December 1994 £1

# BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

## Sleaze does it




**LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!**

# Stop press

## Blair's babies

ISLINGTON'S YUPPY 'Blair babies' Labour councillors have plumbed to new depths of shame.

In the by now annual round of cuts proposed by the Council, there were proposals that adventure playgrounds should be 'restructured' - yuppy speak for closed. The ruling Labour Group decided to make that cut in September and then rather reluctantly agreed that the users and staff of adventure playgrounds should be consulted.

Cuts in adventure playgrounds have a high political cost. Adventure playgrounds are cheap to run, with low overheads and are used by a lot of kids. They are free, open long hours and provide safe and supervised play, making them massively popular.

The 'consultation' carried out by the Labour Council resulted in nobody wanting to see the playgrounds closed - surprise, surprise. Despite this, the Labour Group in a private meeting decided to close one playground and 'restructure' the others so that they would only open limited hours.

On Thursday 17th November, children, parents and workers in adventure playgrounds turned up at the Council's Education Committee to watch the debate and lobby against the cuts. There were alternative cuts options on the table, and detailed analyses of the figures showed that they did not add up.

After hearing from two members of the lobby, Cllr Phil Kelly spoke in favour of the cuts. It was a speech designed to provoke the lobby when he referred to closure of adventure playgrounds as 'less damaging' than other cuts. Inevitably, the children got angry and heckled.

To the lobby's amazement, Phil Kelly seemed so intimidated by the heckling he announced that he was moving straight to the vote. Although several councillors had indicated they wanted to speak, and were going to propose alternatives, suddenly the cuts were voted through with such speed that Phil Kelly even failed to call for votes against. To cries of 'shame', Labour councillors, grim-faced and refusing to debate the issue, voted through cuts that will decimate the play service in Islington. The lobby and one Labour member of the Education Committee walked out in disgust.

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# Defending Clause IV

**Dorothy Macedo looks at the next steps for the Defend Clause IV campaign.**

TWO HUNDRED people heard Arthur Scargill officially launch the Defend Clause IV campaign in London on November 12th with a rousing speech about the need to organise to defend the socialist objectives of the Labour Party. If these are removed, there will be nothing to distinguish the Party from the Liberals or even the US Democrats.

Stan Newens MEP described his exciting initiative in the European PLP, which has seen 31 out of the 62 Labour MEPs sign his letter calling for the retention of Clause IV. It says "socialism must surely mean a commitment to aim at the complete abolition of poverty, entailing a profound redistribution of wealth, as implied in Clause IV", and concludes "Clause IV should therefore be retained in its present form exactly as it was in 1960 and we should actively seek to promote the principles enshrined in it". This refers to Gaitskell's attempt to get rid of Clause IV; on that occasion, a face-saving formula adopted a new statement of aims and values. The MEPs suggest that once again a separate statement could be added "to express the Party's aims today".

Of course, most *Briefing* readers recognise that Blair is not really concerned that the wording of the Party's constitution is out of date, but wants to purge it of any commitment to the redistribution of wealth. There is a widespread feeling however that the Newens proposal would give Blair an escape clause if he looks like losing. There is little doubt that most Party members don't want to drop Clause IV. Blair is counting on winning despite this because many comrades are unwilling to see the leader embarrassed in the run up to a general election. So it is up to us to organise effectively to defeat his plans. If we go through the usual left routines and speak only to other left-wingers, we will fail. Support for Clause IV extends to all wings of the Party, and we must work in ways that include the maximum number of Party members.

The launch meeting approved a strategy statement that the campaign should seek to unite all those who are committed to the retention of Clause IV in its current wording. The national campaign committee will be open to representatives of all labour movement bodies affiliated to the campaign, and will operate on the basis of consensus. If the NEC decides to hold a referendum on Clause IV, a recall conference will be held to decide how to respond.

Meanwhile the model resolution will be updated. Closing dates for regional Labour Party and trade union conferences are very soon, and also for National Women's conference. Fringe meetings will be organised at conferences where possible. Information packs and badges will be produced and a campaign statement will be sent to all Party members via *Labour Party News*. The meeting adopted Arthur Scargill as Honorary President of the campaign, with Stan Newens MEP and Doreen Cameron as Honorary Vice-Presidents and Alan Simpson MP as Honorary Treasurer. The campaign committee will elect functionary officers at its first meeting. (Sunday 4th December, noon, in London).

The SCG Network Youth Committee have produced a useful pamphlet, *The Battle for Labour's Soul* which deals with many of the arguments about Clause IV. It costs 80p (£1 including postage) from 25 Howard Court Peckham London SE15 3PH.

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Contact the Defend Clause IV campaign c/o the NUM, 2 Huddersfield Road, Barnsley S70 2LS or telephone 071 582 2955.

## Defend Clause IV Defend Socialism

### *London Rally*

**8pm, Wednesday 30th November**
**Committee Room 14**
**House of Commons**

### Speakers

**Arthur Scargill**
**Dennis Skinner**

**This meeting has been called to coincide with the expected decision of the NEC about how to conduct the consultation about Clause IV.**


**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 two EBs will meet on December 4th and January 8th. We are happy to offer a right to reply on the usual basis to all members of the labour movement.**

**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 January 16th.**

***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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# Converting strategy into action

**The Defend Clause IV campaign needs to utilise the strong heart-felt support for Clause IV and convert it into action which will defeat Blair. Here *Briefing* focuses on the debate over strategy and highlights the campaigns in the regions.**

## Defend Clause IV

**Tony Blair's attempt to ditch Clause IV provides the Labour left with an opportunity to rally its shattered ranks. This is an issue which can end its isolation and allows it to draw on a large cross-section of Party members. Starting a debate about Labour's long-term aims when the Tories are on the run and the general election may not be far off could turn out to have been a misjudgment which will cost the Party dear. Whether it will do so depends on the strategy the Labour left adopts.**

**A successful defence of Clause IV cannot be pursued without launching a counter-attack. The left mustn't concede the choice of the battle-ground to the modernisers. Their strategy is to concentrate on the archaic wording of Clause IV but their real aim is to kill the socialist agenda which Clause IV represents.**

**The Party which once aspired to transform society turns into one which defends the capitalist (i.e. "mixed economy") status quo.**

**This, of course, is the object of the "modernising" exercise.**

**'Up-dating' Clause IV is therefore the modernisers' trap. Clause IV cannot be defended in isolation. The attack on it is a pretext. The real target is the Labour Party as we know it. As for socialism, we cannot defend something we haven't got.**

**The Labour Party which we have is not a socialist party, but one cohabited by socialists and non-socialists. However, the Party's democratic structure, its close links with organised labour and the widespread, if vague, socialist aspirations give it the potential to become a socialist party.**

**It is this which worries the "modernisers". It is this potential which is under attack. It cannot be defended unless members are made conscious that it is the Party, not just Clause IV, which is under attack.**

**It is up to the left to make them aware of this. In the process of doing so the focus will be shifted from a dispute over wording to the conflict over Labour's future. It is the Party which is under attack. The Party must be kept Labour.**

**Vladimir Derer**
Campaign for Labour Party Democracy

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CLAUSE IV is a key tenet of the Labour Party and it has come to symbolise the essence of the Labour Party. As a campaigning party we must not lose our principles. Tony Benn has expressed Clause IV as "a statement of the democratic, socialist faith". I would certainly concur. Not only is it democratic but it possesses notions of equity and accountability which appears to be features long lost in our modern day society. A restatement of this view will offer the hope and commitment so long absent from many people's lives.

**Doreen Cameron**
President of NATFHE

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With Clause IV we do not have to defend Labour, we are able to categorically state the goals and objectives of the Party. Any attempt to change can only lead to confusion not only in direction but about principles. Labour has a wide ranging appeal. This is its attraction. Therefore there is no need to narrow it to something less defensible.

There is nothing more worthy than pursuing democratic ideals based in concrete examples through the collective effort and in a way which is equitable. This therefore means an end to privatisation, less non-elected quangos and a return of public services to the public sector. Our experiences over the last 15 years show just how apposite Clause IV has been and how useful it can still be to the Party.

I do believe in modernising the Party and have fought consistently for this, including real and adequate representation for black people and women, as well as giving a voice to the disenfranchised and dispossessed. Clause IV fully implemented will deliver these and more.

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● Leicestershire Socialist Campaign Group has launched a series of activities to resist attempts by the Labour leadership to change the Party's constitution.

Nick Holden, spokesperson for the Group, told *Briefing*, "We are delighted at the level of support the campaign has received so far. Members from all sections of the Party are outraged at attempts to weaken its commitment to socialist values.

We have already secured a pledge of support from local MEP Sue Waddington. Several local union branches including MSF, Unison and RMT have also given backing to the campaign, along with city and county councillors."

There will be a public debate on Friday 16th December, at 7.30pm, at the Holy Cross Centre, Wellington Street, Leicester.

For more details contact: Nick Holden on (0116) 280 0945.

# defend socialism

**Stan Crooke reports from Scotland:** The Campaign For Socialism (CFS) was launched in Glasgow in mid-October in response to Tony Blair's declaration of war on Clause IV.

The launch meeting was dominated by discussion over whether the campaign should defend Clause IV or whether it should seek to campaign for a 'left alternative' to Clause IV. A number of the 'dignitaries' present - with that well-known master strategist George Galloway to the fore - argued that the campaign should 'box clever'.

Instead of defending Clause IV, the campaign should 'catch out' Tony Blair by putting forward a 'left alternative'. This would supposedly put the left in a stronger position to intervene in the debate around Clause IV. A majority of those present were unimpressed with such a line of argument. There will not be any real open discussion about Clause IV - Blair would find that too risky - and for the left to re-write Clause IV would only play into Blair's greasy hands.

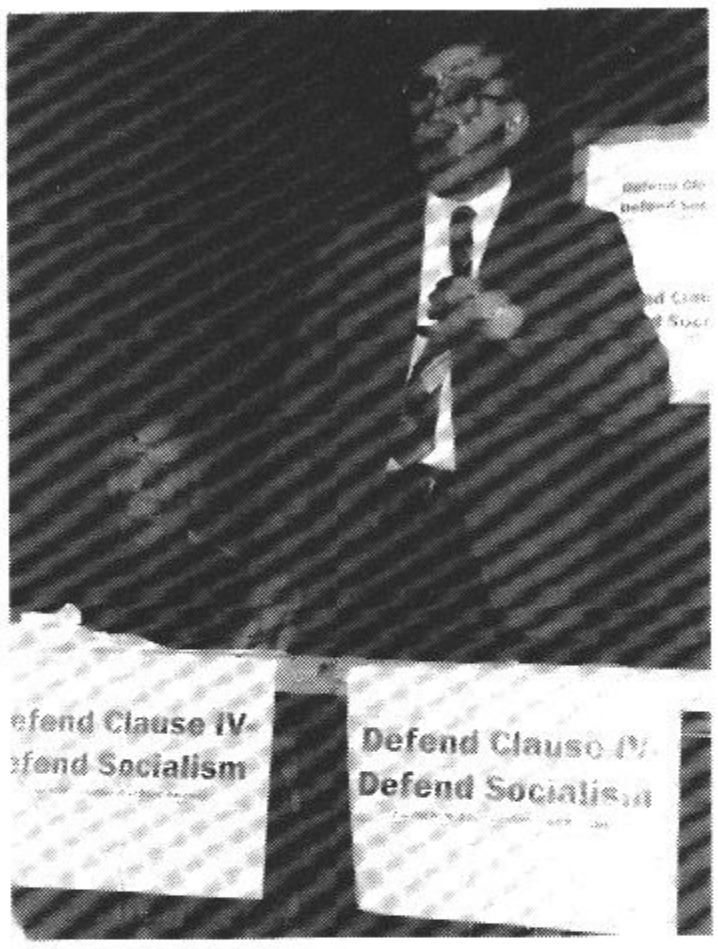
The upshot of the lengthy discussion was that the campaign should defend both Clause IV and also the principles contained therein. An Executive Committee was 'volunteered' to carry on with the work of the campaign. One of the campaign's co-convenors, Dundee MP John McAllion, has already resigned. Now that he is a Labour Party frontbench spokesperson he felt that it was inappropriate to continue in this post!

Like the launch meeting itself, the CFS Executive Committee is a mixture of those who want to defend Clause IV and those who believe that their natural role in life is to 'update' Clause IV. It is of the utmost importance that the CFS adopts both on paper and also in its campaigning activities a clear and unambiguous commitment to defence of Clause IV.

Clause IV will be a major issue at next year's Scottish Labour Party conference. Many CLPs have already passed resolutions supporting Clause IV for sending to the conference. Everywhere the story is the same - such resolutions go through virtually without opposition. Party members who want to fight to defend Clause IV are therefore urged to attend the next meeting of the CFS to make sure it does the job that needs to be done.

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For details contact: Steven Purcell
(041) 950 2254




**Stan Newens speaking at the November 12th rally in London. PHOTO: Emma Gination.**

**Cate Murphy reports from Merseyside:** Merseyside Campaign Groups have joined forces to launch a "Defend Clause IV" campaign. In addition to circulating model resolutions and petitions to CLPs across the region. Wirral, Wallasey and Knowsley Campaign Groups are organising a one-day conference on Clause IV on Saturday 17th December in conjunction with the Merseyside Association of Trades Councils. Speakers at the conference will include Arthur Scargill and a shop steward from Delco, a factory threatened with closure in Knowsley.

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For more details of the conference contact: Cate Murphy (Secretary, Wallasey SCG) on 051 638 0133 or Gary O'Neil (Secretary, Wirral SCG) on 051 677 4853.

John Nicholson reports from Manchester: **As soon as the Labour Party Conference was over, active rank and file members across Greater Manchester started to organise to defend Clause IV. We did not even wait for the national campaign to start. Our first meeting agreed to start a petition using the wording of the Blackpool petition but writing the whole of Clause IV on it.**

**This has proved to be a useful addition to the campaign. Not many people realised that Clause IV, as a whole, calls for the organising of "a political Labour Party in Parliament and in the country" - or defends the trade union link - or emphasises the importance of Party Conference - or calls for "the political social and economic emancipation of the people". When taken in this way, it is easier to see how vital the principles of Clause IV are.**

**Manchester comrades quickly gained the first hundred local Party members' signatures to the basic statement to defend Clause IV. These included many CLP and DLP secretaries, local MPs like Andrew Bennett and MEPs like Eddy Newman as well as councillors and trade union representatives. A model resolution was drafted and circulated too and a letter sent out urging branches to organise debates, invite speakers, pass resolutions and not least to subscribe financially.**

**Meanwhile Tony Benn was booked to come to a Young Labour meeting on November 10th following three student union and Young Labour debates (all successfully supporting Clause IV).**

**A major rally was organised for 18th November - with Arthur Scargill (NUM), Alan Simpson (SCG of MPs), John Nicholson (SCG Network), and MEPs Eddy Newman and Michael Hindley.**

**The breadth of support for defence of Clause IV is undoubted. But what we have to do now is ensure that all this rank and file pressure is brought to bear on the trade union general secretaries, NEC members, MPs and others so that Blair is made to retreat on this once and for all.**

## Defend Clause IV meetings in Wales

**6.45pm, 25th November 1994**
**Brynmawr Community Centre, Orchard Street**
**Diane Abbott MP, Bruce Kent, Denzil Davies MP, Llew Smith MP.**

**11am, 10th December 1994**
**TGWU, Transport House, Newport**
**Campaign Group Public Meeting**

**For more information:**
**Llew Smith MP, 23 Beaufort Street, Brynmawr Gwent NP3 4AQ.**
**Tel: 0495 313345**
**Fax: 0495 313346**




# Clause IV and the economics of socialism

**As the campaign in defence of Clause IV grows, Dave Palmer looks at the traditional models for a socialist economy and finds them wanting.**

BLAIR'S PREDICTABLE move to ditch Clause IV aims to ensure that the possibility of the Labour Party ever challenging the primacy of private ownership and allocation of resources and economic rewards through markets is permanently excluded.

