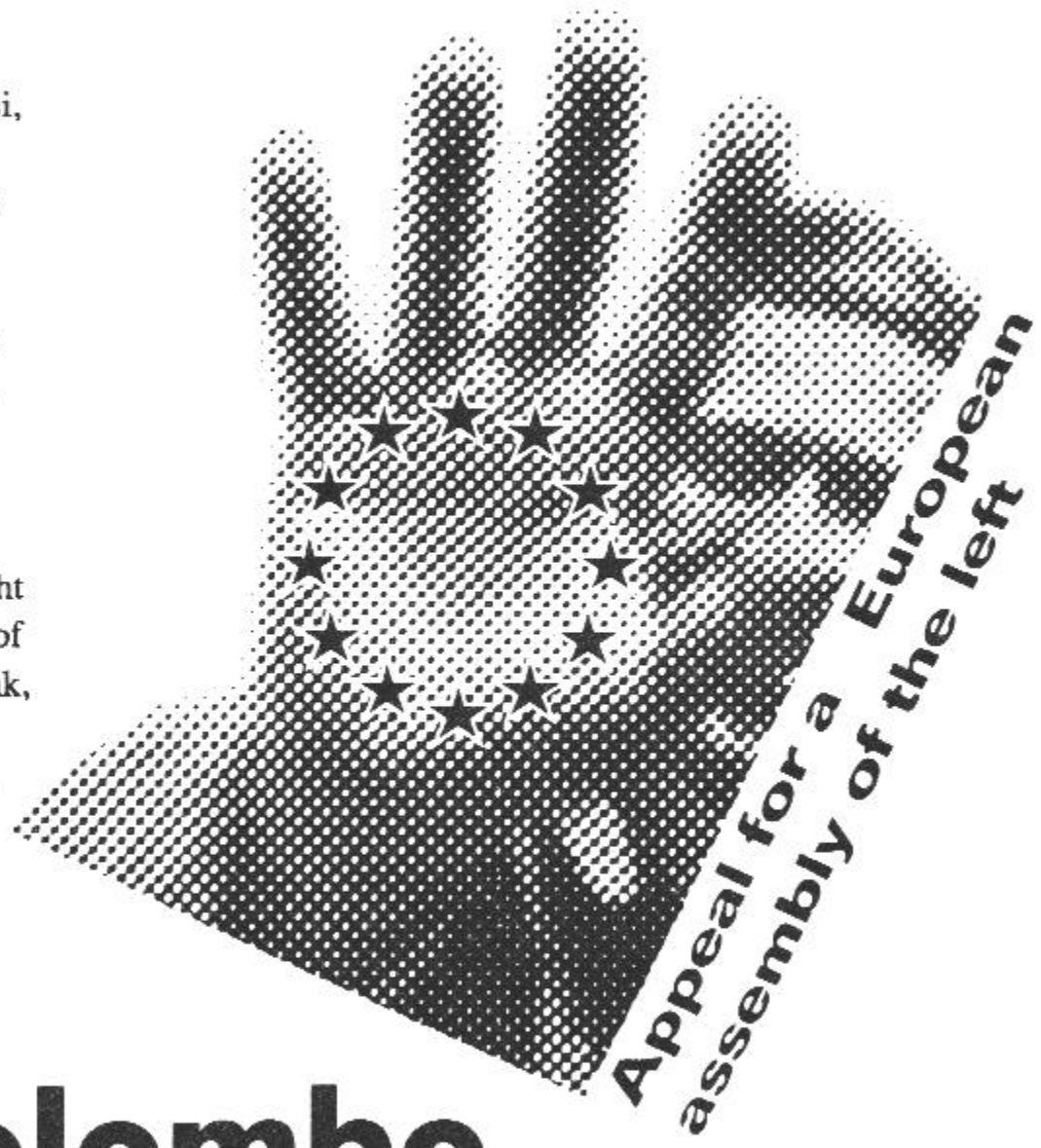
Nouvelle alternative

Andrew Coates reports from Paris: Around 5,000 European militants attended a meeting in Paris on 12th June. Described in the French Left press as the "Rendez Vous des 'non' a Maastricht", it brought together groups such as the Italian Communist Refoundation Party, fresh from their triumphal defeat of the revisionist Italian ex-Communist Party in Milan and Turin, and the Spanish Left Unity, which won around 9% in the recent elections.

French participants ranged from the Mouvement des Citoyens (ex-Socialists) to the French section of the Fourth International, the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire.

From Britain a coach-load of comrades turned up to a warm welcome from the French. Two speeches were particularly well-received: the first was by Gregor Gysi, the leader of the German PDS (ex-Communists). He spoke movingly on the historic task of socialists to "refound the Left". The second, by Tony Benn, concerned itself with the nature of the new European Left that has to be reconstructed against Maastricht.

A declaration summed up the main theme of the meeting: "The Maastricht Treaty, based as it is on the creation of a common currency and a central bank, is the principal enemy of the social gains of the European working class. We are opponents of the racist 'fortress Europe' being constructed. We are for a Europe without racism, for an egalitarian Europe."



Carnage in Colombo

Liz Philipson reports: All political parties in Sri Lanka, including the ruling right-wing United National Party (UNP), pride themselves on rallying their supporters to huge May Day celebrations. But the celebrations turned to horror in Colombo this year as a bomb exploded, killing President Ranesinghe Premadasa and some of his security guards and injuring many others.

This was the second political assassination in the island's capital within ten days. The earlier bomb killed Lalith Udalathmudali, a prominent opposition politician. Both bombs are suspected to have been placed by the LTTE, the armed Tamil militant group which has been locked in civil war with the government for almost ten years.

Political commentators predicted bloody anarchy in Colombo. Friends of Sri Lanka watched with bated breath. A short curfew was imposed until President Ranesinghe was buried in the presence of various foreign dignitaries but remarkably few of his own people. Parliament unanimously elected D.B. Wijetunge to the presidency and he will serve out the current term of office.

One of his first acts was to outlaw the 'goon squads' which had terrorised people in Colombo during Premadasa's reign. Contrary to our worst fears, reports from Colombo indicate a more relaxed city with a marked lessening of the tension and fear it has lived with for so long.

The newly elected president would have been able to cancel the impending provincial council elections without incurring much opposition. Surprisingly, he did not do so. The opposition parties won the Western Province, the South and the North West. The Chief Minister of the powerful Western Province, which includes Colombo, is now Chandrika Bandaranaike, whose political career has primarily been in parties to the left of her mother's Sri Lanka Freedom Party. These victories have given confidence to those who have been working to open up democratic space in Sri Lanka. They are the first substantial victories for opposition parties since President Jayawardene brought the UNP to power in 1979.

