JULY 1994 £1

BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

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- The left and the leadership
- Behind the Rwandan massacres
- Kurds split
- Women Against Pit Closures
- Tatchell on queer sex



LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

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Save our post!

The Union of Communication Workers has mounted a campaign against the privatisation of the Post Office - it claims that second deliveries will come under attack, meaning job losses, as will the Postal Cadet Scheme which enables youngsters in the capital to get and keep jobs.

Hugh Lenaghan, the union's regional secretary for London, commented: "The claims made by this government that a privatisation of 51 per cent of Royal Mail Letters and Parcelforce will leave the Crown Office network intact is, of course, pure myth."

Blair-bites

At a conference hosted by the *Guardian* - leading proponents of a Lib-Lab pact - Tony Blair declared that there was no need for "pacts or deals" with anyone. Rather, it was necessary to build a "new coalition of support, based on a broad national appeal that transcends traditional electoral divisions".

Who needs pacts when you are prepared to junk your "traditional" supporters in favour of fine sounding words that will appeal to all? Blair has only two speeches - rather fewer than his faces - one on law and order, the other on the need for a new "active society", and it was the latter that got its umpteenth airing on this particular occasion.

Blair wants to build on "a set of principles and beliefs based around the notion of a strong and active society as necessary to advance the individual" - whatever that means. He has accepted Thatcherism's emphasis on individual self-help, with an added dash of "community" help for those who can't cut it.

Far from being modern, these are Victorian values with a vengeance, even if Blair promises that his version of the poor-house is going to be more humanitarian.

Sit. vac.

Sorry to ruin Tony Benn's breakfast, but a check on the Labour Party rules reveals that vacancies in the Constituency Section of the NEC are filled by the runners-up in last year's elections.

After the leadership ballot there will be at least one and possibly two vacancies - and the top runners-up last year were Benn and Dennis Skinner.

Of course, they would only be elevated to the NEC for a few months, but we can count on them to give the new leader a few uneasy moments.

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A rotten choice - but a choice nonetheless



THERE IS NO denying the poverty of choice in Labour's leadership election. All the candidates belong to the Shadow Cabinet elite which has strangled the life out of the Party over the last decade.

As we go to press, Margaret Beckett and John Prescott are hinting that a Labour government under their leadership might repeal the Tory anti-union laws. Neither, of course, voted for this policy on the Party's National Executive in the late 80s and early 90s. But both are keen to secure the votes of Party members unhappy with the modernisers' antipathy to trades unionism.

In contrast, Blair lets the media do the talking for him. One of his key spokespersons has been Martin Kettle, the former *Marxism Today* acolyte and currently deputy editor of the *Guardian*. He sees Blair as the torchbearer for a "new progressive agenda" - in which mass movements and class interests count for nothing. This is not so much a politics for a post-Tory age, as Kettle claims, as for a post-Labour one. Blair represents the completion and extension of Kinnock's failed programme for recasting Labour as the champions of a non-existent "one nation" consensus.

The components of the bleak politics of Blairism are only too familiar: a break with the unions, permanent acquiescence to the free market and its European and global instruments, abandonment of any aspirations to common ownership, total concentration of power in the Parliamentary Labour Party, and rejection of the claims of women, black people and other oppressed groups. It is a recipe for a deeply conservative, professionalised politics dominated by an unaccountable media-Westminster axis.

This is precisely what voters elsewhere in Europe have been rejecting in droves. Too often, the far right has picked up the pieces - and there are clear signs that this will happen here as well.

The not very hidden agenda in all this is a pact with the Liberal Democrats, the prospect of which alienates far more voters than it attracts, and which would make it impossible for a Labour government to deliver anything of substance to its supporters.

What has crippled the rank and file of the movement in recent years and made it easy prey to the modernisers is the abiding faith in the myth of "electability", whose latest incarnation is Blair. But there is no evidence that Blair is especially electable or even that he can win votes for Labour in the south. His single transferable platitudes will wear thin under the media spotlight. His allegedly amazing achievement in giving Labour the edge over the Tories on "law and order" is not what it's cracked up to be. Gallup polls show that since 1992 the proportion of voters preferring Labour to Conservative over key issues has risen by 37% over tax, 26% over employment, 20% over education and a mere 17% over "law and order".

It must be pleasant for our rulers and their propagandists to imagine that our society is divided by geography, not class, and that there is a middle-of-the-road, consensus-seeking southern voter waiting to be snapped up by an anti-Tory political alliance. But in the recent Euro-election southern voters have shown themselves surprisingly resistant to the allure of the Lib Dems. Increasingly, it is clear that Labour's major target group is the 5.2 million working class adults who did not vote in 1992 and who are spread out in constituencies in all regions of the country. Without mobilising a substantial number of these non-voters, Labour simply cannot win a general election. Does anyone believe Blair can get them to the ballot box?