Ditching Clause IV is eminently possible because confidence in the prospect of either reforming capitalism, or ever constituting a workable socialist economy, is probably at its lowest ebb since the birth of the workers' and socialist movements. It is essential we understand that the roots of this crisis are not just in a present conjuncture of British national politics but in the changing fundamentals of the world political economy and a profound crisis of perspective on what constitutes workable socialism.

The ambiguities of Clause IV were deliberately drafted by the Webbs (who believed that the state managed by a rational elite would eventually supersede the market) to be open to differing interpretations by the various strands and traditions which make up the British labour movement. At whatever ideological level there was common language in the labour movement of commitment to socialist ideals shared by virtually all its constituent elements. Moreover the Labour right was generally committed to the post-war social settlement. A large nationalised sector and the general growth of the public sector provided the basis for a particular 'consensus-driven' interpretation of Clause IV.

At the onset in the 1970s major economic and political changes threw the post-war settlement into crisis. The subsequent 'great leap rightwards' in the labour movement from the early 1980s onwards meant that this broad but diverse consensus could no longer be maintained. Disillusion with Morrisonian nationalisation and, more importantly, the economic failure and collapse of Stalinist 'state socialism' has been used to shift Labour towards the only economic position the British establishment and capitalism will tolerate - Labour as managers of a lightly regulated free market political economy. However weak the left currently is Clause IV remains a potential threat.

Why then is the defence of Clause IV faced with profound difficulties when the social coalition around Thatcher's radical shift to a free market political economy has so evidently collapsed and the living standards of the mass of the population in the developed capitalist economies has generally got worse?

First, there has been wholesale acceptance of the 'New Right' neo-liberal critique of nationalisation and public ownership. The 'New Right' argues that public ownership can only reduce incentives to efficiency, lead to 'wasteful' use of resources, reduce choice and benefits to the consumer and stifle innovation. Any restriction of private control of the means of production and freedom of market forces leads to inefficiency and bureaucracy. Privatisation has now been internationally applied and the neo-liberal view of public ownership and economic liberalism has become the new universal orthodoxy to which Labour has adapted.

Yet even within a conventional economic framework this hostility to public ownership can be challenged. A capitalist mixed economy with both nationalised public utilities and state-owned corporations in strategic sectors of the economy can, and should, be argued for with confidence within the Labour movement and provides a basis for maintaining a commitment to Clause IV.

All the evidence suggests the benefits of privatisation and monopoly public utilities has been entirely gained by the new private shareholders and top managers. Consumers and workers have lost out to the monopoly pricing by the privatised utilities as conventional economic theory suggests they would. Nor do the arguments for public ownership just apply to the monopolised utilities. It appears that the economic efficiency of firms has more to do with competitive pressure than ownership.

Whatever the problems of nationalisation in a capitalist framework of state micro-economic intervention and the tax subsidisation of loss-making industries, public ownership has been abandoned not because of any fundamental weaknesses but because of characteristics of the particular phase of capitalism in which we now live. It has occurred, first, because of a fiscal crisis of the state - which in some large part is due to the globalisation of capital markets - and secondly, because a more rapacious capitalist class wanted to get control of these often highly profitable assets on advantageous terms.

A more significant factor in weakening commitment to social ownership has been the repercussions of the crisis and collapse of the Stalinist 'state socialist' economies. Productive resources were state-owned and the allocation of those resources was by a central planning mechanism. These economies were characterised by very little consumer choice, extremely poor quality products and chronic shortages, declining growth rates, stagnant living standards and little innovation and high levels of pollution. The experience of 'state socialism' has




led to the association of socialism with bureaucratic incompetence, disastrous economic inefficiency, stagnation and shortage.

These are the profound characteristics of state-owned, centrally planned economies which are not just due to their dominance by bureaucracy but also has economic roots (ie. are not only due to lack of political and economic democracy). Bourgeois economics criticises state ownership and central planning on two main grounds which have to be addressed by socialist economists if the idea of a transition to socialism is to regain the influence and credibility it has so self-evidently lost.

First, it is argued that state ownership means that enterprises lack the incentives to be economically efficient or develop dynamically which the profit motive and competitive pressure provide in capitalism. In a state-owned centrally planned economy enterprises fail to provide high quality products at lowest cost, take no account of consumer choice, nor organise innovation in production techniques and products. There are just planning targets to achieve.

It is also not in the immediate interest of enterprise workforces to maximise their output (achieving targets will only result in them being raised). This results in a huge waste of resources and has meant that the centrally planned economies were beset by shortages. Once available resources are fully utilised (extensive growth) the economy can only grow by increasing overall levels of productivity (intensive growth) and if this does not happen growth rates (which may be high during industrialisation) stagnate. The centrally planned economies became incapable of raising the living standards of their citizens. The market reforms in Eastern Europe in the 1970s and 1980s were largely attempts to replicate the decentralised financial incentives which exist in capitalism without reintroducing private ownership.

Secondly, it is argued that the centrally planned allocation of resources cannot deal with the 'information problem'. This problem was identified by socialism's most implacable intellectual enemies, the 'Austrian school', and their main ideologue Hayek.

At the height of the apparent success of the Soviet Union's Five Year Plans in the 1930s, Hayek advanced the argument that there is just too much diverse information - much of it qualitative not quantitative - in a complex economy to be dealt with on a centralised basis. More importantly qualitative information is just not available on a centralised basis, nor is it possible for conflicts over the allocation of resources to be transparent at the central level. Hayek identified a profound weakness in central planning which those who favour central economic planning must answer.

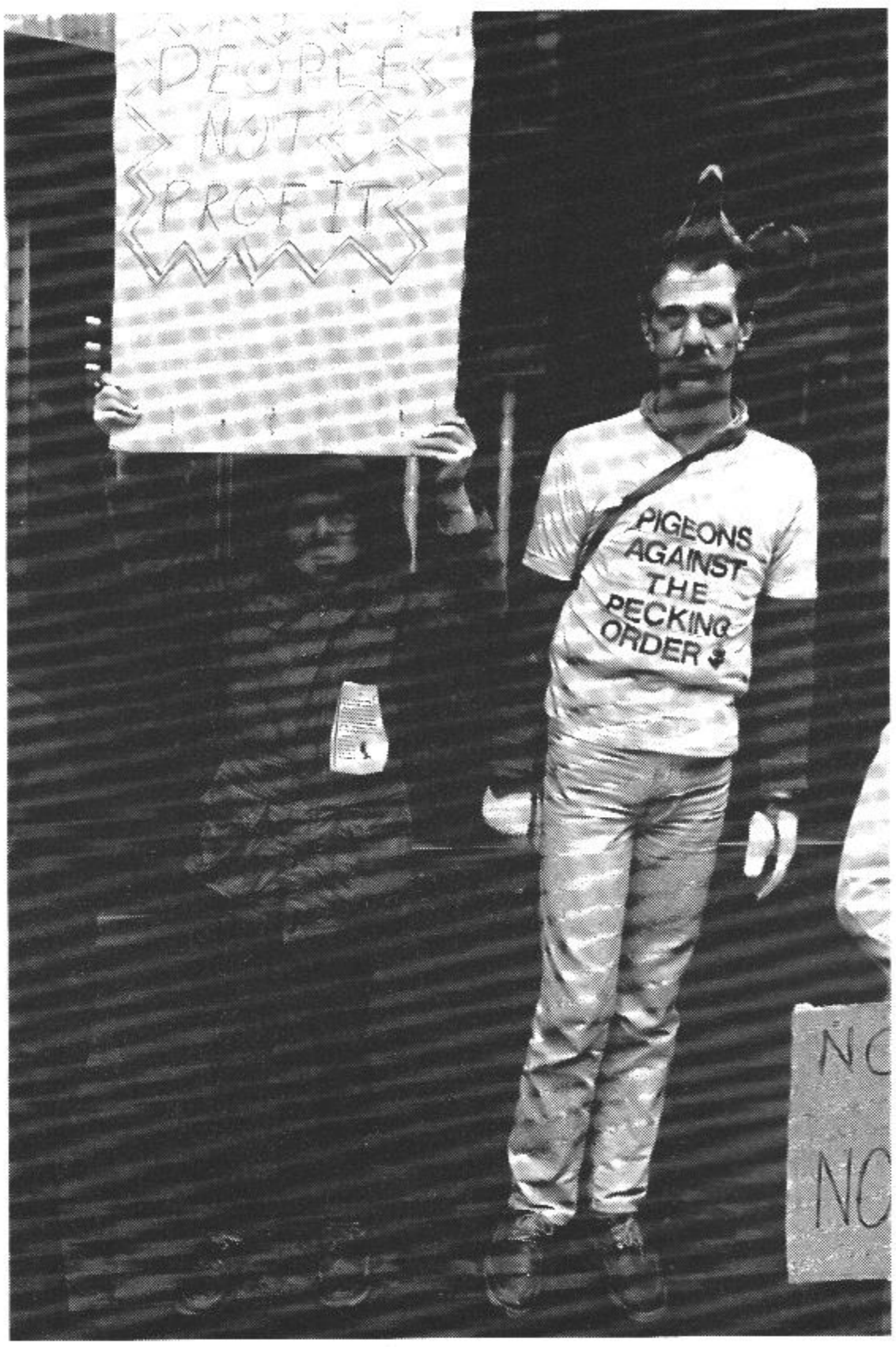
Central planning is based on the 'one big factory' model of economic co-ordination - that the economy can be run in the way a large-scale factory allocates physical resources. This was developed during the 'high period' of the Second International at the end of the nineteenth century and was outlined by Kautsky. This conception of how a socialist economy would function is common to all the currents of Marxian socialism however bitter their differences on political grounds.

Planning is conceived as a system of direct administrative allocation. This emerges as a result of capitalism becoming increasingly monopolistic and (state) socialism just 'takes over', abolishing the production of commodities and substituting production for use for production for sale.

This wrong conception of the economic foundations of socialism must be completely abandoned if socialist economic ideas are to regain influence. Yet at the same time Marxian socialism's commitment to common ownership and planning must be maintained. These principles are the essential prerequisites of establishing conscious and collective control of the satisfaction of human needs.

The ideas of so-called 'market socialism' give too much ground to the enemy and logically lead to conceding the superiority of capitalism. If socialism is to revive in historical influence socialist economists must identify frameworks for post-capitalist economies based upon social ownership and planning which are flexible and can respond effectively to the diverse qualities and decentralised nature of economic life.

What then should actually be done in a democratically planned economy? The issue of democratic economic co-ordination will be examined in the next issue. ❑




**Stop the City - protest against City profits, Stock Exchange, London, 1985. PHOTO: David Hoffman.**




# Fighting back against the odds

**Peter Bradley, deputy leader of Westminster Labour Group, and one of the formal objectors to the District Auditor , pieces together 'the greatest act of political corruption in the history of local government.'**

MOST PEOPLE think of Westminster as a place of power, privilege and prestige. Certainly that is how the Tories see it. When they nearly lost control of the City Council in the local elections of 1986 they panicked.

But they panicked in a particularly Conservative way. They closed ranks. They committed themselves to the maintenance of power at all costs and by all means. They devised a strategy and implemented it ruthlessly. The Government helped.

"Imagine socialists running Buckingham Palace", ran one of the early Tory strategy papers, "Militants lording it over Parliament and controlling Downing Street, left-wing extremists interfering in the daily running of business; a horrible nightmare. But it could happen to the City of Westminster ...unless action is taken now."

It is hardly surprising that no mention was made in that document of the existence, much less the needs and rights of the traditional working class communities of Westminster from Pimlico to Paddington. Though powerless and without privilege, they were nevertheless the city's only stable communities. But they were also the Tories' problem. They voted Labour, so they had to go.

It was with a sick ironic twist that the Tories called their strategy for the social cleansing of Westminster, "Building Stable Communities". They said they wanted to increase the number of permanent residents in the city. What they meant - and what they did - was to deport low income, Labour-voting council tenants from the city and replace them with upwardly-mobile, home-owning Tory voters.

They started by adopting the "designated sales" housing policy which they targeted on the marginal wards to yield the greatest effect. In designated blocks, every flat which became vacant was boarded up and eventually sold, some to people with as tenuous a link with Westminster as a job offer in the borough. Genuine local families who had already waited years for a council tenancy needed not apply, unless of course they were prepared and able to become the proud new owners of a crippling mortgage.



Later, as Westminster's Tories cooked up deals with housing associations such families were at last offered hope and homes... in Hillingdon, Enfield, Ilford or Dagenham, anywhere out of Westminster and off the electoral register. Even now, though Porter may have gone, the policy continues. 1,400 families have been found homes outside the borough in the last two years alone.

Housing was not the only means of gerrymandering Westminster. The Tories used planning policies to increase the amount of new private housing being built in the city while resisting the development of social housing. High profile, vote-catching environmental improvement initiatives from street cleaning to hanging baskets, were targeted on marginal wards. Not a stone was left unturned but that Tory votes might be lurking beneath it.

And just in case the gerrymandering did not work the Government helped out in the run-up to the 1990 elections with a set of subsidies which brought the poll tax down from a not-so-clever £400+ to an election-clinching £195.

And for good measure this election year, the Government did it again stumping up 96% of Westminster's budget. The result? Surprise, surprise, while Labour was romping home everywhere else there was no change at Westminster: Tories 45, Labour 15, democratic local government, 0. But that is not the end of the story. Labour in Westminster has been as committed to rooting out political corruption as the Tories have been to gerrymandering.

It is our campaign in partnership with the community we represent that has created a job-for-life for the District Auditor as inch by inch and document by document he pieces together the picture of what our QC Andrew Arden has described as the "greatest act of political corruption in the history of local government, not financial corruption in the conventional sense but corruption of the machinery of the authority itself given over to party political gain in a way and to an extent that is absolutely without precedent..."

In January this year, after a four-and-a-half year investigation, the Auditor published his provisional findings that Dame Shirley Porter, Barry Legg MP and eight others had been guilty of gerrymandering.