The election eve statement of the UNP called for a vote to uplift the poor. Yet since 1979 the UNP government of Sri Lanka has followed liberal, export-orientated economic policies favoured by the World Bank, Reagan and Thatcher. In that time, the government advertised in transatlantic magazines that its wages were half those of any Asian country. By 1986, the share of the poorest 20% of the population in the economic product of the country had fallen from 7.55% to 4.8%, while that of the richest 10% had increased from 28.2% to 43%. Under the UNP, the welfare state was cut back and numerous state enterprises privatised.

The impoverishment and unemployment of the island, coupled with the consumerism introduced with the newly opened economy, led to an uprising by the JVP, a ruthless paramilitary group claiming left-wing credentials. Between 1987 and 1989 Colombo and other Singalese areas of the island experienced the violence and terror that until then had been confined to Tamil areas. Eventually the uprising was put down by state terror every bit as ferocious and indiscriminate as the JVP's.

The government did acknowledge the root causes of the uprising but its response was inadequate. The cosmetic, costly village parades and schemes instituted by the dead President Premadasa in the JVP heartlands have been cancelled by his successor Wijetunge, who has also announced that the liberalisation of the economy will continue. Although it appears to be business as usual on the economic front, the new president has promised to consider the possibility of reverting to parliamentary government rather than the executive presidency set up by the UNP. Paradoxically, the carnage of May Day in Colombo may have begun to open up the political space so desperately needed if both the Singalese and Tamil people are to move towards the democracy that once looked so solid on this island.

United Nations — keep out

Continuing the debate on the war in former Yugoslavia, **Andrew Coates** (Ipswich CLP) argues against intervention and any encouragement of nationalist forces.

BOSNIA-HERZEGOVINA (BHZ) was formed in such a way that it was impossible that it could represent all of the communities in the country without violent conflict. All three communities had a permanent veto over a break-away from the federal state. This was itself the basis for the structure of the former Yugoslavia. When the German government announced in December 1991 that it would recognise Croatia this left Bosnia with the choice of maintaining the link with a Serbian dominated Yugoslavia or declaring itself a separate state. The plebiscite then held by Alija Izetbegovic met EC requirements for recognition but violated the principle of the three constituent nations.

Many in the EC probably felt that Yugoslavia would break up along the relatively peaceful lines already followed in the Baltic. That this has not happened is not due to 'fascism'. It was because many Serbs simply wanted nothing to do with the new republic. A peace plan, with a form of cantonisation resembling Vance-Owen's, was initially agreed to by the Bosnian government but was then dropped. The views of the increasingly radicalised Serbian population has been no secret to observers since 1991. Their hostility has been encouraged by the fact that while proclaiming support for democracy to the West, Izetbegovic's ministers have toured the Islamic world gathering support for their community. Arms and material from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Turkey have since then been readily supplied. Whatever the truth about the importance of this help (and German backing for Croatia) you cannot force a 'multi-ethnic' state into existence if large numbers of one ethnic group do not want to be part of it.

Given this background it is impossible to accept Garth Frankland's description of the civil war (June, *Briefing*) being caused by 'fascism'. Serbia is undoubtedly a nasty and anti-democratic regime but to describe it as 'fascist' is exaggerated: it must be the first 'fascist' state in history to tolerate large scale public opposition, and Moslems and Croats still live in Belgrade in some numbers. The chief cause of the vicious battles is the break-up of an existing multi-national state, Yugoslavia, and the attempt to create independent republics against the wishes of minorities.

A 'plot' against Serbia is unlikely. Clearly Western governments and political leaders have looked with a tolerant eye on Croatia, with its firm anti-communist basis. The invitation from Washington to the Croat leader, Tudjman, to attend the opening of the holocaust museum, was particularly outrageous. This took place while Bosnian Croats were fighting their own war of ethnic hate, with his active encouragement. Thus the West has met the dissolution of Yugoslavia by adopting double standards.

Mike Phipps (June *Briefing*) recognises that supporting any one side is a dead-end. He advocates an "international protectorate" in BHZ. Some of his charges against the Serbs are contestable: he has no proof that mass rape and starvation camps have been "decided at the highest level". More fundamentally, Phipps states that the UN has to become involved in setting up a protectorate. It is impossible not to sympathise with the aim of protecting civilians from murder, and Workers Aid's aim to help refugees which is the best immediate reaction.

But matters are not so clear when we come to an overall plan of external involvement. Socialists are suspicious of the UN and the Security Council's interventions not simply because of their geo-political role, and domination by the Western powers. The ability of any outside body to halt a civil war is indeed a "complex" affair as Phipps observes rather dismissively. Firstly, what is the objective of such action? If it is to support BHZ then we are back to the problems created by the state's own formation. By contrast, building safe havens and limited spaces of peace is only a short-term answer and has its own problems. This will not deal with the millions of displaced persons, hundreds of thousands who are in Serbia as well, who wish to resume normal lives. But if this can be achieved without stirring up more bloodshed, then the idea has to be explored. Secondly, exactly who is calling for measures to "disarm the paramilitaries"? If it is Alija Izetbegovic then we are again back at square one, as he obviously means by that: disarm the non-BHZ combatants.

Obviously socialists will have little influence on the immediate outcome of the civil war in the ex-Yugoslavia. Our role is not to encourage the nationalists in any camp. It is to try to back what Mary Kaldor initially described as a "bottom up" strategy of bringing people from the warring sides together, free from the murderous militarists. Unfortunately Kaldor now believes in some ill-defined armed Western presence on the ground. If there is military intervention it is likely to be messy, and it will be carried out in line with the interests of the Security Council and EC. At present these are lined up against the Serbs. In these conditions, it is not for the Left to get involved in the further misery that will result from a one-sided assault on their positions. ❑

Convoy to Bosnia

A LONDON CONFERENCE on 6th June decided to launch a Workers Aid Convoy to the main mining region of Bosnia around Tuzia, the only region in Bosnia where Muslims, Serbs and Croats still live together in peace.

The convoy will be sent off from Dundee by striking Timex workers on 7th August, travel though Britain and across several European countries, especially mining areas.

Impoverished Tuzia miners put a section of their wages every week into supporting British miners during the great 1984-85 strike. The organisers are calling for maximum support from workers and unions throughout Britain and urging workplaces and individual unions to set up their own Workers Aid Groups, building for the convoy, organising meetings and raising donations.

Out of the shadows

Continuing the debate on the family, *Labour Briefing* Co-Chair **Sue Lukes** interviewed **Jo Fisher**, author of *Out of the Shadows*, a book on women, resistance and politics in South America.

LB: Is the family different in Latin America?