In the media campaign for Blair we are witnessing outside interference in labour movement politics on an unprecedented scale. The British establishment assumes that the next government will be a Labour government and its minions are pulling out all the stops to ensure that their man has his hand on the tiller. What the whole leadership circus shows is the fear with which the ruling class still regards that inert giant, the labour movement. It has also highlighted the division not so much between left and right but between the base of the movement - committed to public ownership, defence cuts, the welfare state, strong trades unions and steeply progressive taxation - and the Parliamentary elite, which long ago abandoned those commitments. The only way that division can be expressed in this election is through a vote for either Beckett or Prescott against Blair, the "liquidationist" candidate.

It is vital for Labour that it shows it can resist the enormous pressures being placed on it by interests hostile to those it represents. A substantial vote against Blair will help check the modernisers and will increase confidence at the base of the movement. It is a crucial part of the long-term battle to turn the tide of defeat and to elect a Labour government that will actually make a difference for the working class.

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

***Labour Briefing* is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. It is managed by an elected National Editorial Board whose meetings are open to all supporters. The next EB will meet on August 7th. 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 September 9th.

***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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LABOUR PARTY

A question of leadership

TO STAND or not to stand? That was the question that preoccupied many on the left in the weeks running up to the closure of nominations for the Labour leadership on June 16th.

Mike Marqusee
Political correspondent

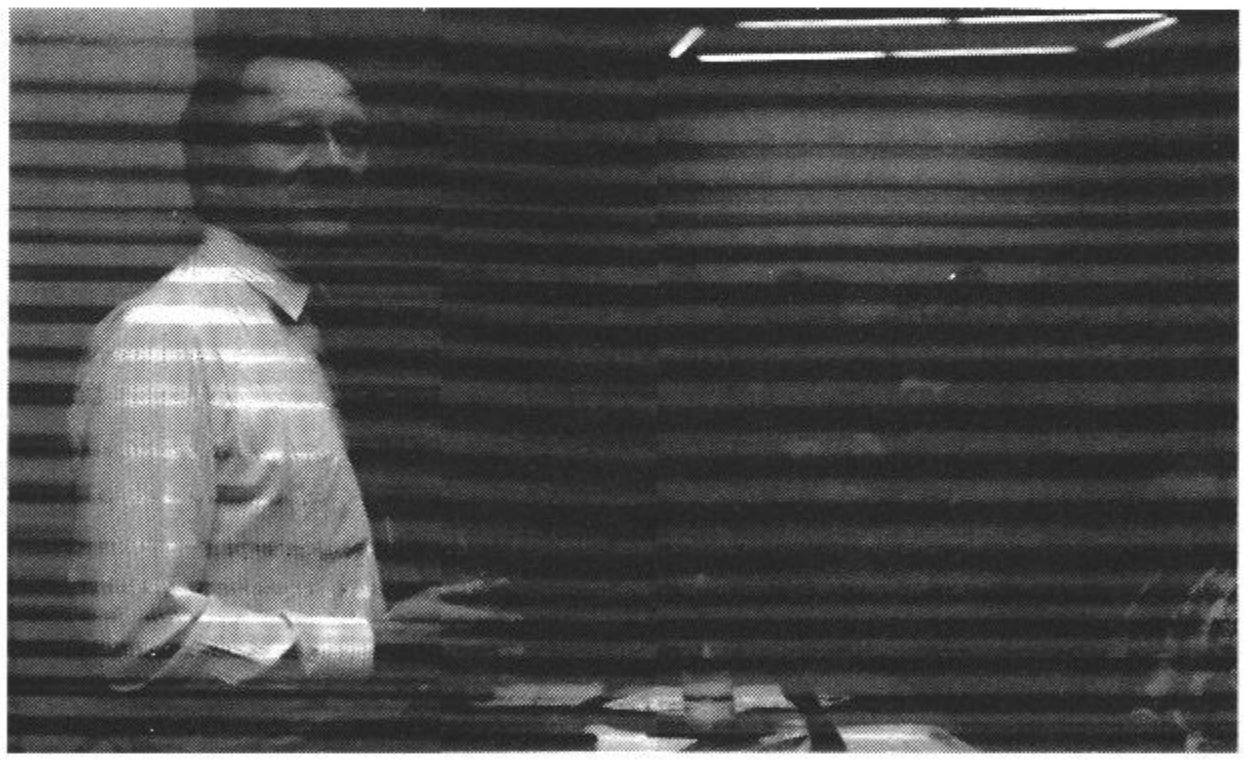


PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

Collective coherence and discipline have never been the Socialist Campaign Group's strong suits. In 1992, the Group voted for a leadership contest but only 13 MPs (less than half its members) actually nominated Ken Livingstone for leader. However, with the growth of the SCG Supporters Network and the positive approach of SCG Secretary Alan Simpson and Chair Malcolm Chisholm, the Group has taken on a new lease on life and even attracted fresh recruits for the first time since 1987.