But that is not the end of the story either. Throughout the public hearings which started in October and could end with the Auditor confirming his earlier findings and pressing a surcharge, Porter has been represented by one of the most celebrated (and expensive) QCs in the country. She says that she intends to take the Auditor all the way to the European Court if necessary. She can afford to.

And astonishingly, despite the Auditor's provisional findings and the 12,000 pages of evidence on which they are based throughout the hearings, the onus has been on the objectors to make out the case against Porter and the others. Legal aid is not available even, or perhaps especially, to those who are performing a public service.

But if Westminster's Tories are not to escape, it is essential that we are legally represented every step of the way.

We are very fortunate that our solicitors, Alan Edwards & Co, and our barristers Andrew Arden QC, Gavin Millar and Alyson Kilpatrick, have been prepared to work flat-out and non-stop on a promise.

We have raised £65,000 towards our target of a £200,000 which is way below what our lawyers could expect from a commercial client. They are working on this case because, like us, they believe in it. None of us are going to give up now but we need your help.

When ultimately we prevail, we will have the satisfaction of having sent the Tory's proudest flagship to the bottom. We will have helped substitute the "raving right" for the "loony left" in the nation's demonology.

We believe that, though we have been consigned by gerrymandering to almost permanent opposition in Westminster, we have helped Labour Groups throughout the country win votes, take control of councils and deliver the services to their communities which are denied by the Tories to ours in Westminster. When it is over we will have helped restore the £21.25m (perhaps as much as £60m by the time the Auditor concludes his final investigation) that the Tories' corrupt policies cost the Council to the ratepayers of Westminster.

But it has to be remembered that for the principal victims of the social cleansing of Westminster there will be no redress. "Building Stable Communities" has ripped apart whole neighbourhoods, divided families and blighted individual lives. That damage cannot be repaired. Westminster is the nation writ large. The wounds inflicted here by Shirley Porter are the wounds inflicted elsewhere by Thatcher and Major. It is only that the Tories in Westminster have been caught.

We have taught them a lesson which they will not forget. But Labour should not forget it either. The next Labour Government will be judged not just by its commitment to the principles of social justice and to the idea of democratic values but by the practical steps it takes at the earliest opportunity to ensure that the Tories' victims do at last inherit the earth.

Please contribute to our "Fund for Justice" by addressing your cheques to: Westminster Objectors Trust, 29 Croxley Road, London W9 3HH.

# Publish and be damned!




**As *Briefing* goes to press Tony Benn waits to see if the House of Commons votes to remove him from the Privileges Committee because of his intention to continue to publish his personal report of the Committee's enquiry into the cash for questions affair. Tony talked to *Briefing* about why he believes that it is important for democracy that Labour take a stand.**

***Labour Briefing*: Why did you print the minutes of the Privileges Committee and what do you think the consequences could be?**

Tony Benn: We are in a position now where allegations are being made of corruption, bribery, blackmail and forgery and the House of Commons has responded by saying we must cover it all up in secret committees. I am not prepared to accept that.

My first responsibility is to the people who elected me and I haven't joined a little club called Parliament which protects itself. I am there to represent the people and so they are entitled to know what is happening. I wrote a very accurate factual account which said that, published it, gave a copy to the Speaker and to the Tory chairman of the Committee, Tony Newton. But in doing that I have obviously broken the rules of the House.

The House cannot deal with me unless the Committee asks it to at the end of the month. I have little doubt that it will recommend that I be removed from the Committee and that will be voted on by the Committee and it will go back to the House which will have to decide whether to remove me or not. If they do I shall no longer be a member of the Committee and the Committee will go back to its secret sessions.

I am absolutely sure that unless this is brought out into the open public confidence in Parliament will diminish and that will obviously damage the left, because the left is always looked upon to correct the injustices brought about by the power of the wealthy.

**LB: What do you think is the significance of the recent allegations of corruption and sleaze and what does it say about our Parliamentary democracy?**

TB: I'm not in the business of muck-raking or scape-goating. I'll tell you why. Because if Labour people accuse the Government or individual Conservative Members of these offences people say, "ah well, they would say that wouldn't they?", whereas if we concentrate on opening it up, public confidence in us will increase. So I'm not involved in that side of it. If it comes out in public, as I think it should, then people will make up their minds as to what should be done. I'm interested in the openness and democratic aspect of it all.

**LB: What effect do you think that all this will have on the Tory Government's ability to govern and on its ability to win the next election?**

TB: Well, I think that it has done damage to Parliament as a whole and I think one effect will be a reduced turnout. I think people might say, 'well, we are not voting because they are all at it, all democratic parties', and that will be very damaging. I think probably if individual Conservatives can be shown to have behaved in a way that fell below the standard expected it might have an adverse effect on them in their own constituency.

But when you think of the struggle for years and years in South Africa, I do think that we must remember that the defence of democracy is something absolutely fundamental and if we are seen to defend democracy it will, co-incidentally, help people to have confidence in us.




# Thatcherism's Waterloo?

**Daniel Harris, the Union of Communications Workers' media and campaigns officer, outlines the recent successful campaign by his organisation against the Post Office sell-off.**

IT WAS perhaps one of the most significant victories for the labour and trade union movement in a decade and a half. A key piece of legislation for the 1995 session of Parliament - and the central driving philosophy of the Conservative Party throughout the 1980s - was stopped in its tracks. And what makes this victory more satisfying is that it was a battle that was taken head-on and won hands-down by the movement.

For the last two and half years - before any Government proposals had been made - trade unionists were building alliances within communities all over Britain and campaigning in largely hitherto unnatural territory. They were arguing the virtues of a public service which had to operate with public service as its priority. Any other way would see it destroyed.

It was an argument which found support wherever it went. Into Women's Institutes, parish councils, pensioners' groups, charities and virtually any organisation that would listen, trade unionists would offer speakers, literature and advice for the campaign.

With 60 million letters delivered to more than 24 million addresses every day this was a message which touched the lives of everybody in every community across the country. It also proved to be a vital campaigning tool.

Michael Heseltine's and the Government's central error was not simply to so clearly misread the overwhelming opinion being expressed by the public but also to ignore trade unions. The Union of Communication Workers along with the other postal unions had been telling the Government for two years before its privatisation plans floundered that the best future for the industry was to keep it in the public sector but give it greater commercial freedom to invest and develop new services. That way, it was argued, the Post Office could protect vulnerable services, remain accountable to the people through Parliament, and grow and adapt to a changing communications environment.

But Michael Heseltine and the Department of Trade and Industry chose to ignore this sound advice and instead spent £1.6 million on consultancy fees (consultants who donate to the Tory Party) trying to find a way to privatise the Post Office.

They began by trying to sell off Parcelforce on its own, then thought they could sell the whole of the Post Office, lock, stock and barrel. They then decided that 51 per cent of Royal Mail and Parcelforce would be the thing to do. In the final few days Heseltine was desperately pacing up and down the corridors of the Commons with any cobbled-together compromise he thought might win over the Tory rebels.

The campaign itself focused not only on privatisation but also on the break-up of the Post Office stressing the importance of the integration and interdependence of the various parts of the industry.

Nobody from Tory voters to Post Office managers could really understand that splitting up and selling off the Post Office could possibly be better than keeping it together with greater freedom. Successive polls of key groups showed that view and sought to cut away the perceived support for Heseltine and the few exponents of privatisation.

Thus with a combination of a positive message and a broad base of support the Government found itself having to back-pedal, by first agreeing to have a consultation period and to include a public sector option in its Green Paper and also by being forced to make various guarantees on services, accessibility and affordability of a privatised postal system. Meanwhile, on Saturday afternoons in town and village centres up and down the country, a staggering 1.75 million people were signing a petition to save their Post Office.

The tremendous grass-roots support for a public sector Post Office and for a dynamic agenda for the industry was also winning over a significant number of Tory rebels. Their postbags were bursting with criticism of the plans from their own constituents; so much so that one Tory, Sir Peter Emery of the Honiton constituency, said that he had never received so much mail on one topic in all his 34 years in Parliament.

As the rebel numbers grew - to more than 20 - nervous whips were doing their mathematics and advising that the plans should be dropped. The Cabinet meeting on Thursday November 3rd confirmed what at one point nobody dared to believe was possible.

This victory will give heart to the trade union and labour movement not just because the Tories have suffered a significant knock-back but also because it was a campaign fought and won on the best of principles. It was a pre-emptive campaign which developed a positive message and built a broad base of support.

The arguments and the force of public opinion became so overwhelming that not even this wretched Government could ignore them. To privatise the Post Office would have condemned it to near certain defeat at the next general election. The victory over privatisation could yet have the same effect. ❑

# Subjective neutrality

**Our media correspondent looks at how the Broadcasting Complaints Commission invokes censorship at the behest of trade union officials to evade criticism from grassroots activists.**

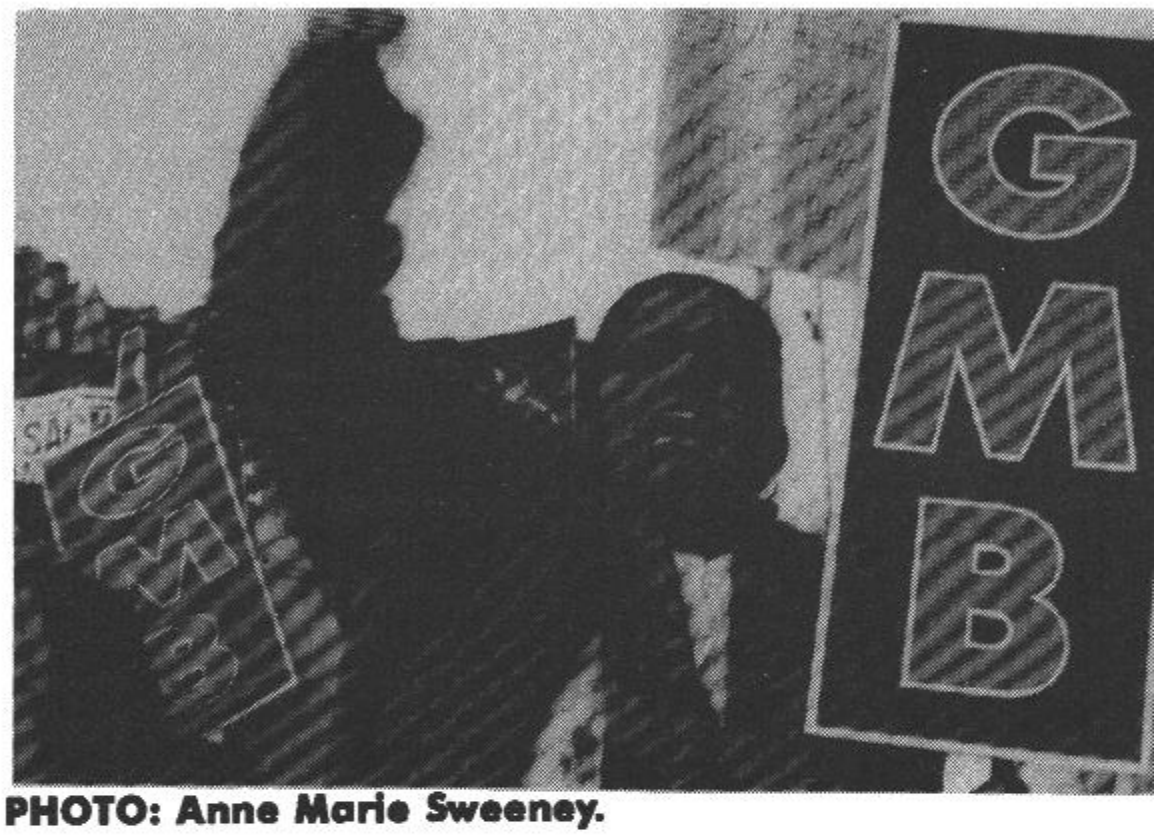



PHOTO: Anne Marie Sweeney.

THE 1990 Broadcasting Act, strongly opposed by the Campaign For Press and Broadcasting Freedom and the media trade unions, prevented the production of programmes representing a strong point of view. A powerful form of censorship was imposed and broadcasters now have to be governed by assumed "neutrality", realised in the stance of "impartiality."

The Broadcasting Complaints Commission (BCC) is one of the Government quangos set up to enforce this. It has, recently, been widely discredited by both the BBC and Channel 4, with accusations that is an 'irrelevant', 'unelected' and 'unrepresentative' body of establishment figures, representing their own opinions, whose findings do not stand up to close examination.

The BCC's findings against Channel 4's *The Women of 10 Downing St.*, run true to form. The politically motivated complaints were brought by the powerful lobby of the national office of the GMB. The programme looked at the Burnsall's strike and the experience of the Asian women strikers.

It also set the strike in the context of anti-union legislation and paralleled it with the experience of women at Grunwicks and in the miners' strike of 84/85. It contained not insubstantial criticisms of the TUC and of the GMB full time officials. The programme received widespread acclaim from activists, the strikers and the left press. Women Against Pit Closures described it as "outstanding ... we see it as a landmark in films on twentieth century trade union struggles."

"The BCC's verdict was predictable," according to Anne-Marie Sweeney, director of *The Women of 10 Downing St.* "The GMB brought over 60 substantial complaints to the BCC, in some 400 pages of invective against the programme and its makers. Many of them required a verdict based on the BCC members' own interpretation of the history of the strike.

"Two of the BCC are former members of the TUC, Brenda Dean and Tony Christopher. The others, like Reverend Pilkington, the head of a public school, would I suspect have limited experience of life on a picket line. Their findings, on what is unfair or not to the GMB, were bound to reflect their own subjective political opinions.

"In the end, they only found in favour of two complaints and neither of them bear scrutiny. We are said to have misrepresented, in a way that was unfair to the GMB, both an interview with Mrs Desai and the tone of a meeting, between the GMB and the strikers. But neither Mrs Desai, nor the majority of the strikers, thought we had misrepresented what was said. It is all a question of political interpretation."

The strike at the Burnsall's metal finishing plant in Smethwick was a long and difficult dispute with wide reaching implications. The GMB had a problem as they wished to appear the combative representatives of lowpaid, exploited workers, but at the same time were dedicated to remaining within the law and co-operating with the police.

They wanted the publicity but at the same time did not want to attract the kind of radical network of support, which argued that, if every effective form of trade union action was being rendered illegal, then the question of challenging the law must be on the agenda.

They were prepared to promote the strike in high profile media events, over which they had firm control, such as the GMB national conference or a press conference in the Houses of Parliament. It appears they were less keen, however, to encourage the strikers to make links at a grass roots level with other trade union activists. For example, during the strike, the GMB held its first ever national conference of black workers. The Burnsall strikers were not informed about it, nor invited to attend.

The GMB did not succeed, however, in preventing an energetic, enthusiastic and independent network of support groups for the Burnsall strikers. After a year of the dispute, believing that the strike could not be won and concerned about the increasing liaison between the support groups and the strikers, the regional officials called the strike off without a vote of the strike committee.