JF: In Paraguay, for example, the traditional idea of the family is breaking up. I saw households with fifteen children, where there was no land and no work. So the men migrate to find work, leaving whole areas where most households are headed by women. Across the southern part of the continent about one-fifth of households are headed by women.

LB: How has that happened?

JF: While the military governments talked about the sanctity of the family, the traditional family could not survive the monetarist economic policies they promoted. I saw this happening in Chile in the '80s, and now in Argentina in the '90s. Women are forced out of the home, to go to work or to involve themselves in collective activities like the communal kitchens.

In Chile, women spoke about the men hanging around the house all the time "like ornaments", and how they began to question what was happening. They all got organising out of financial necessity, to meet their needs for health care, education, food. The family was changed for them, they did not go out to change it. Most of them had quite traditional ideas about their roles as wives and mothers. Even the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina, who were so brave in their stand against the military, said "we were like lionesses searching for our cubs", as though what they did was inherent in motherhood. One-third of the disappeared were women.

LB: Why was that?

JF: The repression was targeted on the 'caring' professions, where there were many women: social workers, teachers, students. But also, Argentina was the only country where there was a real working-class women's movement, under Evita Peron. So there was a history of women's involvement, although the movement was not feminist. Through Peronism, and through the non-traditional organisations outside the political parties, women became involved in guerilla groups, which suffered massive repression.

LB: Does that history continue with the Housewives Union?

JF: That is a quite contradictory phenomenon. They are very anti-feminist, and very connected to Peronism. The real reason for their growth is that social security in Argentina is organised and managed by the trades unions. If you are not in a union, you have no pension and no medical insurance. So huge numbers of women are left out of that provision. The Housewives Union provides health insurance, and pensions in some areas. Women in the shanty towns are worried about those things, especially as there is a real problem of elderly, homeless, indigent women abandoned because of the breakdown of the extended family. So the union is popular. They also say that housework is not natural, not done for love, it is real work. But they both call for wages for it, and for the socialisation of women's work. Some of the Chilean women I spoke with had discussed the demand for wages for housework, but had very mixed feelings about it.

LB: What were the ideas about the role of men?

JF: There was a general emphasis on the need to educate them. The campaigns against domestic violence in Chile are very significant, with 150 or more women turning up to meetings in small shanty towns. But they do feel that there is a way men can change as they have done. The Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina had similar experiences. In Uruguay, Paraguay and Argentina, they spoke of the importance of talking to husbands, getting them 'on your side' and then even persuading them to talk to other men to allow their wives to go to meetings.

But, although it is true that a lot of women were surviving alone, other women saw that they were the poorest, and they did not want to be like that. They actually wanted to integrate into other working-class movements which were largely male. They built up their organisations to push for that. They accused middle-class feminists of being anti-men. Their focus is on the family, but they wanted it to change.



LB: And has the family changed because of these organisations?

JF: Pastora from the Paraguayan peasant movement said, "We are struggling to make the men understand that it's an injustice for girls to do all the work in the home. We're teaching the boys to work in the house and look after the children so the girls have the same chances to go to school and play."

On issues around abortion and birth control, many women said that they personally believed in it, but that they had to take things slowly. In Paraguay, some said that it was not an issue: if they had enough land to feed their children, then they would be happy to have more. They were worried about the forced sterilisation campaign in Bolivia. And in Argentina, for many years the Peronist women's movement opposed campaigns on birth control, seeing it as an imperialist plot. But they have now changed their line.

LB: So these organisations of women have produced 'democracy in the country and in the home'?

JF: As I say in the book, they have begun to challenge machismo inside political parties, unions, communities and at home. Remember, they were thrust into organising because of their roles as women. From there, the need to organise challenged their roles in the family. All of these groups have been important in shaking military rule, and real changes have been achieved.

● ***Out of the Shadows*** **by Jo Fisher, Latin American Bureau, £7.99. Available from LAB, 1, Amwell St, London EC1R IUL for £9.00, inc p&p.**

REVIEWS

Modernisers turn the clock back

Bryn Griffiths reviews
Unions and the Labour Party: independent but linked,
by Jim Mortimer, published by MSF London Regional Council, 21B Theberton Street, London N1 OQY.

THIS PAMPHLET places the current debate about the Labour-trade union link in the context of the long struggle for working-class political representation.

Jim Mortimer gives us a history of a trade union movement beleaguered by a hostile judiciary and lacking independent parliamentary representation prior to the formation of Labour's forerunner, the Labour Representation Committee, in 1900. The key issue then, re-emerging today, was whether trade unions should be liable for damages incurred by employers during strikes.

The Labour Representation Committee brought together on a federal basis the trades unions and the main socialist organisations of the day to achieve working-class representation in Parliament. This federal structure sets Labour apart from other parties, giving it an organic link with the trade unions and through them with the working class itself.

The 'levy plus' proposals floated by Smith as a 'compromise' completely miss the point: under them, trades unionists become just another group of individuals within the Party. Their collective identity as trade unionists, guaranteed by the Party's federal structure, would be lost.

As Mortimer points out, the original need for working-class representation remains as strong ever. The volume of anti-union legislation since 1979 speaks for itself. Even the United Nations' International Labour Organisation has criticised the British curtailment of trade union rights.

Today's 'modernisers' would turn the clock back to the pre-historic politics of Lib-Labism. They stand for the abandonment of organisationally independent working-class politics - and that makes them a very old-fashioned bunch indeed.

At its birth, Labour was seen by many as simply a pressure group on the then more powerful Liberal Party. This old tradition is now being revived by the *Guardian* tendency spouting off in favour of proportional representation and other coalitionist nonsense.

Labour's anti-union right also peddles the lie that it is the link with the trade unions and the memory of 1978-79's winter of discontent that makes us unelectable. Mortimer more than adequately knocks this twaddle on the head. He points out that Jim Callaghan ran into trouble when he ceased to use the link to co-operate with the unions and provoked a battle with low-paid public sector workers.

Those who fought for democracy within the Party after the 1979 defeat were saying 'never again' to a Labour government which attacked its own supporters. They wanted to reclaim the Parliamentary Labour Party for the movement as a whole. In contrast, the 'modernisers' continue the sordid tradition of Labour MPs placing themselves beyond democratic accountability and above the movement which gave them their positions in the first place.

We do need to change the Labour Party. Tony Benn's proposals to refound it on a more representative basis deserve the widest possible discussion. First, however, we need to defeat those who wish to take us on a huge leap backwards to the politics of the late 19th century.

Mortimer's great little primer explains just how high the stakes are in the debate on trade union links. Having read it, anyone committed to class politics should understand the importance of uniting with all those - no matter how right-wing - who support the federal nature of our Party. ❑

Kurdish chronicle

Keith Veness reviews
No Friends But the Mountains
by John Bulloch & Harvey Morris, Viking, £16.99.