At the first meeting of the SCG MPs after John Smith's death, there was a frank and thorough discussion of the merits of standing a candidate as opposed to focusing on policies. Once again, the only Group member prepared to stand was Livingstone. It was clear that most of the MPs were uneasy about a leadership bid, not least because of the difficulty of securing the required 34 nominations. It was agreed that Livingstone should take soundings and come back to the Group with evidence that he could get the nominations before a final decision on a candidacy was taken.

The Group membership of 28 meant that at least six non-SCG MPs would need to sign on to push any left candidate over the threshold. In addition, it was always clear that a number of SCG MPs would not nominate Livingstone no matter what the Group as a whole decided.

Within days of the SCG meeting, the papers were full of stories to the effect that Livingstone was looking for the six non-SCG MPs to back his campaign. Ken also announced that if Margaret Beckett stood he would support her.

Once the Group's deliberations were exposed in the media, confidence in the process among the MPs was undermined. They were, in addition, coming under pressure to support either Beckett or Prescott.

At the Supporters Network conference in Manchester it was clear that most grass roots activists wanted the SCG to stand a candidate. Livingstone, who had never before shown the slightest interest in the Network, took its decision as his cue to announce he was standing for leader. Media discussion of his candidacy focused, inevitably, on his inability to get the 34 nominations. Four days later, he announced his withdrawal from the contest - hours before the SCG MPs were due to meet to make a final decision.

"The resolutions from the Network conference were put clearly and positively to the Campaign Group meeting," Alan Simpson explained. "I want to stress the seriousness with which the Group considered the call to stand a candidate of our own. Had that been a viable option the Group would probably have gone for it. In the circumstances, it wasn't."

The Group decided against offering its collective endorsement to any of the other candidates, though most ended up nominating Beckett. In the end, the argument over a left candidate proved no more than a sideshow. Livingstone's antics in the media made it harder for the left both in Parliament and in the movement as a whole to act collectively to make an impact on the leadership contest. ❑

Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network

"A manifesto without candidates - in contrast to the candidates without a manifesto" - Tony Benn

Public meeting

Socialism and the leadership election

with Campaign Group MPs

Tuesday, July 5th, 7:30 pm
Conway Hall
(Holborn tube)
Central London

What's the big idea?