All the strikers publicly demanded that their strike be re-opened and the picket reinstated. They circulated a letter, signed by them, highly critical of the GMB's conduct of the dispute. The GMB officials toured the country, in an attempt to do a damage limitation exercise, endorse their running and ending of the dispute and to vilify the support groups.

It is within this context that the BCC findings, liberally peppered as they are with positive references to the GMB ('looking after their member's interests', 'the considerable back-up which the union had provided for the strikers') can be seen to stem from a particular political standpoint. It is not one necessarily shared by the strikers, their supporters in the dispute, or the programme makers. Nor is there any reason why it should be, if everyone had the right to freedom of expression and opinion. It is certainly one that the GMB will attempt to use to the full, to legitimatise their handling of the Burnsall's strike, discredited not by any television programme but by their own actions and by the verdicts of the strikers themselves. ❑




# Health's answer to De Lorean

**Cherished Tory plans to disembowel the National Health Service are falling apart, taking mountains of taxpayers' cash with them. The Government is just waiting to be attacked, says John Lister of London Health Emergency.**

IT'S ALL gone terribly wrong for Health Secretary Virginia Bottomley. The Thatcherite dream of a marketised NHS laying a base for increasing means-tested charges for treatment and press-ganging millions of reluctant punters into private medical insurance has turned into a nightmare.

While the NHS market has been inundated with accountants, over-paid managers and insensitive quangos taking embarrassing and indefensible decisions, the private sector remains deep in the doldrums and has now generated the biggest scandal so far.

Just six months after it was proudly opened by Scottish Secretary Ian Laing, the most expensive private hospital in Britain has called in the receivers after squandering £30 million in Government hand-outs.

The Clydebank-based Health Care International conceded defeat when it could not find bankers willing to bail out this year's expected £15 million deficit on the lavish £180 million hospital complex.

Glasgow's *Evening Times* has had fun listing dozens of ways £30m could have been spent to benefit Scotland's NHS: among them, 10,000 hip replacements; 54,000 varicose vein operations; the *entire* annual running costs of Glasgow's Victoria Infirmary, with £4m to spare; the building of a 350-bed district general hospital.

But while the opposition of the Scottish public to the new hospital project was vocal and predictable, it is hard to see why bankers were prepared even to contemplate such a reckless and ludicrous scheme.

The hospital cost almost three times as much to build as a large district general hospital for the NHS but has only 260 beds. Yet it also has 21 operating theatres compared with just five in an equivalent-sized NHS specialist hospital. The attached 160-bed luxury hotel always depended upon the success of the hospital . In theory, the Clydebank hospital was to draw in lucrative specialist cases from the wealthy elite of the Middle East, Greece and Italy. But it turns out that to make a profit, the Clydebank hospital would have needed to attract a third of all the overseas private patients treated in Britain.

There is a vast surplus of private hospital beds with occupancy currently averaging less than 50 per cent. When the firm went belly-up there were just 20 patients in the £180 million hospital.

Life is no easier in the NHS, with Old Bailey judges joining the denunciation of the collapse in mental health services, with inadequate numbers of acute and secure hospital beds for people suffering severe mental illness, and a dwindling, chaotic pretence of 'community care' for those discharged or denied a bed.

Care of the elderly, restructured by Sainsbury's boss Sir Roy Griffiths to fleece millions of pensioners of their savings through means-tested charges for increasingly privatised care, is also generating a succession of scandals: the Isle of Wight is the first social services authority to declare that the money has run out.

The scheme to set up GPs as independent fund-holders - pioneered by a Thatcherite GP who is now facing drugs charges - has led to thousands of unscrupulous doctors pocketing millions in unspent cash allocations while hospitals carry the cost of a dramatic surge in emergency admissions: fund-holders do not have to pay for emergency admissions.

Even the Blood Transfusion Service, now run by a new quango, the National Blood Authority, is reeling under the impact of the NHS market system. Brutal cut-backs proposed by the NBA would axe a third of the 15 Regional Transfusion Centres (closing Liverpool, Lancaster, Oxford, Brentwood and Plymouth) and threaten total dislocation in vital supplies to hospitals.

Huge meetings and petitions have focused the near-unanimous rejection of the scheme, designed to cut up to £12 million from a budget of only £135 million a year. It is being forced through by quango Chief Executive John Adey who until his new job was chairman of Baxters Healthcare, the monopoly supplier of blood bags to the NHS.

Health authorities and hospital trusts across the country are setting out horrendous and hugely unpopular proposals for closures of thousands of front-line acute hospital beds and casualty units.

In Bristol, Surrey and Birmingham, public protests have been able to force back plans for devastating cuts in acute services and there are hopes that a similar retreat could be forthcoming in Sheffield where Nether Edge Hospital is under threat.

Powerful campaigns continue elsewhere, notably in north London, where opponents of the closure of Edgware Hospital have won the backing of all four local Tory MPs and all but one of 183 councillors in the boroughs of Brent, Harrow and Barnet. Thirteen London casualty units are now under threat of closure, with plans to extend the chaos into Hertfordshire with the threat to axe the Lister or QE2 hospitals.

As Kenneth Clarke contemplates a tighter squeeze on NHS capital spending, Bottomley must also decide whether to defy petitions which attracted 2 million signatures and pump in the £500 million required to implement the full closure of Bart's and Guy's - triggering immense rows with dozens of other trusts and health authorities whose cherished development projects would be halted for lack of cash.

As cash for routine treatment begins running out in many big-city trusts and the weather starts getting colder, the Tories are exposed and the time is ripe for campaigners to hit the trail in defence of our NHS.

Will the Labour movement rise to the challenge? ❑




# Why we won't join Labour

RECENT EVENTS may have raised political awareness among Britain's youth, along with a willingness to become involved in a cause. The Criminal Justice Bill brought different groups together and the young became involved with those they believed could change things. If the Labour Party had made a commitment to oppose the Bill they would have gained many young supporters.

When faced with choice of political parties at election time many young people would rather not vote than put their cross beside a party which they feel does not represent any of their interests. Almost half of the 18-25 year-olds did not vote in the last general election.

Many of those who want to become actively involved in some form of protest are looking away from the major political parties and toward smaller, grass roots groups where results appear to be seen. It seems to the youth in Britain that the Labour Party has nothing to offer so it is hardly surprising that many are not becoming involved in the Party.

**Clear action not sleek words will attract youth to Labour, says William Pickering, Croydon North CLP.**

Direct action groups are more appealing as they are seen to be directly interested in the views of the young on top of which their tactics are perceived as achieving results. Witness the publicity gained by the recent roof top protest against the Criminal Justice Act at the Houses of Parliament.

Many young people are becoming so disenchanted with Labour's recent performance that they are turning away altogether. For example, within my own relatively wide circle of friends and aquaintances, I am the only card-carrying Labour Party member.

Over many decades the Labour Party's relationship with its own youth movements has been far from enthusiastic. It appears that whenever youth inside the Party become critical the answer is simply to expel them or disband their organisation. If we are not allowed to be critical now, what hope for socialist thought and action as we grow older?

Young people are fed up with this Government and are desperately looking for change. They will, however, only offer their support to the Labour Party when they feel that the Labour Party will give something worthwhile back in return.

# Bureaucracy and animal welfare

**Hilda Kean reports from the 'extraordinary' meeting of the British Union of Anti-Vivisectionists:** I will certainly "remember, remember the 5th of November" 1994, the date of the British Union of Anti-Vivisectionists (BUAV) extraordinary general meeting at Westminster Central Hall. It's the first meeting I've attended to be closed by the police. It's the first time I've been threatened with aggravated trespass for being in a meeting place. But it's not the first time I've witnessed autocratic manoeuvres and chilling witch hunts.

Certainly there was cause for aggravation. The meeting had been called, ostensibly, to decide on the introduction of proxy voting and the removal of six executive members constitutionally elected at the summer AGM. In practice the real intention was to launch a witch hunt against any members seeking to defend the campaigning traditions and ideology of the BUAV.

In chairing the meeting,the bureaucratic behaviour of Dominic Johnson was, unfortunately, nothing new to labour movement activists. He tainted the opposition with gibes of extremism, or falsely linking them to the Animal Liberation Front.

Unfortunately the members had no say at the meeting. When one executive member, down for expulsion, tried to challenge standing orders the chair refused to allow him to speak and asked security guards to remove him. He was defended and the guards sensibly withdrew. Next Johnson, rather than proceed with business, called the police to remove this member. The police then took over, closed the meeting and threatened anyone who did not leave with aggravated trespass. Outside wagons of police in riot gear met the leaving activists.

The reason for all this is that Johnson and others are trying to move the BUAV away from its origins of total opposition to *all* animal experiments to the tactics of support for Anita Roddick (bless her) and a focus on the "easy" issues of cosmetic testing.

The BUAV and other animal campaigning groups are not "new" groups of the environmentalist 90s. Rather their roots are in the radical 1890s when they drew support from feminists and socialists such as Edward Carpenter and Isabella Ford. Then as now argument raged about whether it was better to ameliorate conditions under which animals were abused or whether all experiments should be banned. The "revolutionaries" won and the BUAV went on to be the largest British anti-vivisection group.

Experiments on animals have not brought significant change in the health of working people: this has come from improved housing, sanitation and diet. To accept ideas that experiments on another biological species are valid and useful raises questions about ways in which we look at the world.

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For further information contact BUAV Members Coalition c/o Joyce Sanders 11 Shaw Cross Street, Salford, Manchester M6



**PHOTO: Phil Maxwell.**

# Is there life on the NEC?

**Diane Abbott, MP for** Hackney North

I ALWAYS KNEW I stood a good chance of getting elected to the NEC. I think being elected onto the executive committee of the Labour Party was the greatest honour that the Party can bestow. My victory shows that the mass of the Party, the left, has a strong following at grass-roots. I think this year will be seen as the year the left began to turn the tide. I hope that the left in the constituencies will think that they now have a voice on the NEC.

I have been surprised that there is so little political debate on the NEC. I have been horrified to see the extent to which control of the policy-making process has slipped from the NEC to the policy forums, the Leader's office and Gordon Brown's office. Conference is largely ignored and the NEC is an accomplice in its own marginalisation.

I attended the National Conference of the Association of Directors of Social Services recently in Harrogate and people were telling me that as Party members they didn't feel they were consulted or involved and that policy was made by little cliques in London and that there was no respect for the Party any more.

An example of how blatant the manipulation of Party structures had become was Tom Sawyer's election speech to the NEC where he boasted of how he had delivered the Party against unilateral nuclear disarmament against the grain of his union. I recently asked Tom Sawyer how he would deal with the change from being the trade union hit-man for Kinnock to being the General Secretary, representing the entire labour movement. He replied that he had loved Neil Kinnock so much that he would have jumped off a cliff if Neil had asked him but now Tony Blair was in power he felt he could be more objective and represent the movement as a whole.

I fully support and will, of course, be voting to defend Clause IV but I believe that this whole internal debate is a deliberate distraction by the leadership. In the meantime they are dumping our commitment on the minimum wage, pensions, benefits and full-employment. What we should really be doing is defending the welfare state and debating the *Social Justice Commission Report*.

# New Labour in Coventry

Dave Spencer reports: **More than 120 left-wing Labour Party members in Coventry remain suspended two and-a-half years after the general election. Only five have been investigated by the National Constitutional Committee. The others have received no indication of what crimes they are supposed to have committed or when their trial is due.**

**Meanwhile, the local party has been busy recruiting ex-members of the SDP including a former council candidate, Anthony Armstrong. It is therefore acceptable to have opposed the Labour Party while in the SDP, but not acceptable to have given any support at all to Dave Nellist and John Hughes, former Labour MPs and Campaign Group members, who stood as independent Labour candidates in the last general election.**

**The local press have hinted at the existence of photographs, videos and other evidence in files compiled by councillor Neil Rider. These are of posters in comrades' windows, of comrades talking to people they shouldn't have, or leafleting and canvassing. Councillor Rider spent 15 years' loyal service with the Communist Party of Great Britain before joining the Labour Party four years ago and becoming henchman for "Boring" Bob Ainsworth, MP for Coventry North East, who deposed John Hughes. In Coventry South East, Dave Nellist's old seat, now occupied by the NEC-imposed 'Sleepy' Jim Cunningham, the CLP has not met since the general election and branches have only met to select council candidates.**

**Now the whole Coventry Party has been re-organised because of boundary changes. In the new Coventry South CLP, councillor Dave Edwards was elected chair with his wife Tama as secretary, not difficult with most of the left suspended. The former Lord Mayor, who has kissed and shaken the hands of royalty, said to the local press: "If there are people who do show left tendencies we will soon find them out."**

**He has promised "debates on current issues" - not to find out new ideas but "to discover where people stand". No doubt, councillor Neil Rider will come along and photograph or video them if they dress too far to the left.**

**Funny thing, Dave Edwards in the 1970s once beat Tony Cliff in votes for the National Committee of the Socialist Workers Party. But then perhaps it's not so funny or strange after all.**

# Posturing Pat



**Even among the innumerable time-servers, sycophants and parasites that infest the upper echelons of our Party this month's Class Traitor would surely feature prominently in any Premier League of self-serving careerists.**

PATRICIA HEWITT arrived in Britain from Australia during the 1960s to study at Cambridge where she avoided political commitment by joining all three of the main political societies. Upon graduation she worked at Age Concern before moving to the National Council for Civil Liberties. She skillfully rode the feminist tide before emerging from a prolonged factional dispute as its general secretary.

Her high-profile work within the NCCL attracted the attentions of both the Special Branch and MI5 who were sufficiently alarmed by her campaigning work to regard her as a threat to the state. She therefore found herself the subject of extensive surveillance and the occasional smear but this experience would not prevent her from later endorsing similar tactics by Walworth Road's own "secret services".

In the early 1980s Hewitt was a familar figure at Labour conferences, where she could constantly be heard denouncing the failures of the Callaghan Government and her espousal of such then prevalent sentiments enabled her to gain selection for the marginal seat of Leicester East in June 1981 (which to date is still the last occasion on which she was elected to any post within the labour movement). Unlike certain individuals during that time, she made no attempts to distance herself from the left and even led many to believe that once elected to Parliament she would immediately become active within the newly-formed Campaign Group.

Indeed Hewitt's election address in 1983 was forthright and unequivocally socialist. It stated: "Under Labour the rich will pay their fair share of taxes. This extra money will be used to increase child benefit, pensions and other benefits". Hewitt's address continued: "We reject the nuclear arms race which threatens to kill us all. The billions of pounds now spent on nuclear weapons will ... be used to provide the things people need most such as homes, hospitals, nursery places services for the elderly".

During the next decade Hewitt would play a crucial role in ensuring that all these policy commitments would be dumped by the Labour leadership allegedly because they were rejected by voters as unpopular. However, her parliamentary ambitions were scuppered by the combined intervention of the incumbent SDP MP and a Hindu fundamentalist candidate, both of whom targeted would-be Labour voters and together attracted more than 11,000 votes. This allowed the Tories to capture the seat with a majority of just 900.