READ THIS BOOK - it's by far the best short history of the Kurds and is bang up-to-date with coverage of the Kuwait War and its aftermath. The title reflects the cynical proverb of these 'mountain people' when asked who their friends are - "the Kurds have no friends - only the mountains!".

It also covers the civil war in Turkey between the PKK and the Turkish armed forces. A detailed account of the peculiar PKK organisation is provided. It explains the murderous legacy of 'Kemalism' and why the West's strategy towards Turkey is a disaster.

The struggle in Iran between the KDPI and the fundamentalist ayatollahs of Teheran is well documented. It shows why Iran may yet again be the flashpoint in a world crisis.

The end of the book covers the Kurdish communities in Syria and also in the ex-Soviet Union, where the Kurds now number over one million and have maintained their culture in a way no-one thought possible a few years ago.

It concludes with the exchange between the legendary Mullah Mustafa Barzani and a guard at the Kremlin, who refused to let him in to see Stalin in the 'fifties. "It is not I but the Kurdish revolution that is knocking!" said the guerilla leader. This knock will be heard again and get louder in the next few years -buy this book to find out why!

Falling flat

Liz Davies reviews
Falling Down
(at a cinema near you, unfortunately).

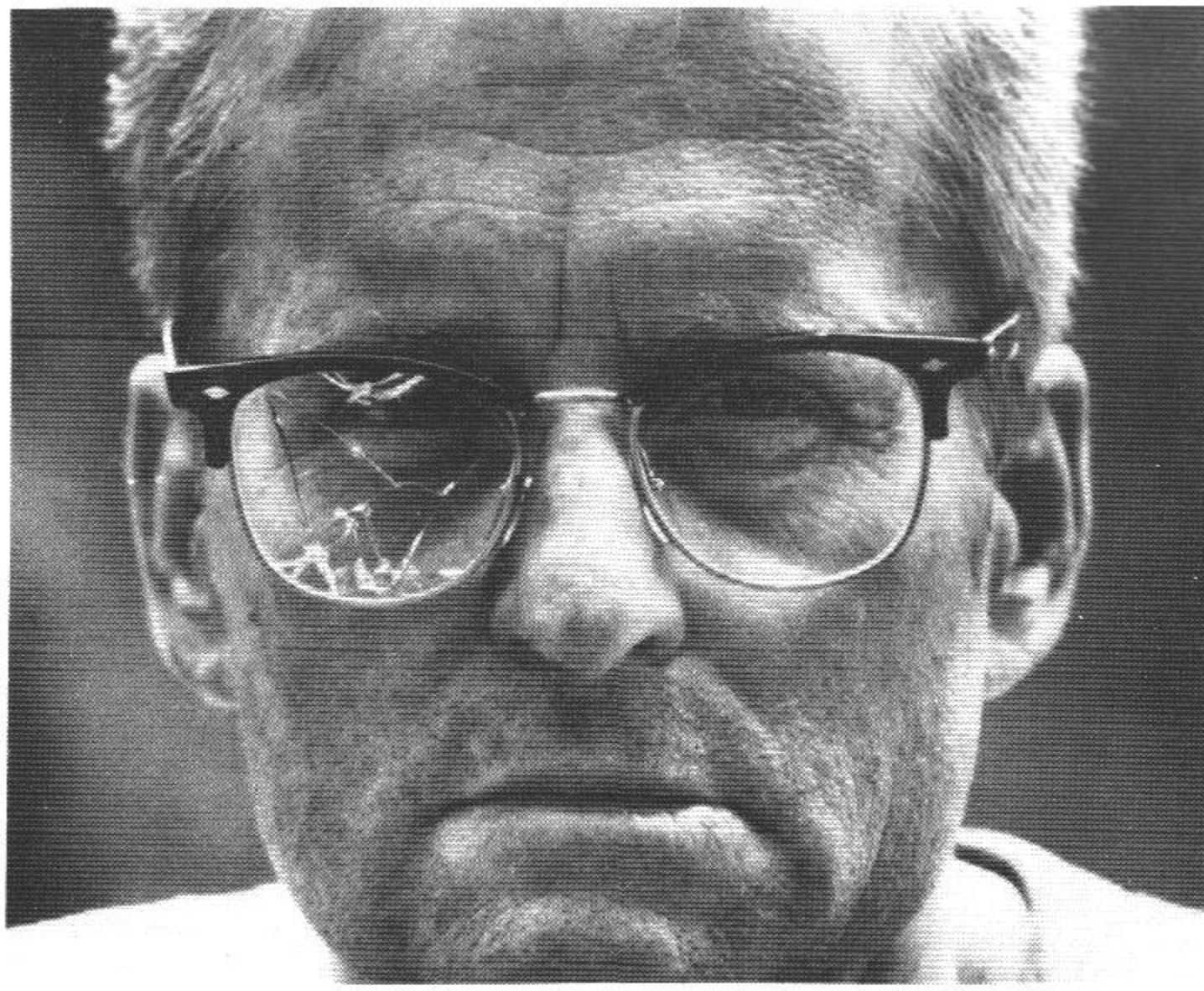


Photo courtesy Warner Bros.

THIS IS A boring film failing to live up to its marketing hype. Strangely, this hype seems deliberately designed to imply that the film will offend the 'politically correct'. In fact, *Falling Down* is far less offensive than many other Hollywood products.

Michael Douglas is white, divorced, white-collar, unemployed, American - and mad! His alter ego, Robert Duvall, the cop trying to track him down, is white, bereaved and sane. Douglas takes his frustration out on non-whites and women. Duvall works best with non-whites and women and is despised by the white men around him.

The film opens with Douglas sitting in a hot traffic jam, apparently on his way to work. He becomes increasingly frustrated and irritated. The camera focuses on some black school-kids, suggesting somehow that they might be to blame. Suddenly Douglas abandons the car and takes off into the mean streets of a socially polarised Los Angeles. There he encounters a Korean shop-keeper, whose English Douglas mocks although he seems perfectly articulate. The shop-keeper overcharges for a coke, the symbol of the American dream, and Douglas explodes. He wrecks the shop and departs, taking the shop-keeper's baseball bat with him. As he continues through the neighbourhood, he acquires a variety of weapons from would-be assailants, eventually ending up with a small arsenal of automatic weapons and a mortar. He beats up and finally shoots a Hispanic youth who tries to take his brief-case. He flips when encountering absurd bureaucracy in an apparently 'customer-friendly' burger chain.

Up till now, *Falling Down* has the makings of a visceral vigilante thriller, reactionary but at least coherent and even entertaining. But the film-makers, keen to exploit the explosive subject matter of urban tensions, want to have it all ways. Douglas' character slips out of focus. He murders a cartoon Nazi militarist, who at one point seems to be trying to rape him. He asserts his right to walk across a private golf course, in the course of which his threatening behaviour gives a rich white elderly man a heart attack. Climbing barbed wire to penetrate a luxury Beverly Hills home, he encounters only the caretaker's family and chooses not to harm them. Suddenly he is a vigilante with a liberal conscience.

The film has been marketed as 'an ordinary man's war on everyday life'. Douglas announces that he is "rolling prices back to 1965 levels" - before Vietnam damaged American pride and when the nuclear family was the unquestioned norm. It is an attempt to exploit the growing belief, promoted non-stop by the American media, that the white middle class has somehow become a prisoner in its own land, that the hardworking, tax-paying majority is being victimised by increasingly clamorous minorities and 'special interest groups'.

There is a second thread to the plot - the American male's backlash against women. Douglas is making his way through the neighbourhood in order to attend his daughter's birthday party in defiance of a court order obtained by his ex-wife (Barbara Hershey) banning him from her house. The police are sceptical about her fear of Douglas and fail to protect her.

Duvall, in contrast, is dedicated to his 'child-bride' (Tuesday Weld), a woman once beautiful but now, in middle-age, dependent and manipulative. In an attempt to mollify her neuroses, he has agreed to leave the police force, which he loves, move to a quiet town and lose his friends. Eventually Duvall asserts his identity as a 'real man' by telling his wife to shut up and have his dinner ready when he gets home.

Both men are obsessed with their little daughters - Duvall's daughter died at two and Douglas is prevented from seeing his.

Again, the film tries to have it both ways. It sets up these women to emasculate their men, then switches sides as Douglas is increasingly revealed as a violent psychotic whose emotional problems have more to do with an inadequate mother than the social tensions of life in contemporary LA.

The violence is bad, though many Hollywood films are much worse. The racism is there, but not nearly as intense as suggested by the hype. 'Real men' such as Robert Duvall are shown to be able to cope happily with non-whites and with women. Douglas becomes the madman, the outsider, and the film's promise of 'an ordinary man at war with the everyday world' is betrayed.

Don't waste your time going to see it. ❑



Red Ken speaks!

We don't like to hound our old friend Ken, but his remarks to a meeting of the North West London Business Forum, as reported in the *Ham and High Express*, ought not to pass unnoticed by Periscope.

Livingstone confessed to being a "**monetarist**, opposed to borrowing" and argued that the only solution to Britain's economic woes was to cut military spending and convert factories to non-labour intensive production of high-tech consumer goods in competition with the far east.

This is a variant on a familiar Livingstone theme, but readers will be surprised to learn that the ex-GLC leader "candidly admitted he was now attracted to the **Liberal Democrats**".

"If I applied now," he observed, "they would not have me."

Still, Ken insisted, "at least I don't lie in bed ashamed of what I said during the day."

Reprieved Class Traitor reveals all

Appearing on a new TV panel game for washed up politicians, **Kate Hoey**'s intriguing response to the question "What's **James Callaghan**'s first name?" was: "It's the same as **Trotsky**'s...Leonard!" Not bad for an ex-IMG member.

Parliamentary cretin of the month

The *Guardian* lobby team at the Commons is well known to be securely in the pocket of the 'modernisers' on Labour's front bench. Between them **Michael White** and **Patrick Wintour** have assured Blair, Brown et al a virtual monopoly of *Guardian* coverage in which the rhetoric of **OMOV** is always taken at face value.

But with **John Edmonds** making his break, the GMB publicity machine, run by ex-NUS President **Phil Woolas**, showed it was a match for **Peter Mandelson**. Edmond's article attacking Smith and the 'modernisers' was originally offered to the *Guardian*, but when editor **Peter Preston** dithered over publishing it, Woolas wasted no time in offering it to the union-busting *Sunday Mirror*, which at least had the brains to recognise a good story. On the day it was published, Edmonds further expounded his views on BBC TV's *On the Record*, thus setting the stage for a week of good old fashioned Labour Party internecine strife.

In the next day's *Guardian*, **Seumas Milne** (definitely not in the modernisers' pockets) reported Edmonds' attack on the Labour leadership in detail, despite efforts by White to put his own pro-OMOV spin on the front page piece. Undaunted, Milne followed up with a report of an attempt by Blair to offer **Tom Burlison**, GMB Deputy General Secretary, a compromise deal around a register of supporters.

Outraged by Milne's report, which he described as "trash", Blair claimed he had not met any senior trade union official on this matter within "the last two weeks" as the *Guardian* article had claimed. True enough - he had met with Burlison shortly before then.

Blair, furious at having his game exposed by the GMB, decided to shoot the messenger. He harassed *Guardian* staff and called the pathetic Preston three times in a single day. Then came news of Smith's alleged threat to resign if he did not get his way on OMOV. This was a bluff made on Smith's behalf (possibly without his knowledge) by Blair and Brown in a crass attempt to knock the Burlison story off the front page.

In traditional *Guardian* style, Preston has acceded to pressure from the high and mighty by printing rafts of pro-OMOV letters and giving Blair space on the inside back page.

OMOV frolics

Poor old modernisers, so used to getting their way with no more than a quick leak to the *Guardian*! It must be difficult to have to argue your case for once, especially when it is such a weak one.

After all, even their cherished opinion polls are against them. Twice as many people cited **Neil Kinnock**'s leadership as their reason for not voting Labour last year as mentioned the spectre of **trade union power**. And a recent ICM poll revealed that state funding of political parties is opposed by 80% of the public.

State funding is the modernisers' proposed financial alternative to the allegedly vote-losing trade union link.

Undaunted by fact, the modernisers have turned to fantasy. The electoral college for Parliamentary selections, for which no replacement has yet been agreed, has been unilaterally removed from the Party rule book. And in the selection of the candidates to fight the **Newbury** and **Christchurch** by-elections, the NEC disenfranchised the local trade union affiliates and imposed an OMOV-style ballot of individual members only - entirely outside the existing rules of the Party.

Resign!

Unsurprisingly, **BritRail**'s plans to run the Channel Tunnel link through **Islington** have caused a storm of local protest. Whereas the line is to be tunnelled and landscaped on its way through Tory Kent, when it passes through Labour-dominated inner-London, it is to be left wide open.

Needless to say, Islington's **Labour Council** has taken a hard (and most popular) line against the rail link. But this stance is being compromised by the presence amongst the local Labour leadership of Cllr. **Phil Kelly**, Chair of the Education Committee. Kelly, when he is not lurking about the town hall insulting parents, nursery workers and teachers, works as a publicity officer for **Union Railways**.