But Hewitt wasted little time in recovering from this setback, using her links (hitherto little-publicised) with the Labour Co-ordinating Committee to publish a pamphlet in which she called for the Party to establish a Campaign Unit, thus avoiding many of the glaring errors made during the 1983 election. This attracted the attention of Neil Kinnock who on his election as leader in October 1983 immediately appointed her as his press officer.

Hewitt's influence in establishing the most autocratic and internally intolerant regime in the Party's history can be gauged by the fact that she blazed a trail for the notorious Peter Mandelson and his ilk to wreak havoc within Walworth Road.

All too often this influence was wielded to serve the interests of the leadership rather than those of the Party as a whole. One example of this came during the 1987 election campaign when on Hewitt's instruction two Party broadcasts featured Kinnock's notorious conference attack on Liverpool Labour Party. At the post-election inquest with no discernable sense of irony she reported on how research had indicated that voters perceived Labour as "divided and disunited".

Furthermore when the Tories with the aid of large sections of the media launched wave after wave of attacks on so-called "loony left" councils, Hewitt and her entourage did not seek to refute such smears. Instead they often pandered to them, regardless of the damage this approach caused to the Party, and especially in many marginal seats which were lost to the Tories as a result. Hewitt's and Mandelson's widespread access to the media meant that the left were blamed for defeat.

Although Hewitt acted as co-ordinator for the Kinnock-instigated "policy review" during 1988-89, maternity leave and the ambitions of close colleagues including Mandelson and Charles Clarke meant she was becoming increasingly marginalised within the Party hierarchy. She left Kinnock's office to take up a lucrative post with the Institute for Public Policy Research. However, she remained a member of the then little-known Shadow Communications Agency through which Kinnock would later conduct the ill-fated 1992 election campaign. Indeed, she was heavily involved in planning the expensive and infamous Sheffield rally.

Throughout Kinnock's miserable reign Hewitt displayed one consistency - namely her refusal to accept any shred of personal responsibility for election defeats. Like Kinnock she moved into a six-figure salary post (with Andersen Consulting) in which she, unlike millions of working-class people, is extremely well insulated from the consequences of Labour's electoral failures.

This has not dissuaded her from her efforts to turn the Party even further to the right, as illustrated by her activities as a member of the misnamed Commission for Social Justice. The recent report of this body which recommended a massive extension of means-testing was hailed by Thatcherites everywhere as an example of Labour's capitulation to their ideas. This in turn has encouraged the Tories to consider further savage attacks upon the poor. ❑

trade union notebook

# Lyons in a corner

**Hugh MacGrillen looks at the dangerous strand of New Unionism developing among certain modernisers and highlights the case of his own organisation, the Manufacturing, Science and Finance Union**

JUST AS Tony Blair hopes to saddle us with New Labour, many trade union leaders would like to convert their organisations into New Unions. Just as Blair embodies political demoralisation in the Labour Party and a willingness to abandon class politics, the leadership in the unions, with few exceptions, would prefer to give up the hard grind of resistance to the employers but rather seek the solace of "social partnership".

This is the notion that trade unions can retain a degree of influence by seeking accommodation with employers and the Government at whatever level agreement can be achieved. Hence, there have been the controversial decisions to invite Tory ministers and CBI representatives to TUC events, the dubious response by the TUC to new management methods and the current pleas to employers to engage in joint monitoring of health and safety at work.

Some of the thinking behind this approach is outlined in a recent book, *The Future of the Trade Unions*. The introduction says: "Reaching this goal (a more stable and secure society) requires social partnership and a shared commitment to full employment at both national and international level. The trade union movement is ready to play its part and is highly capable of doing so."

Later, we are told: "However, the best relationship trade unions should have with any of the political parties is one where both sides can pursue their different agendas in a spirit of mutual tolerance and understanding." So while the TUC retains its old goals of full employment, good welfare provision and social equality, the TUC leaders are willing to lie down with anyone who thinks differently.

Even at the best of times, the problem with that type of relationship is that the employers are always on top. In present circumstances when the employers are confident and on the offensive they will only be looking for arrangements which fit their own agenda - more sackings, tougher working conditions and union busting. The TUC could end up rather like the Communist Party in its decline, going about offering alliances to people who have no earthly intention of joining in.

The other fly in the ointment is that this approach does not accord with the opinions of trade union activists who in the main retain political consciousness, have a perfectly justifiable suspicion of their employers and want to keep independent organisation in the workplace. The proponents of New Unionism, therefore, need to take on a struggle for control of their own organisations if they are to have their way.

A good case in point is MSF, where a lengthy battle is in progress between the New Unionists, headed by the general secretary, Roger Lyons, and the more traditional defenders of independent trade unionism.

Differences initially broke out over industrial organisation - Lyons is a proponent of company unionism, works councils and other dilutions of collective bargaining - and are increasingly being transferred to the structure of the union itself. So far the results are mixed. A discussion document on the future of the union, prepared by the Lyons camp at enormous expense, was rejected by the 1994 MSF annual conference and had to be pulped. But the rejection was based more on the distrust of the motives of the leadership than on the espousal of clear political alternatives.

Consequently, a very similar document has just been presented to the NEC, and will now become the subject of a new round of politicking. While the ostensible purpose of any reorganisation is to improve services to members, what is being proposed is a tightening of the centralised direction of the union, reduction in the role of the activists and, in reality, no extra say for the members.

The tactics pursued by Lyons's supporters include personal smears, sackings and removal from office and ballot rigging, more reminiscent of the 1950s than indicative of a new way forward into the 21st century.

The outcome of this struggle is far from decided at present. The left in the union, if not exactly galvanised, has begun to stir itself and is displaying a healthy appetite for unity. Lyons is losing support as the nature of his project becomes clearer. Meetings around the country have demonstrated reservations and opposition by the activists.

In the near future, the scope of the struggle will broaden to include the debate over Clause IV where the basic politics of the two main strands in the union are sharply at issue. And there will be a battle over the next election for general secretary, due to commence in 1995. There is a good chance the left will enter this with a united programme for running the union and will be able to make a serious political challenge.

There is some correspondence between the present acquiescence of trade union leaders and attitudes which arose after the General Strike in 1926 - you could say the TUC has been transformed from mondism to monksism in 65 years. The revival of trade unions in the 1930s had a lot more to do with the revival of confidence in the workplace and the activities of bodies like the Minority Movement than the defeatist policies of the leadership.

The New Unionism of the nineties is likely to be equally futile and sterile and that the revival of unions must start in the workplace with the direct defence of workers' interests.

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*The Future of the Trade Unions* by Robert Taylor, is published by Andre Deutsch, £9.99 from bookshops, £5 from some union Head Offices, ISBN 0-233-98900-5

# trade union notebook

The long running campaign to discipline four Liverpool shop stewards - which Unison has inherited from NALGO - is continuing. Disciplinary hearings are currently stalled by legal action taken by the shop stewards as the only means to ensure that the union follows its own disciplinary procedure.

Increasingly Unison activists are realising that the disciplinary action - and the related refusal of the union to allow the former NALGO branch in Liverpool to hold an Annual General Meeting - is the first sign of a political witch hunt in the union. On November 4th the Greater London Regional Council became the second Regional Council to support the Liverpool shop stewards and to demand that the union members in Liverpool be allowed to settle their local disputes in a democratic way by voting at an Annual General Meeting.

The real lack of confidence of the Unison national leadership in its fight with activists and the left in the union is increasingly clear and the campaign being waged by the Liverpool shop stewards has clearly rattled the would be witch hunters.

The recent legal action against Unison by Sefton Council following successful strike action against privatisation which breached the Tory anti-union laws has not led to disciplinary action against the Sefton branch officers. Instead the National Executive has agreed to circulate a scurrilous and misleading report to every branch of the union - thereby raising the issue of the anti-union laws with greater effectiveness than the left could possibly have managed!

Unison activists need to increase the pressure on the leadership of the union, which is demoralised and discredited by the financial crisis into which the union is sinking as the trade union "sign up" exercise exposes the wildly exaggerated membership figures which the union claimed to have at its inception.

We need to organise to force our leaders to fight the employers and not their own activists if we are to rescue the union from a vicious spiral of weakness and decline.

The launch conference of the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison in Leeds on Saturday 3rd December is a timely opportunity to organise the work that needs to be done. Details from Glen Kelly, Bromley Unison 081 464 3333 extn. 3273.

**The Royal College of Nursing has reported that the Goverment's community care legislation has increased workloads, stress and paperwork for district nurses.**

**The nurses are working record levels of unpaid overtime, risking back injuries and suffering verbal and physical abuse, the research from the RCN and Industrial Relations Services shows.**

**A nationwide study has found that 50,000 working days are lost each year due to work-related illness and injury among the 16,400 district nurses in Britain. Eight out of ten nurses report that community care has increased workloads and half of them report decreasing job satisfaction.**

**RCN General Secretary Christine Hancock said: "This research demonstrates that district nurses pay a heavy personal price for coping with massive changes.**

**"Community care legislation has both increased and changed their workload and multiplied their paperwork."**

Actors' union Equity has warned that thousands of actors risk losing their stage names unless they pay their union dues.

The union has 45,000 members but around 9,000 are in arrears, some by up to five years. Equity is in the process of reminding them that it cannot protect their stage names if their memberships lapse for non-payment of subs.

"Equity provides protection and help on pay, conditions and legal problems," said spokesperson Martin Brown.

"Members' stage names are also protected, which is important not only for credits but also for payments for TV work.

"We make sure that newcomers to the profession cannot use the names of listed members - we cannot have two Kenneth Branaghs or Emma Thompsons."

**Scottish teaching unions have demanded pay talks with management following the rejection of the bosses' 2.3 per cent wage rise offer.**

**If the management side refuses to consider a meeting, the unions will call a special meeting to consider strike action.**

**The Educational Institute of Scotland says that local authorities can still avert industrial action if they improve the offer.**


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*Conference*

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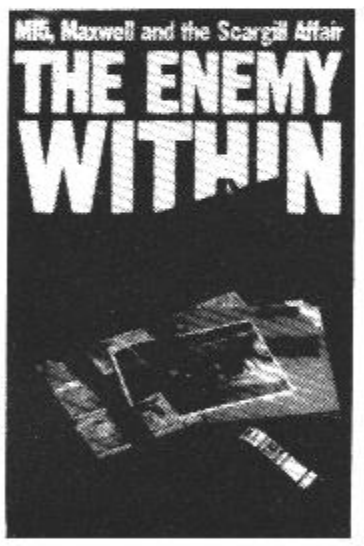
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**PHOTO: Campaign Against Racism and Fascism.**

# A pernicious evil

**In the second and concluding part of their interview with Paul Field, Liz Fekete and Frances Webber discuss the insidious menace of European racism.**

**PAUL FIELD: Your research highlights the way the media in Europe have portrayed asylum-seekers and immigrants as criminally inclined. What impact has such stereotyping had in terms of the number of racial attacks and popular racism in general?**

LIZ FEKETE: It's had a massive impact. The feeling that you get, going through press cuttings (we monitor around 30 European newspapers here at the Institute of Race Relations), is of the seventies, of Powellism and the numbers game. So first, you've got an obsession with the numbers of immigrants and asylum-seekers in Europe but secondly you've got a popular racism towards the Third World where the focus is on the Third World - population explosion, famine, plague, disease etc. It's inevitable within this context that you're going to get a rise in racist attacks.

All our research indicates that it's asylum seekers, migrant workers and the homeless who are being singled out for the worst attacks. If we look at Britain it's the refugees isolated on housing estates who get the rawest deal and it is they who are portrayed in the press as 'Euro-scroungers' out to defraud the welfare state. In terms of the rest of Europe we're seeing very ugly situations developing in places like Spain, Italy and France where you have migrant workers living in specific areas or makeshift camps, often in the poorest conditions, who are being set up for very frightening organised attacks and, quite literally, run out of town.

A corollary to this is that we are witnessing a massive rise in anti-Romany, anti-Gypsy racism. One connection we've made in the book, which few in the anti-racist movement have made, is the parallel between the new anti-refugee, anti-migrant racism and the older anti-Gypsy racism of Europe.

FRANCES WEBBER: I'd add that, just as we saw the beginnings of the criminalisation of the black community in Britain during the seventies with scare stories in the press about 'mugging', so we are now seeing a similar process emerge in Europe with the release of racial crime statistics on immigrant youth in the Netherlands, Denmark, Norway, and other countries. It seems to coincide very often with second-generation 'immigrant' youth saying, 'enough, we're not going to stand this racism', and the beginnings of that youth protest.

**PF: Sivanandan has argued that 'racism is no longer about racial or cultural superiority but about prosperity and prosperity is white, western, European'. Do you see any potential for making common cause between what Noam Chomsky called the 'Third World at home' (the indigenous poor, dispossessed and working class) and asylum seekers, immigrants and refugees? In answering could you briefly describe the level of self-organisation among immigrant communities in Europe and say whether you believe the European left has come anywhere close to meeting the challenge of the present situation?**

LF: First of all, there's the quote from Sivanandan. I think that's a very important argument for understanding the new racism. The end of the Cold War and the 'New World Order' mean that we're now getting asylum-seekers from eastern Europe who are subject to popular racism too.

On the question of uniting immigrants and the poor and dispossessed I would say there is always potential for common cause. There are so many issues that could unite these groups - poverty, unemployment - and then, of course, there's the policing of those communities. It's not just black communities in Europe which are affected by increasing levels of police repression, it's the poor, dispossessed white communities as well. I think you've seen some of the excellent work that people in Newham have been trying to do in forming alliances with the white community in Canning Town, who might be racist, but understand what policing is like from first hand experience. Across Europe it's not just black people who are dying in custody so of course there is room for common cause.

But there is a major obstacle to that unity and that's the question of citizenship rights. What we have to understand in Britain, and I find that people in the anti-racist movement are very bad at understanding this, is that you cannot just export the situation in Britain and talk about the black struggle because the whole nature of citizenship rights in Europe is such that what should be second and third generation black French, or black Belgians, or whatever, are still immigrants which means that they are still seen as outsiders, as foreigners. Until you get rid of that distinction it's going to be much more difficult to make common cause and that for us has got to be the priority in terms of any anti-racist movement in Europe.

FW: And citizenship laws have got stricter, more narrowly based on blood and descent and birth in the territory, in the past two decades. France recently tightened its citizenship laws deliberately in order the exclude young people born in France to North African parents. We should bear in mind that to base citizenship on blood ties is to reiterate the ideology of the Third Reich.

LF: In talking about the left's response, I think it's necessary to distinguish between the parliamentary response and that of the alternative or socialist left. What we have found with the parliamentary parties is that they have reneged on campaigns for citizenship rights and voting rights over the last five years. They've ditched them because they are frightened that they are unpopular.

They have concentrated exclusively on anti-fascism because that's a far easier thing to do. But, at the same time, the rug has been pulled from under their feet because the Christian

Democrats and the Conservative politicians can get up and say, 'well, we're anti-fascist, we don't want all these Nazis running about'. So in that respect, their response has been very weak.