Union Railways is the unit set up by BritRail to build and operate the Chunnel link.

Revolutionary Creeps Party

It's not **Periscope**'s habit to waste time attacking irrelevant sectarian grouplets, but the performance of the **Revolutionary Communist Party** at a fringe meeting at the recent **NALGO** conference deserves to be recorded.

The meeting, organised by the admirable Irish workers in NALGO Group, heard a speaker urge support for the campaign to release **Frank Johnson**. From the floor, speakers from the self-styled **Irish Freedom Movement**, an RCP front, argued that "aiming to get victims of miscarriages of justice released only legitimises the British state".

Contrasts

Let's see this on the front page of the *Sun*!

Hundreds of thousands of pounds lost in a string of irregular financial deals... **fraud squad** brought in...ex-social services boss held on police bail following suspect trip to USA...contracts awarded without being put out to tender...frozen meals contract awarded to most expensive bidder after tasting session...loss of **£47,000** a year in interest by paying one firm in advance instead of in arrears as per contract... .

All this and more has been going down in 'London's Greener Borough', Tory-run **Bromley**.

N.B. Labour's local government spokesperson, **Jack Straw**, has issued numerous press releases and made speeches in the Commons denouncing alleged corruption in Labour **Lambeth**. He has yet to say a thing about Bromley.

Scard off

We are delighted to learn that the inestimable **Jo Scard** has been removed from her sinecure at the **Birmingham** City Council press office.

Readers will recall that Scard, during her not-brief-enough tenure as a spectacularly inept press officer for the **London Labour Party**, devoted most of her feeble efforts to dishing dirt to the media about the suspended Lambeth councillors.

After the general election, she lent a helping hand to **Vincent Hanna**, former by-election reporter turned all-purpose media charlatan, on the TV documentary he made explaining that Labour may have lost the election but it wasn't the fault of Scard or her friends.

Scard was subsequently installed in the beleaguered Brum press office by Hanna, who was being paid **£1,200** a day to revamp the Council's 'image'.

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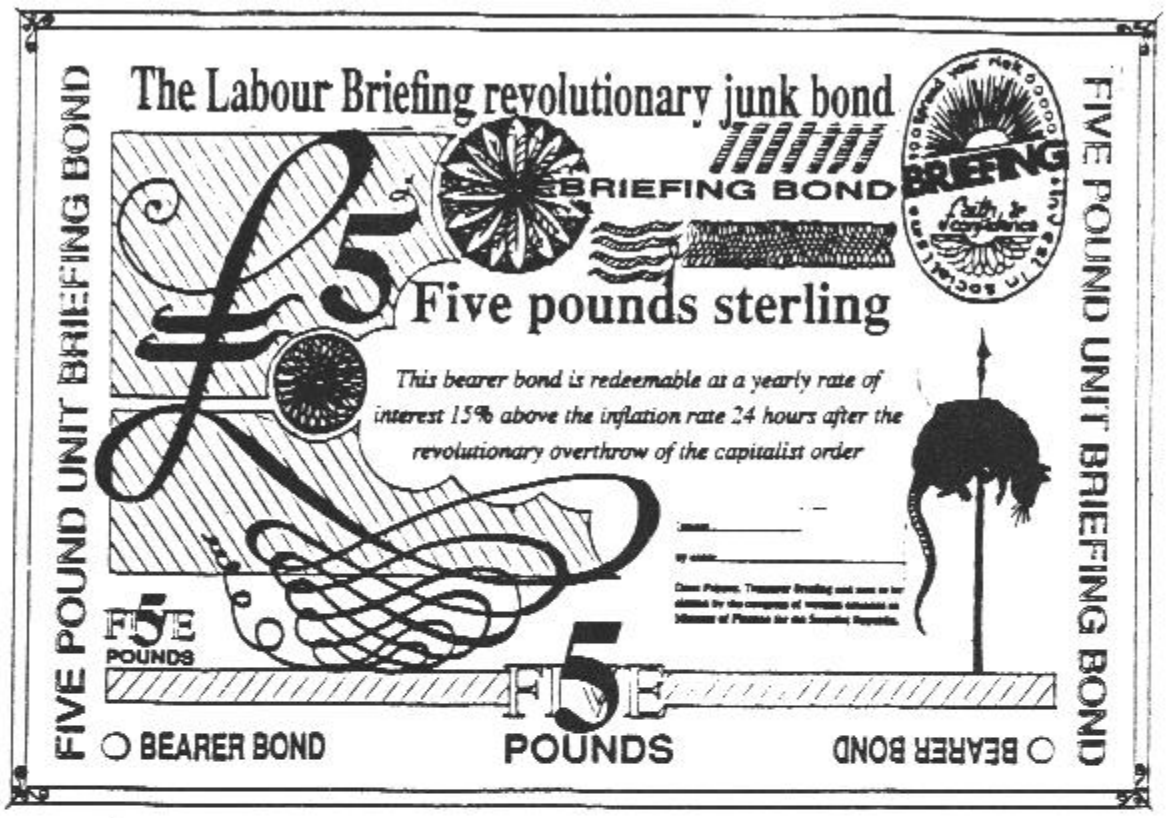


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Famous last words....

"Ireland can make no real progress - social or economic - until Britain withdraws. Only then can Republicans hope, as dedicated socialists, to realise their struggle for a 32-county democratic socialist republic."
- Gerry Adams MP

"It is not enough to elect good General Secretaries like Jimmy Knapp. Activists should be getting out of their caucuses and branch rooms to consolidate the silent majority before anyone else gets there."
- Ian Williams

"As Labour councillors we clearly have a responsibility to develop and to support all action - strikes, occupations etc - in defence of services. Above all we have the responsibility to shout from the rooftops that such action will be essential to hold back the Tory menace."
- Cllr Alan Clinton, currently campaigning amongst the Islington Labour group for the closure of local nurseries.



Your letters are welcome, but please keep them short.
Write to:



I read Ron Huzzard's reply to my article on the new religious turn by certain Labour politicians ["Labour's God Squad"] with wry amusement. Ron's basic proposition was that certain people manage to combine Christianity with being a socialist and he cited Eric Heffer and Tony Benn as examples. However a great many other equally famous socialists do not need any religious underpinning and believe that social justice and freedom are worth-while ends in themselves without any need for an old man with a beard sitting above us to order it.