In terms of what I'd call the socialist left there have been great failings as well. There's been the tendency to see racism simply as a question of xenophobia, prejudice, intolerance, without linking racist attacks to all the things we have been describing: policing, state racism, media-inspired popular racism. A second weakness has been the tendency to look for groups that claim to represent the immigrant communities in terms of institutional groups, lobbyist groups, and forums.

FW: The 'take me to your leader' syndrome.

LF: That's right. They are looking for a mass organisation that can tell them what their anti-racism should be. In so doing, they are not looking at the grassroots struggles that have emerged.

There have been struggles of immigrant communities even though they don't have citizenship rights, even though they have so much to lose if they go on a demonstration. There have been the struggles of the asylum-seekers held in prisons. As we talk, there are going to be many hunger-strikes going on across Europe, but they're not receiving the solidarity and publicity they deserve from the left.

FW: The detention of asylum-seekers is one of the most scandalous and sickening aspects of European asylum policy. Governments then add insult to injury by stigmatising them as 'bogus' and 'scroungers'. The asylum seekers themselves are in constant struggle, in prisons and detention centres all over Britain and Europe. Earlier in the year, 200 asylum prisoners were on hunger strike. They have no voice, nobody hears them. What socialists should be doing is lending them a voice, giving them the resources they need to make themselves heard. Their abject silence is a betrayal not just of the asylum seekers' struggles but of the principles of solidarity which socialism is about.

LF: This for me is where socialists have to start, with solidarity. Solidarity with the hunger strikes, solidarity with the campaigns around deaths in custody, taking the campaigns against racist attacks further than one off demonstrations. We've seen massive demonstrations against racist murders in some countries. However, they are not going anywhere because they are being divorced from the wider struggle over the response of the state, the courts and the police to these murders. The left needs to develop a much more serious anti-racist movement and a much more sustained response to grassroots manifestations of resistance, rather than looking for an organisational peg to hang their anti-racism on.

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*Inside Racist Europe*, £4 (+ 75p&p), is available from the Institute of Race Relations, 2-6 Leeke Street, Kings Cross Road, London WC1X 9HS.

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# Seize the moment

**Leonora Lloyd spoke to Gerry Adams on his visit to Britain.**

"PEACE IS NOT merely the absence of conflict. To be sustained, peace must be built on democratic structures which recognise and realise the right of the Irish people to decide our own future and which can win and secure the consent and allegiance of all the Irish people."

So said Gerry Adams to a packed press conference on his first visit to Westminster in 22 years. Tony Benn, who introduced Gerry Adams, underlined what an historic occasion this was. He reminded us that when he had tried to invite Gerry before the Government had banned the visits - the last time only ten months before. He also emphasised that the end of the Cold War meant that Northern Ireland was no longer of strategic importance to the British Government. It did not need the province any more.

The day of Gerry's visit was the day on which it was clear that the Dublin Government could not survive. But the cause of peace was bigger than any of the players involved in the process. Sinn Fein was prepared to deal with any government that was formed in Dublin.

Only the British Government was dragging its feet and refusing to be pro-active in advancing the peace process. He felt the best way forward was a referendum organised by the Irish themselves - one formulated or run by the British Government would be suspect. In an exclusive interview with *Briefing*, I asked Gerry Adams about the role played by the labour movement in Britain and Ireland in the peace process. He said that it was time for the labour movement to move ahead of the Tories and show its clear support for the possibilities for peace. Until now no political party in Britain had been actively involved. He believed they would be further forward if only British political parties had been involved in the dialogue. When I pressed him to say more about the role of the Labour leadership, he would only say that he was sure they were prepared to engage with him in dialogue and he looked forward to that.

I also asked him about the reaction of the Sinn Fein membership and supporters to the peace process. He said that there was a palpable sense of expectation and hope amongst them. They want



**Gerry Adams. PHOTO: Newsfocus**

the moment to be seized and not to be squandered. He underlined that these feelings were not felt just by republican supporters but by loyalists as well.

In response to a number of questions about disarming republicans he called for the demilitarisation of the British presence and said that the peace process was not under threat from republican sources but from the inactivity of the British Government. The recent killing of the postman was wrong but he did not believe that this would hold up the process.

# Conflict in the Congo

**Noel Adolphe Nouila, a Congolese currently seeking political asylum in Germany, charts the turmoil prevailing in his home country over the past few years, which has gone unreported in the west. (Translated from the French by Alexandra Schulte.)**

EVER SINCE colonisation by France in the late nineteenth century, the history of Congo has been a bloody one. Things have got far worse, though, in the last couple of years - despite Congo being officially recognised by the international community as a democracy.

In 1990, unions called a general strike against the Stalinist dictatorship of Sassou-Nguesso and the PCT (Parti Congolais du Travail), calling for democracy and an end to one-party rule. This forced Sassou-Nguesso to organise a national conference of sovereignty from February to June 1991. The conference elected a government of transition, passed a new constitution, called presidential elections for the following year and a general election for 1993. The former were won by Pascal Lissouba of the UPADS (Union Panafricaine pour le Developpement Sociale).

Lissouba had been prime minister in Massamba Debat's military dictatorship of 1963-7, before fleeing to exile in France after a coup. Between 1967 and 1990, he had cultivated strong links with the French Government. Under the watchful eye of France, Lissouba fixed the first round of legislative elections, held in May 1993, excluding the votes of eleven constituencies (all opposition strongholds) from the final count. Lissouba nominated Yhombi-Opango as his prime minister.

Yhombi-Opango had spent nine years in prison after being toppled from power by his vice-president, Sassou-Nguesso, in the coup of 1981. The opposition parties protested at the vote-rigging. The protests were led by Sassou-Nguesso's PCT (which had renounced Stalinism) and Bernard Kolelas' MCDDI (Mouvement Congolais pour le Developpement et la Democratic Integrale). The latter was part of a larger movement, the URD (Union pour le Renouveau Democratique), which came together with the PCT in the wake of the election to form an oppositional alliance.

The URD and PCT refused to participate in the second round of legislative elections, set for June 1993, and unrest in the capital, Brazzaville, left at least 30 people dead. The Government promised to rerun elections in the eleven outstanding constituencies on 3rd October - a promise never kept. Talks to resolve the situation ended in failure, provoking more clashes in Brazzaville and the main port, Point Noire. This led to Yhombi-Opango declaring a state of emergency in the middle of July, which lasted for two weeks.

The situation became even worse in November 1993. Kolelas and Sassou-Nguesso made an official appeal to the Congolese Government to adhere to the terms of the 1991 constitution. Lissouba refused Sassou-Nguesso's offer of peace talks and continued to spread anti-opposition propaganda through the state media. The alliance of opposition parties organised a march on the Palais de la Republique and on the national radio station on 4th November. During the march, sections of the army opened fire on the unarmed protesters, killing six. Other sections of the army, however, came to the help of the protesters and, in the ensuing exchange of shots, a prominent Government journalist was killed. Fighting in Brazzaville continued for the next few days.

On November 8th, the president of Gabon appealed to the Congolese Government to bring order and stability to Brazzaville. The appeal was ignored, however, as Government troops continued to shoot innocent citizens, throwing their dead bodies into the river. Gabon's president appealed again. This time, Kolelas, Sassou-Nguesso and Lissouba went to Gabon for peace talks.

Two days after the end of the summit, in mid-November, at least 39 people were killed and many others wounded during clashes between supporters of the MCDDI and the security forces in Kolelas' stronghold of Bacongo. The security forces bombed an opposition radio station which the Government said was "unauthorised".

Kolelas organised the arming of his supporters and fighting continued until November 27th when government troops were finally driven out of Bacongo. Hospital sources indicated that about 1,000 people had died in the clashes. Official figures put the casualty figures much lower.

Fighting continued between Lissouba's private guard and the militias of the opposition. Between 50 and 60 more people were killed in Brazzaville over one week-end in December. One month after these clashes, and after a week of relative calm, the two sides clashed again on January 14th this year when soldiers fired heavy artillery during the night in response to machine-gun attacks by armed supporters of the opposition in Brazzaville. To end the conflict and to prevent the country from slipping into a full-scale civil war, a reconciliation agreement was signed by Government and opposition supporters at the end of January. However, talk of reconciliation is anathema to the more militant supporters of the Government.

In May of this year, Yhombi-Opango declared on national radio that he would do everything in his power to "neutralise" opposition. The conflict has attracted very little attention in the west. This is not surprising as western journalists are barred from the country.

Finally, the role of France in the conflict is noteworthy. The French Government clearly supports Lissouba, supplying weapons to his army. In return, petroleum is sold to France for $4, when, according to the Congolese constitution, it should be sold for $24.

It is, therefore, in France's interests to keep Lissouba in power. Failing that, a state of conflict is also quite useful. ❑

# Liberal to a fault

**When the Brazilian Workers Party helped to set up the Sao Paulo Forum four years ago, a great step forward was taken in co-ordinating the fight against neo-liberal policies across Latin America. Today that fight still has a long way to go, argues Mike Phipps.**

IT'S BEEN a difficult year for the left in Latin Amercia. There has been a record number of elections, sometimes with the left participating for the first time in decades, as in El Salvador. In the great majority of cases, the left has done worse than it expected, fuelling internal tensions and divisions.

Earlier this year, the Sandinistas who lost power in 1990, performed poorly in Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast regional election. Since then a major power struggle has developed within the FSLN between the Democratic Left faction of ex-president Daniel Ortega and the more moderate coalition-minded 'Sandinismo of the Majorities' grouping led by ex-Vice President Sergio Ramirez.

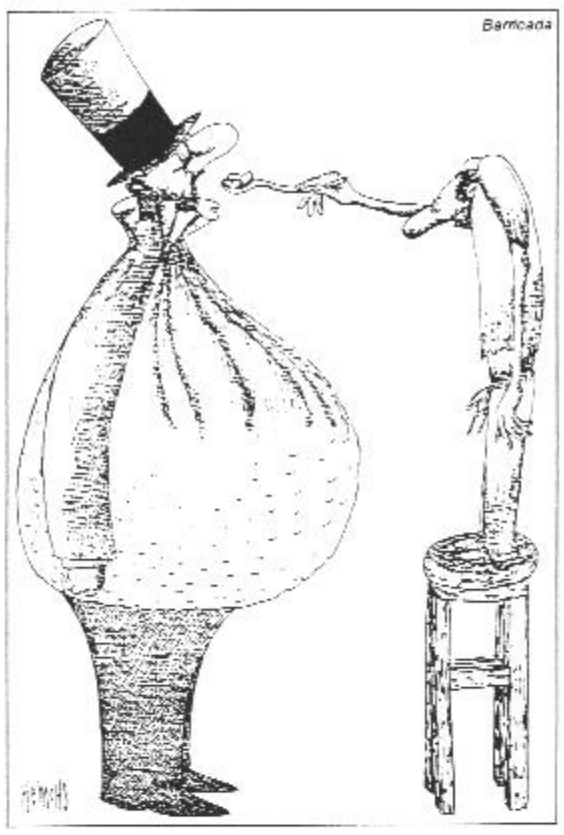
After the Democratic Left took control of the party at the recent Sandinista Congress Ortega replaced Ramirez in the National Assembly and divisions have sharpened. Ex-Minister of Culture and poet Ernesto Cardenal announced on October 24th that he was leaving the FSLN as "a small group headed by Daniel Ortega has taken over ... this is not the FSLN we joined". FSLN National Assembly Deputy Julio Marenco also quit denouncing the leadership's arbitrariness and demagogy".

A day later the Sandinista Assembly voted to remove Fernando Chamorro, a 'Majorities' supporter, as editor of the FSLN newspaper *Barricada*. His pro-Ortega replacement has no journalisitic experience and three key members of the editoral board have resigned in protest.

Meanwhile, four members of the FSLN National Directorate together with ex-Directorate member Sergio Ramirez have launched a 'Movement to Renew Sandinismo' and accused the Ortega leadership of creating a party that excludes, thereby dooming the FSLN to defeat in the upcoming 1996 elections.

These elections loom large in Sandinista reckoning. Divided or not, it is their chance to return to power. Yet, amazingly, the FSLN has allowed the right-wing government to put them back to November 1996 instead of February when they are constitutionally due - an indication of their lack of preparation.

Differences between the two factions appear to outsiders to be based on personalities rather than principles - in particular who will be the official




**Cartoon: Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign**

presidential candidate for the FSLN in two year's time and by implication who will dispense presidential patronage. But with opinion polls on the Pacific Coast showing that 59 per cent of Nicaraguans do not identify with any political party, a Sandinista comeback is by no means the likeliest outcome.

Meanwhile, for the poor everything gets worse. Nicaragua has the worst health statistics in the region - always a key indicator -and in the past few weeks 1,000 new cases of cholera were reported in Managua alone. De-industrialisation continues: the biggest single contribution to export earnings is now money sent home by Nicaraguans abroad - $200 million a year. And it is estimated that if the country complies with the IMF's conditions on the payment of interest on its $7 billion debt, then by the year 2000 the debt will be $16 billion.

The details of the Nicaraguan illustration are instructive, but these problems are not unique to any one country. The neo-liberal offensive is continental in scope and there are striking similarities in the setbacks the left is facing.

Tensions have surfaced in the FMLN in El Salvador along similar lines to the Sandinistas after its worse-than-expected election defeat last spring.

In Mexico divisions on the left have continued despite the historic conference at Aguascalients organised by the Zapatistas in an attempt to find a basis for unity in action.

In the August elections the challenge by Cardenas of the leftist PRD was considerably weaker than expected. Although widespread fraud occurred in the state of Chiapas the PRI government did not need to falsify the results nationwide as it did six years ago.

More recently the PT of Brazil trailed badly behind Cardoso in Brazil's presidential elections. Predictably, tensions have emerged in the PT over presidential candidate Lula's moderate campaign which, unlike his previous much closer bid for the presidency, failed to tackle the crippling burden of the foreign debt.

There are many good reasons why the left has done badly in all these processes - its lack of money compared to its opponents, its limited access to the media, its inexperience at electoral politics and so on. But as the Brazilian case shows most clearly support even among workers and the poor cannot be guaranteed if the party itself cannot offer a perpective that breaks with the requirements of the IMF and the World Bank. The fundamental problem facing the left in Latin America is that it still lacks a clear alternative to the policies of neo-liberalism.

The Sandinistas, the FMLN of El Salvador, the PRD of Mexico and the Brazilian PT are all affiliated to the Sao Paulo Forum. Four years after it was founded the forum faces a historic challenge to help the left develop new strategies to combat the neo-liberal offensive which is sentencing millions to poverty, hunger and death. ❑

# The pot still boils

**Sean Coyne reports from Nigeria on the prospects for a return to democracy.**

THE MILITARY regime in Nigeria has won itself a breathing space. At the end of the oil workers' strike, General Abacha boasted to the international community that "everything has now returned to normal".

Needless to say, what the General meant was that he and his supporters could resume the task of pillaging the national treasury and forestalling a return to democratic rule for as long as possible.

It is hard to describe the scale of official corruption by the ruling elite of Nigerian society. The World Bank and others, not known for their indiscretion in these matters, have stated that billions of petroleum dollars are spirited away annually by senior Government figures into private bank accounts.

The Clinton administration has refused visas for several senior Government representatives to travel to the US because of their known involvement in the laundering of drug money.

Meanwhile, Abiola, the successful candidate in last year's presidential elections continues to rot in prison, the poor are forced on to starvation levels of existence, and workers are told to "play their patriotic part in nation building" and moderate their wage claims accordingly.

The Nigerian Government is now one of the few military regimes left in Africa. It receives substantial aid from the British Government and uses a large part of it to buy British tanks and other arms.

The cynical hypocrisy of our Government is not confined to South East Asia. At the very same time that Lady Chalker trumpeted about the need for aid to be spent on sustainable development to benefit economic growth, and promote 'good governance' the Nigerian Government was imprisoning political activists, shooting protesting students, and banning trade unionists in a manner more reminiscent of apartheid than of the 'new dawn of democracy and development'.

These are dangerous times in Nigeria. The regime itself is riven by competing factions. The younger officer class have recognised that the continuous and brazen theft from the national coffers not only threatens the establishment of a democratic society, but their own future role within it.

As the African proverb states, when elephants dance, ants get crushed. A shoot out between these factions cannot be ruled out, and the cost in civilian lives could be horrendous.

In a further development, the National Constitution Conference established by Abacha, and largely made up of discredited corrupt officials from previous governments, has failed to produce an agreed programme for the transition to civilian rule.

In mid-November a bomb went off in Lagos International airport. This is a new and worrying development in the unfolding crisis. Many commentators have privately stated that they believe the bomb was the work of the regime itself, or at least a faction within it, to create a climate of terror as an excuse for wide-spread detentions and suppression.

As if to confirm the point, Beko Ransome-Kuti, the leader of the Campaign for Democracy, and an internationally recognised human rights activist, was rearrested for the fourth time and released only after a concerted international campaign was launched.

The workers movement in Nigeria, however, is far from finished. A period of reflection is under way, and pressure is building up among the many active affiliates of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) for a new offensive. They have recognised that despite the firepower of the regime, it is in fact in a very weak position.

There are millions of workers in Nigeria organised into unions. Despite repression, they have been able to maintain a national democratic structure, with roots deep into the workplace and community. Every major sector of the economy in unionised, and unions are giving expression to the anger and frustration of workers.

Even in the oil industry where the leadership of the unions has been banned and some imprisoned, the workers remain militantly connected to their unions, and refuse to accept any other authority.

The unions have taken the initiative to rectify some of the weaknesses of their immediate past. They have recognised the need for a new democratic leadership, elected on the basis of a programme of clear and unambiguous demands which reflect the needs of the mass of working people.

They have committed themselves to conduct their affairs transparently, and have begun to put pressure on the regime to cease its occupation of NLC headquarters. This is the type of 'good governance' we should be supporting.

The British TUC endorsed a positive motion on Nigeria at its last Congress. This was warmly welcomed by trade unionists in Nigeria, and the many Nigerians resident in this country. But that should not be the end of the matter.

International solidarity should be extended to those Nigerian unions now fighting for the right to operate freely, and pressure should be put on the British Government and others to stop propping up the regime.

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*Briefing* plans to hold a solidarity meeting with Nigerian workers early in the new year, with visiting comrades from Nigerian unions. If you or your organisation are interested in building such an event, please contact *Briefing*.


**Kingston Peace Council/CND**

**send New Year's Greetings.**

***Keep Campaigning for Peace.***

# No Hawks for Indonesia

**Will McMahon reports on the campaign to stop the arms trade with Indonesia.**




IN DILI, capital of occupied East Timor, thousands of youth with banners calling for independence clashed with Indonesian military and police. The hotel containing the world press, reporting on the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation conference, was surrounded by the crowd ensuring that the media could have no doubts about the nature of the Indonesian occupation of East Timor.

At the same time, 30 East Timorese students, risking life and limb, are occupying the grounds of the US embassy in Jakarta. The students are demanding the release of the leader of the East Timorese resistance, Xanana Gusmao and an end to the Indonesian occupation. Outside the embassy compound hundreds of Indonesian students and workers demonstrated in support of the East Timorese.

The occupation began on the 12th of November and signalled to the world an international day of action calling for an arms embargo on Indonesia and an end to its 20-year occupation of East Timor.

At the Indonesian Embassy in London's Grosvenor Square, hundreds gathered to support the international action. At British Aerospace plants in Warton, Lancashire and Stevenage over 100 protesters, mostly youth, trespassed onto the grounds to draw attention to the intended sale of Hawk ground attack planes to Indonesia. Across Britain there were over 40 street events drawing the public's attention to the dictatorship in Jakarta and its genocide in East Timor.

In the first week of November Sukmaji Indro Thayhono, a leading human rights campaigner, on the British leg of a European tour organised by the European Network Against The Arms Trade, explained that the Suharto regime used the weaponry supplied by Britain to terrorise the population. He explained that the regime was becoming more desperate in the face of the emergence of the independent mass trade union movement, the SPSI, and the growing democratic movement. Clearly unable to maintain the stability of its rule through consent, Suharto aims to further use coercion. Already the SPSI and newspapers critical of the regime have been banned. Only recently, Muchtar Pak Palian, a leading trade unionist was jailed for three years on trumped-up charges linked to the mass strike wave of May this year.

The relationship between the British ruling class and the Indonesian regime has never been closer. A massive arms deal is on the cards which matches the growing amount of British capital flowing into Indonesia. Included in this deal is the selling of Scorpion Light Tanks which can only be used for one thing — internal repression. Labour movement activists are calling on the British labour movement to oppose the delivery of these tanks and of all military equipment so that they cannot be used against the mass democratic movement.

The British left, with honourable exceptions, has been painfully silent on Indonesia and East Timor. It is now time to build the united front campaign on this issue. All labour movement, student and other internationalist organisations should sponsor the coalition "Stop The Hawks - No Arms to Indonesia". Already UNISON and the FBU have put their names to the coalition.

There are three things that socialists can do immediately to support the East Timorese and the struggle for democracy in Indonesia.

- Order a 'Stop The Hawks' action pack and get your Labour Party ward, CLP and/or trade union branch etc to sponsor the campaign. Sponsorship is free but a donation would help the coalition.
- Join the lobby, calling for a military embargo and an end to the Hawk deal outside the House of Commons on the 7th December at 7 pm.
- Come to the launch of the Hawk Coalition's Year of Action where John Pilger will be the guest speaker.

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An action pack is available from the coalition for the price of £1 - all cheques payable to Stop the Hawks. Write to Stop the Hawks c/o NPC, 88 Islington High Street, London N1 8EG. Call 071 281 0297 for further details.

## Public Meeting

***Campaign Against Arms Trade***

**To launch a year of action against the sale of Hawk military aircraft to Indonesia and call for a military embargo.**

**7.30pm, Tuesday 13th December**
**Friends Meeting House**
**Euston Road**
**(opposite Euston Station)**

REVIEWS REVIEWS REVIEWS REVIEWS

# Inside the whale

**Mike Phipps reviews two books by very different American journalists.**

*The Agenda:*
*Inside the Clinton White House*
*by Bob Woodward,*
*published by*
*Simon & Schuster, £14.99*

THIS SPRAWLING book about how Clinton's presidency got blown off course makes one big assumption: that there was a clear course in the first place. Still, it's a compelling read: Bob Woodward interviewed hundreds of officials and read piles of internal memos to see how the Clinton White House works. His focus is on the administration's attempt to draft and then pass America's biggest ever deficit reduction package which scraped through Congress last year on the casting vote of the Senate President.

Clinton's political personality emerges as more complex than the tabloid caricature. This is an intellectual president, more at home with difficult ideas than his predecessors but too engrossed in details, a policy junkie.

Over and over Clinton, described by Treasury Secretary Lloyd Bentsen as the "meetingest" fellow he had ever met, organises open-ended strategy discussions with his aides as a substitute for making a decision. As he is drawn ever more into detailed specifics, it is repeatedly Hillary - a key player in the administration - who reminds everyone of the bigger picture.

The second facet that emerges is Clinton's naivete - at the power of Wall Street to ruin his economic policy and at the back-scratching Washington culture, leagues away from less sophisticated Arkansas. As these realities dawn on him, the famous Clinton rages occur, expressions of his impotence. "Where are all the Democrats?" Clinton bellows at one meeting of staffers. "We're all Eisenhower Republicans here and we are fighting the Reagan Republicans. We stand for lower deficits and free trade and the bond market. Isn't that great?"

The elements that are making Clinton's presidency a failure, even for his own supporters, are all here: policy incoherence, poor co-ordination, inexperience, internal rivalry and political failings of key players, such as Chief of Staff McLarty who was sacked soon after this book appeared. It's an absorbing and accessible read.

*Roll Over Che Guevara*
*by Marc Cooper,*
*published by Verso, £18.95,*

THIS SELECTION of articles, which appeared originally in New York's radical *Village Voice*, rivals the best of Martha Gelhorn's reportage for style and perception. Cooper has the knack of combining snappy interviews with deeper insights: his articles from Los Angeles before and after the 1992 riots put to shame much contemporary reporting by their perspective on the bankrupt city politics behind the events.

The title piece is part of a tough left-wing critique of contemporary Cuba. Cooper's starting-point is the defence of Cuba's revolutionary traditions but he observes with irony that photos of Che Guevara, priced only in dollars, could legally be bought only by tourists.

My favourite piece was a report from Nicaragua which included a welcome attack on "the ubiquitous PJ O'Rourke from Rolling Stone who began writing the same piece he always does as soon as he hit the Sandino airport and, after less than two minutes of baggage delay, was heard to mutter loudly, 'Typical Communist luggage service'."

Why should writers, regardless of politics, so often pretend to be comrades in art?

# Looking beyond the silly costumes

**David Pope reviews the recent production of Wagner's Ring at Covent Garden.**

PRODUCTIONS OF Richard Wagner's *Der Ring Des Nibelungen* have often aroused as much controversy as attempts to revise Clause IV. It is not perhaps surprising that the eagerly-awaited recent production by Richard Jones at Covent Garden should have been greeted with a general thumbs down. Many of the costumes and settings seemed designed to send up the work and although a deeper analysis revealed more food for thought, the lack of any identifiable concept was disappointing.

Traditionally, interpretations of Wagner's great cycle are divided into two schools. One, embodied by George Bernard Shaw, sees the *Ring* as a socialist vision of the destruction of bourgeois society.

The other sees it as a parable of a conflict between mutually exclusive aims of power and love. There are of course many levels within these theories and other views also exist: Covent Garden's programme talked about the conflict between nature and society. Although there were moments of revelation in this new production, it never seemed to be based on one of the above or any other discernible concept.

In *Das Rheingold*, the ridiculous costumes worn by many of the cast seemed to distract from whatever intentions the production team may have had. The Rhinemaidens were clad in bulging rubber fleshsuits and Alberich wore a bowler hat and diver's flippers. Mercifully, some of the characters were treated with some thought. The giants Fafner and Fasolt were portrayed as siamese twins (separated when Fafner

kills Fasolt) and the depiction of Freia, goddess of youth, as an autistic woman-child was particularly moving.

The rest of the production failed to make up for the sartorial gimmicks. It is difficult to see what purpose is served by having an illuminated passenger aircraft crossing the stage between the first and second scenes, or by suspending an anvil in mid-air. At the end, there was a moment of insight as instead of entering Valhalla, the gods chased an elusive gold star. Unfortunately, this was not appreciated by the audience, whose patience was clearly exhausted by the series of caricatures. A storm of booing greeted the production team at their curtain call.

In *Die Walkure*, there was little more by way of concept but the more restrained production was less distracting. To emphasise the links between nature and society, a movement group dressed in blue had represented the Rhine the previous evening; here, wearing green, they depicted the forest in the second act.

The first act duet between Sieglinde and Siegmund did not catch fire but I have not previously seen the last scene between Wotan and Brunnhilde more movingly sung and portrayed than it was here.

There were still some moments of burlesque, particularly the depiction of the Valkyries as a bunch of high school girls in gym skirts and tracksuits. The audience seemed relieved to escape so lightly and the applause for the production team outweighed the boos.

The performances should not go without comment and these were much more satisfying. The conducting and orchestra playing were occasionally slightly underpowered but had the virtue of never drowning out the singing.

John Tomlinson as Wotan and Ekkehard Wlaschiha as Alberich were in fine voice and dominated the stage. As Brunnhilde, Deborah Polaski was supposed to be suffering from a throat infection but there was little evidence of this. Her singing was authoritative and her performance touching.

The *Ring* continues next March with *Siegfried*. I hope that by then the production team will have developed some genuine ideas. Some may prefer opera staged without any 'concept' but we are entitled to more substantial things to discuss than the silliness of the costumes. Despite my criticisms, I can hardly wait. ❑

## Brown sauce

Socialist Campaign Group member, **Alex Falconer** MEP shares a constituency office with **Gordon Brown**.

The recent statement by half the EPLP (32 MEPs out of 62) in support of Clause IV has been pinned to the office door, where **Brown** must see it every time he comes in to his office.

## Desperate

***Labour Party News*** must be getting desperate for funds, including an insert from *Leave Country Sports Alone*, supposedly a Labour supporters pro-hunt group that has yet to attract a single MP to its membership. Whilst understanding that *LPN* needs commercial sponsorship for its mailings, surely accepting an insert from a group specifically established to oppose Party policy against hunting is going too far? What next, a colour feature on Blair Baiting and Cook Fighting?

## One more cut

**Bernard Ingham**, former press officer to Margaret Thatcher has been giving some sound advice to **Alastair Campbell**, new press officer to Tony Blair. The former Labour councillor said: "Slit Peter Mandelson's throat."

"I was speaking metaphorically," he later wrote in *PR Week*.

While on the subject of **Mandelson**, you have to wonder if the spin doctor is still on target, as apparently his Hartlepool constituency failed to get either its conference resolution or delegate's details in on time.

## Armed Junkets

Is the military just shedding crocodile tears over the defence cuts? Last year no less than £4.6 million was spent on **regimental dinners, drinks parties and refreshments** for the top brass. Such spending has soared by 15 per cent over the past two years. Some regiments and naval bases even have their own **vintage wine** cellars. One party on board a naval refuelling ship cost £78,000. And all you get in the *Briefing* office is tea and biscuits.

## Gizza job

Tories are always defending the right of MPs to have other jobs on the grounds that it keeps them in touch with the real world. However the Register of Members' Interests shows no evidence of MPs working part-time as nurses, teachers or factory workers.

The most common entries are consultant, adviser, director, writer and occupations to do with the legal profession. Several Tory MPs stand out for the amount of moonlighting that they do. **Charles Goodson-Wickes** (Wimbledon) has six paid directorships and lists seven other forms of remunerated employment.