In any case I fear Ron missed the point of the article. Jesus the Nazarene was a Jewish religious leader who had NO intention of founding a new religion and was killed by the Roman occupiers of Palestine for opposing them. Much of the dogma of the various churches derives from the activities of a certain Saul of Tarsus who adapted the Jewish resistance leader into a sort of cult figure. The bogus miracles, resurrection and 'universal church' that singles out the Christian from other religions were all inventions of a man described by the 'Early Church' in the Dead Sea Scrolls as the "Great Liar" and a traitor! James, Jesus's brother, was a leading JEWISH religious leader and his resistance sect proscribed Saul/Paul as a blasphemer and schismatic. Yet by an irony, this blasphemy became the state religion of Rome and Byzantium and went to justify every mass murder, war and repression in Europe for the next 1500 years!

If Ron, who has an exemplary record over many years in opposing the arms trade, wishes to explain this by his adherence to a bogus religion based on a fraud - so be it. Religions however are not a force for progress and relying on scriptures one can prove almost anything from the need for goodness to the fact that the earth is flat and was created in 4004 BC at 10 o'clock in the morning! Ultimately science and religion are incompatible and socialists are better off [sorry Ron] in relying on the former!

Yours in solidarity,
Keith Veness,
Islington North CLP

I read Leonora Lloyd's article on children's rights with quite some interest, but when she said "a question mark hangs over the role of men" we parted company. Why? There is no evidence to suggest that most child abusers are men. In fact in 1969 the NSPCC found that out of 78 battered children 42 had been attacked by a woman, 33 by a man and the other 3 by both. Leonora seems to think that women and children have exactly the same interests and are both equally oppressed by men. This line of thought ends up saying that young people do not need to liberate themselves, which *Briefing*, with its long and honourable record of support for autonomous struggles, shouldn't be supporting. Let's look at how young people really are oppressed.

First of all it is assumed that the young are inexperienced and ignorant, which gives totally unaccountable parents and teachers the right to tyrannize over them. These people are allowed to do anything they like to you, even physically attack you, which is called 'good discipline'! The police routinely harass young people, who are only hanging around on the streets because there is nothing else to do, what with the lack of both jobs and college places. You can't get benefits or the vote until you are 18 and when you have a party to relieve the boredom the police come and close it down. You get political after all this and look for leadership, only to find Tony Blair condemning you as a hooligan! (Probably too busy praying to see what is actually going on in the real world.) Is there any wonder that the BNP is making headway or that so many unemployed kids become travellers?

That's all familiar and depressing enough, but what can we do about it? First of all we need to up the age limit on the new Labour Youth Section to about 28, so that old hacks like me can help to show inexperienced kids, new to politics, how it all works. Secondly, we need youth sections in the trade unions to train new young activists. Thirdly, we desperately need to expand Labour Students to the FE sector, to include younger students, including those still at school. If we manage this the Party will begin to shift to the left and we can begin to think about such things as a proper school students' union, curbs on the power of teachers and so forth.

Then again how can a party led by Tony "Pray to Jesus for a new image" Blair attract young people? Well I've got an answer to that too. The Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network (SCGSN) has already got a student wing, and it should set up a youth wing immediately. That would provide some kind of basis to campaign on, and possibly a newsletter as well.

Well, it's very easy to write worthy articles in the Left press about what we should or shouldn't be doing. At the next SCGSN conference we should set up a youth section with its own newsletter and make campaigning amongst youth a priority, otherwise we will lose the party to the Christian yuppies, and the kids to the far Right.

Yours,
Andrew Wacey,
Muswell Hill

Periscope states in your May issue that ARA had no record of Judy Mallabar involving herself in the activities of the Anti-Racist Alliance. For the record Ms. Mallabar sent in her membership application (together with the dosh) to the Haringey ARA very soon after the local branch was inaugurated in 1992.

I look forward to you correcting the record in your next issue.

Yours sincerely,
Narendra Makanji,
Haringey Anti-Racist Alliance

I object to the basic bone of contention in my friend Andy Howard's article (*Briefing*, June 1993) that Labour groups have to be flexible towards Clause 7 of the rules governing their conduct. Because a few people are breaking the law that is no good reason for changing it. The clause states: "Members of Labour groups while in opposition... shall not share chairs and vice chairs of council committees or sub committees." In the last few weeks this has been clarified: "The rule means that Labour groups should not form joint administrations with other groups or end up in the position where, by accident or design, Labour councillors are chairing some committees and councillors from different parties other committees."

Where we actually agree on a particular policy I have no objection to using other groups as and when we wish to push that policy through, but I have seen from my own experience that when chairs are shared Labour chairs tend to lose their enthusiasm for socialism. They cut their cloth according to their survival as chairs.

The Lib-Dems on Reigate & Banstead B.C. are politically inept and merely follow our lead, then are very good at claiming credit for our initiatives. I see no reason why I should give them a higher profile than they deserve by supporting them for chairs.

I oppose my group's policy of collaboration, so the Lib-Dems will not be able to chair any committee that I sit on. I have gone along with group policy on chairs until now but the loss of Surrey County Labour group Leader Sid Smith to a Lib-Dem was the last straw.

Yours,
Cllr Jack Johnson,
Redhill

It is clearly true that the British Left, particularly the leadership of the unions and the Labour Party, has a less than honourable record on the issue of racism. At the same time it is also true that the revolutionary left and those who thought of themselves as such [members of the Communist Party], have an excellent record in opposing British imperialism and racism and that this tradition stretches back to the very origins of the British Left in Chartism.

Within this context I am concerned to see the phrase "white Left" creeping into your pages, [Kevin Blowe, June], even if it is in quotation marks. There is plenty of room for discussion about the most effective way to fight racism and fascism. But it should not be denied that the British Left, black and white, has among the better records in this respect over the last 20 years. The National Front was broken by the Anti-Nazi League in the late 1970s and the Left remains correctly watchful over the level of racist attacks and the organised fascists which lie behind them. The situation is getting worse but this is not Germany or France, yet.

'White Left' is a phrase used as a term of abuse by black nationalists and it is a phase which socialists should have no truck with. The Left must stand unequivocally for black self organisation and defence. But black liberation, like that of women and lesbians and gays can only come through a fight for socialism by working people of all types organised in a socialist party. The big problem that the Left faces at the moment is not racism within its ranks but white liberalism which dictates that only blacks can fight for their liberation, lesbians and gays for theirs and so on. This is liberalism, not socialism. Socialism stands for a united fight for a common goal.

Yours sincerely,
Keith Flett,
Tottenham

We joined the ARA demonstration against racist murders and in memory of Ruhullah Aramesh and Stephen Lawrence led by their families and with the father of Rolan Adams. We do feel, however, that the demonstration could have been more effective.

The numbers attending were disappointingly low - only about 2000 - when it left Norbury Park in Croydon. It could have been a major success if the anti-racist Left had not been so publicly consumed with sectarian infighting in the run up to the day.