**Patrick Nicholls** (Teignbridge) is consultant or adviser to nine companies or organisations and also a partner in a firm of solicitors. **Sir Marcus Fox** (Shipley) lists seven paid directorships of companies ranging from contract cleaning through group investment to food processing.

Other MPs have more down to earth interests. **Quentin Davies** (Stamford and Spalding) owns "a small flock of sheep." Does he mean the Cabinet?




## Caring councillor

**Cllr Phil Kelly**, Chair of Islington Council's Education Committee, is no stranger to controversy.

In 1993, he closed two council nurseries, defending the closure to Party activists, the press and community and angry workers and parents who occupied the nurseries for over six months. The Council was eventually instructed through the Labour Party to reopen one of the nurseries.

Even after that decision had been taken through the Party's democratic structures, **Kelly** attempted to sabotage it. He publicly told parents protesting against the closure to 'fuck off' - a tactful comment from a local politician. The second nursery is still lying empty, and vandalised.

**Kelly** appears not to have learnt any lessons - this year's round of cuts included proposals to close another Council nursery, thankfully rejected after further public protest.

During **Kelly**'s tenure as editor of *Tribune*, the paper was widely regarded as plumbing new depths of boredom and sycophancy to the Labour front bench. He left *Tribune* to work for that well-known socially-conscious organisation, the Channel Tunnel. He publicly protested against the banning of *Socialist Organiser*, but within Islington will argue for disciplinary measures against any Councillor who takes a principled stand.

He fails to qualify for *Briefing*'s prestigious Class Traitor of the Month, as having come from the Young Liberals he never had any socialist principles to betray.

## Revolutionary shit

The strength of radical youth protest against road building schemes appears to have passed the **Revolutionary Communist Party** by. Poo-pooing the very idea of such protests, a spokesperson told *The Big Issue*, "If we went back to the horse and trap we'd be knee deep in shit. It's only through roads that anyone became more than narrow minded peasants. The more roads the better as far as I'm concerned."

Next week in *Living Marxism*, "How the Luddites got it wrong."

## Sheep dog trainer?

**EPS Training** is offering the chance of two intensive days of personalised coaching by Britain's Master Trainer. It's **Greville Janner QC**, Labour MP for Leicester West, whose "blend of candid critique, incisive guidance, humour and discretion ensures an immediate and lasting improvement in your performance."

The cost of these courses is a mere £995 + VAT per person.

# Socialist greetings

## from Alf Lomas MEP

### Let's make sure the 'modernisers' don't lose us another General Election

***Keep Clause IV and campaign for radical socialist policies***



GROUP
OF THE PARTY OF
EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS

## Briefing Quiz

***Briefing's politically incorrect quiz***
**8pm sharp**
**Saturday 3rd December**
**Lucas Arms**
**245 Grays Inn Road, London WC1**
**Quiz Inquisitor: Leonora Lloyd**
**£3/£2**

## Memorial meeting

**for the life of**

***Bob Cryer MP***

**Chaired by Dennis Skinner**

**Grand Committee Room**
**House of Commons**
**6-8pm, November 30th.**

## Molesey Branch

**sends**
**New Year's greetings**

## Hook and Chessington BLP

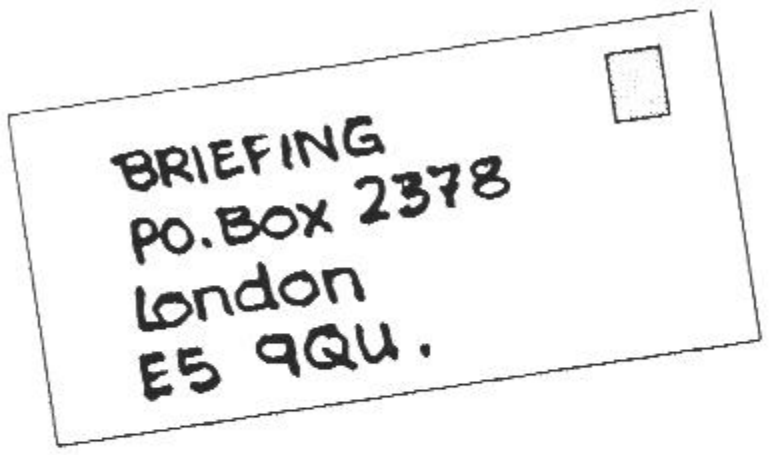
**send**
**New Year's greetings**

## Welfare State Network

***Lobby Parliament on Budget Day Against the introduction of the Job Seekers' Allowance and Incapacity Benefit.***

**Assemble at the lobby gate outside Parliament from 1.30pm, 29th November.**

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




Since World War Two we have witnessed the increasing globalisation of capital and markets. This has been particularly but not exclusively noticeable in the world car industry. There is scarcely any such thing as a British car any more. We as socialists are thus faced with the problem of how to combat an international situation by means of a national Parliament.

A socialist government must nationalise the commanding heights of the economy without compensation to the owners and share-holders beyond guaranteeing them the same treatment as all other workers and citizens. Included in our programme for nationalisation must be cars and shipbuilding (engineering), building, the media and financial institutions as well as the re-nationalisation of what has been privatised in the interim fifteen years. Anything less than this will quickly lead to that government's demise and replacement by something much more right-wing.

In the London Borough of Kingston we have lost at least 4,000 jobs through the closure of just one plant - British Aerospace which produced parts for the Harrier Hawk aircraft. The site of this plant is currently to be developed for housing. The British motor-bike industry needs to be re-founded to take its place but we need other and lots of ideas and proposals too. Clearly we can do little unless we own things.

Until now the Labour Party leaders have pursued a nationalist policy of protecting British industry from foreign competition. Under Blair, the policy is looking very much as if it will change to one of becoming part of business and industry and totally jettisoning the trade unions and working class interests - in other words a veritably new Tory Party and not a new Labour Party.

Why is this happening? The collapse of the USSR is the clearest possible indication and expression that the epoch of imperialism has reached what Leon Trotsky described in *In Defence of Marxism* as the age of neo-barbarism which he said would be far worse than anything that had gone before. The whole issue of sleaze points to the bourgeoisie as a class without a future progressive role.

For revolutionary socialists the call for nationalisation of a particular branch of industry has a revolutionary significance. It is a transitional demand and one that serves to draw workers towards revolutionary politics as well as protecting class interests.

The British Labour Party as a creation of the epoch of imperialism has now run its course in the same way as the bourgeoisie. Our Party is now clearly doomed to split. Under Blair the likely scenario must be for his defeat in the battle over Clause IV with a rump of right-wing social democracy following him.

That will still leave us with the problem of Clause IV socialism, Scargillism and Morrisonian nationalisation juxtaposed to the revolutionary road.

*Yours,*
*John Hayball,*
*Surbiton CLP.*

It is amusing that Peter Mandelson, who spends most of his life circulating rumour and innuendo about anyone with whom he disagrees, considers *Briefing* a muck-raking, sectarian rag.

On a more serious note, it is important that any attempt by him and his ilk to remove the Party's commitment to common ownership embodied in Clause IV is resisted.

Equality and social justice can only be achieved by ensuring shared control of wealth. Injustice, poverty and discrimination are essential elements of capitalism and the market system. The only way they can ever be overcome is through common ownership.

The Tories understand this perfectly well which is why Clause IV and its clear commitment to transferring wealth control comes under specific attack.

To remove it or water it down into some woolly commitment to a social market (whatever that is), will be a signal to the electorate that Labour is no longer committed to changing society but only in managing the inefficiency and injustice which is our current system.

This will, of course, be the start of a progression to a time when only the colour of the rosette differentiates the rival parties. This may, of course, suit Mandelson et al. who are far more concerned with achieving the trappings of power than doing anything to benefit the people of Britain.

*Yours,*
*Pat Hayes,*
*Leyton.*


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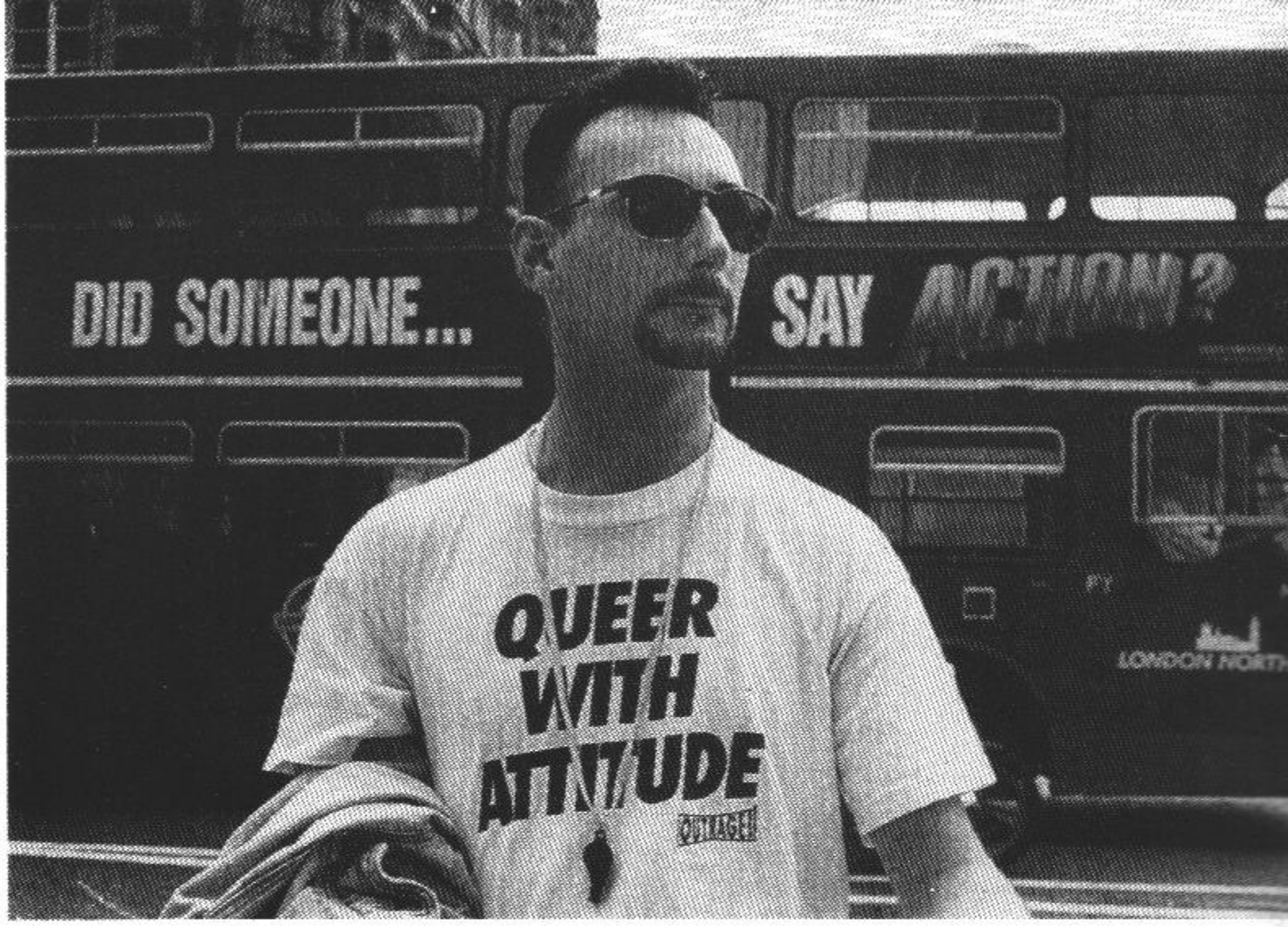



**PHOTO from *Pride and Protest: Celebrate 25 Years of Lesbian and Gay Visibility and Activism*, (Cassell, £6.99).**

# Looking after our own

**Self reliance is the X factor in queer politics. Peter Tatchell argues that while straight solidarity is valued, self-reliance is the key to queer emancipation.**

OVER THE last quarter of a century since the 1967 Sexual Offences Act, there has not been a single instance of significant lesbian and gay law reform. Parliament has repeatedly rejected calls for the repeal of homophobic laws. Instead, the only substantive legislative changes since 1967 have increased discrimination.

In 1988, Section 28 of the Local Government Act outlawed the "promotion" of homosexuality by local authorities. Three years later, Clause 25 (now Section 31) of the Criminal Justice Act reclassified many forms of consenting gay behaviour as "serious" sex crimes and empowered judges to pass longer deterrent sentences.

While the rest of Europe has scrapped many homophobic laws, Britain still has on its statute books anti-gay legislation which originated in the Victorian era. Thousands of gays are still being arrested for consensual cottaging, cruising and sex with 16 year olds. Many others continue to be denied employment, child custody, donor insemination, fostering/adoption, political asylum and the legal recognition of their partnerships.

Despite this, the quality of life for most lesbians and gay men has dramatically improved over the last two decades. This has been largely the result of our own self-help initiatives.

We have created a safe and supportive lesbian and gay community, with switchboards and social centres, bars, advice organisations, publishers and bookshops, counselling and befriending services, AIDS helplines, bereavement and rape survivor networks and much more.

When straight society has ignored our needs we've responded by looking after our own. Over the years, these self-help efforts have made a huge difference to millions of lesbians and gay men. It's now much easier to get positive information about homosexuality, feel a sense of self-worth, come out, socialise with friends, meet a partner, challenge discrimination and get help when in need.

In just over two decades, our own initiatives have created a large, supportive, visible, self-confident and influential lesbian and gay community for the first time in human history. Few of these positive changes have been due to straight politicians. Queers have done it for themselves.

Of course, there have been some honourable exceptions, such as left-wing MPs and Labour councils like the GLC. However, if the post-1967 period has taught us anything it is that most of the time we cannot depend on mainstream political parties. They have repeatedly failed to deliver law reform. For most politicians, lesbian and gay rights are a low priority meaning that our issues are often the last to be adopted and first to be dumped.

In contrast, by focusing on self-help we are less at the mercy of heterosexual-dominated institutions and more in control of our own destiny. It doesn't mean that we always succeed but with self-reliance there are fewer externally-imposed barriers.

By concentrating on creating our own self-affirming community we don't have to justify ourselves or plead with heterosexuals for acceptance.

Self-reliance represents our refusal to conform and defer to a homophobic society and our dissent from the demand that we participate in society on heterosexual terms.

By developing the lesbian and gay community as a focus of counter-culture and counter-power, we are helping to subvert and undermine the ideas and institutions that sustain heterosexual supremacism.

In effect, we are withdrawing our allegiance from the dominant culture and denying it moral legitimacy.

Self-reliance does not mean that we retreat into our own separatist ghetto, give up the campaign for equal rights, or reject working with others suffering discrimination. On the contrary, it simply means that we make lesbian and gay self-help and community empowerment our priority. From a position of strength we will be better able to make effective alliances with others fighting discrimination and to bargain with straight society for meaningful legislative changes. ❑

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