Militant/Panther UK/YRE and SWP/ANL must take much of the blame for the in-fighting but we had hoped for something much better from the Anti-Racist Alliance. The behaviour of the ARA leadership in abusing the Welling YRE demonstration in the national press was a disgrace. When an anti-racist demonstration involving a large young black contingent is attacked by the police anyone with an ounce of political principle would defend the demonstrators.

A big lesson learnt by the ARA is that anti-racist struggle should be led by black people. Can we suggest that the ARA consider another lesson from history- namely that the massive divisions in the anti-fascist movement allowed fascists to win huge victories in Spain and Germany in the 1930s.

The stakes are too high to take such risks again.

Yours in the hope of unity,
Bryn Griffiths,
Graham Bash,
Clapton

"The moral basis of socialism and its relevance today"
by Tony Benn

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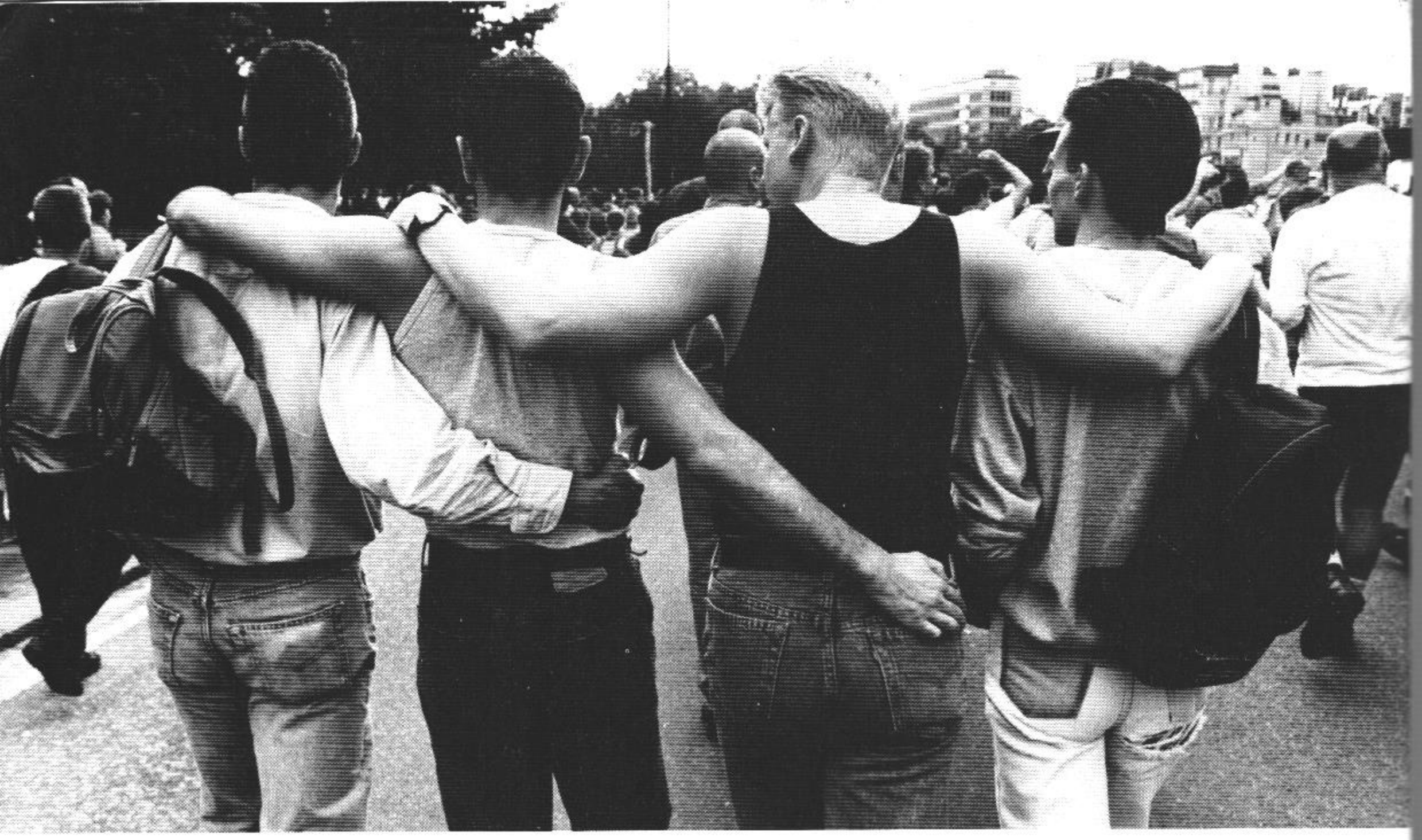
LABOUR AND TRADE UNION STUDIES

Applications are invited by 9 July from activists in the Labour Movement for the two evening courses above, completed over 2 years of study.

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Out and Proud. One hundred thousand lesbians and gay men marched behind the banner "Remember Their Names", referring to those who have died of AIDS. The demonstration was one of the biggest celebrations of lesbian and gay pride ever seen in this country. *PHOTO: Paul Mattsson*

Twyford Down alert

THE BATTLE against the vested interests of big business and the government, which together seem determined to destroy the environment, continues.

On Wednesday 16th June twenty protesters infiltrated the Tarmac AGM in order to make the directors of the company answer for the destruction of Twyford Down, their record on environmental pollution and financial contribution to the Tory Party. Several shareholders were persuaded to sell their shares in the company.

The vindictiveness of the Department of Transport plumbed new depths on Monday 21st June with a three-day court hearing to bring an injunction against 75 people who have been involved in demonstrations at Twyford Down over the past year. The draconian measures of the injunction are a major infringement of civil liberties. The DoT is also applying for costs to be awarded against the protesters, which could result in financial ruin for the few people who have any money (most of the protestors - the Dongas - have few possessions apart from the rudiments of a basic existence). If the DoT seeks damages for lost time and sabotage of equipment the bill could amount to £millions.

Of course it is impossible to place a value on the real damage done to the environment in the name of progress.

People who have tried to protect the environment should not be victimized in this way. Please write letters to MPs, MEPs, and the Department of Transport (2 Marsham Street, London SW1P 3EB).**There will be a weekend long demo at Twyford Down on 3rd and 4th July with a camp and Full Moon Party - come along and bring tents, food and water. The weekend will see hundreds of anti-road groups from all over the country uniting to spread the word that what has happened at Twyford Down must never be allowed to happen anywhere else.**

3rd July - Twyford Down Requiem for a Landscape

4th July - Twyford Rising

For more information and to pledge your support and donations contact:
Twyford Down Alert Office
(Tel: 0703 611561).

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