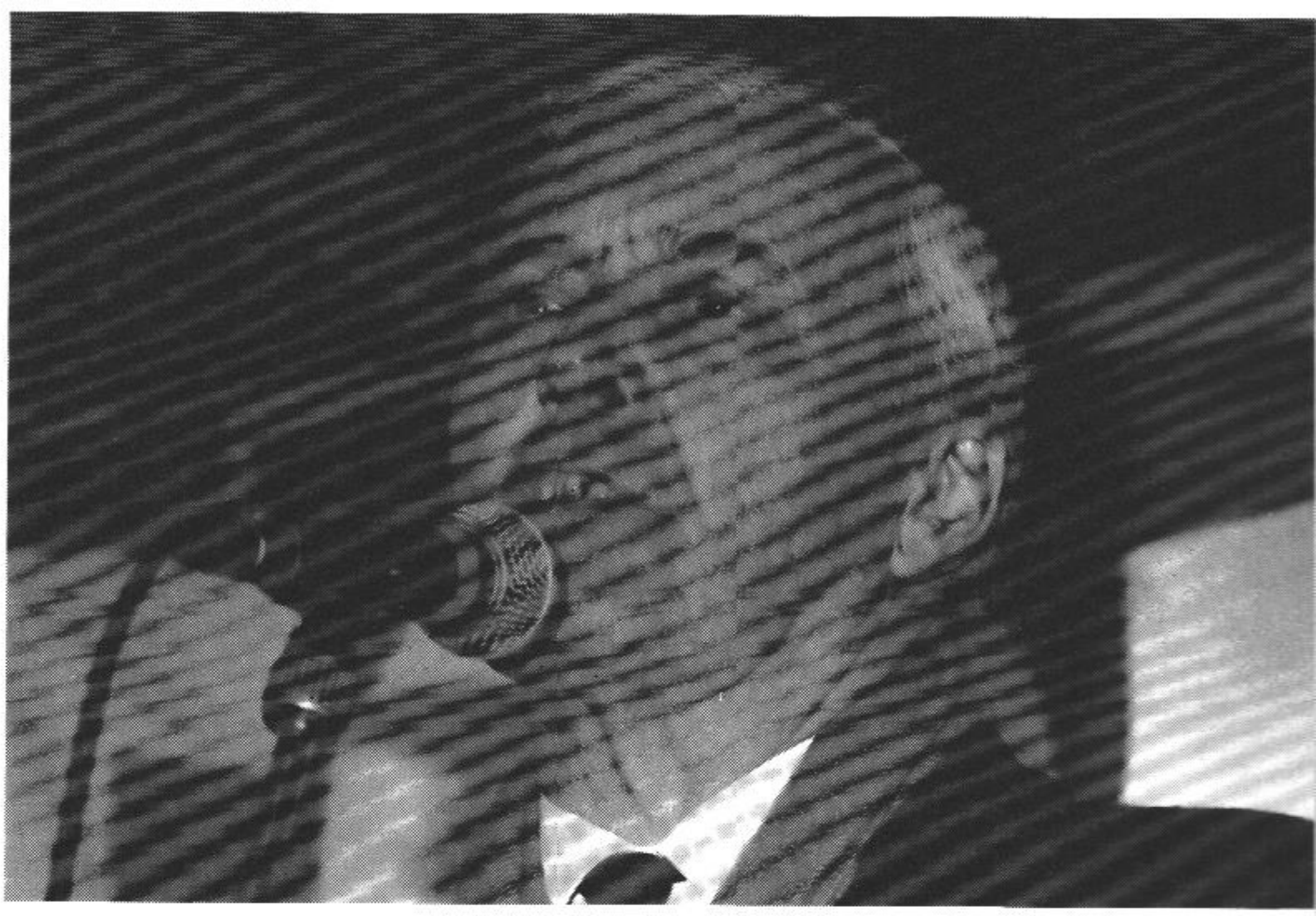


PHOTO: Tim Nolan

In the midst of a Labour leadership race bereft of radicalism and ideas, JOHN CRYER found Tony Benn, a former challenger himself, ever optimistic.

TONY BENN remains ever cheerful about the future of the Labour movement, even in the face of a leadership race which is desperately short on radicalism but big on personal ambition and the prospect of a new leader - one Anthony Charles Linton Blair - who will be the first individual to hold such a position without any real roots in the Labour Party or movement.

But Benn has seen it all before, right back to 1929 when his father served in MacDonald's second Cabinet. A cursory reading of the then Labour leader's speeches reveals that he was a man more interested in the pursuit of power than political principle, almost completely lacking any real socialist ideology and, in common with a certain Neil Kinnock, given to empty verbosity.

Two years later, of course, MacDonald connived with Stanley Baldwin in the creation of the "national" government, Labour was reduced to under 50 MPs with Benn senior losing his own seat and newspapers, magazines, radio broadcasts and even whole books were devoted to recording the death of the Labour Party.

Yet, 14 years later when Tony Benn was a young pilot and his father was back in Parliament, Clement Attlee led the Party to the most crushing victory enjoyed by any party since 1906.

MacDonald's heirs are referred to now as the "modernisers", a term Benn treats with some derision: "The modernisers are committed to the status quo. It's curious to call yourself a moderniser when your main belief is in the economic theory of Adam Smith, who lived 100 years before Marx, and when you think that nuclear weapons are essential when we don't need them, we can't afford them and we haven't really got them anyway because the US effectively controls them.

"The modernisers insist that they are committed to a 'dynamic, free-market economy', which means they are committed to capitalism. There are really grave possibilities in that we might well end up following the policies of Felipe Gonzalez in Spain or Mitterrand in France, whose Socialist Party has just suffered a huge defeat.

"But I remain hopeful because I think policies are determined by the public, not by politicians. Our leaders are now far behind public opinion." Tony Benn sees a growing tide of anger and radicalism in public opinion, a feeling that many Party and trade union activists are noting and which has led to the solid strike by signal operators and perhaps the imminent stoppage by train drivers.

Yet the leadership contenders seem unable to capture the public mood and imagination. "It's a great pity not to take advantage of the opportunity created by any election within the Labour Party to lay the foundations for an election victory. Just attacking the Tories, which is all that we've been doing, and calling for a new minister to resign every week, doesn't impress the public because they know quite well that this is a rotten government but what they want to know is what will we do instead.

"The real problem we have is that nine million people don't vote and they are all people who would benefit from a Labour government but they won't vote because they don't believe Labour would do anything to help them.

"So we're in the position of floating along wasting every precious moment which might be used to build the foundations of a Labour success. I think there's a change of opinion which makes the prospects of a Labour victory very much brighter but when we get there we'll face some very great problems because international capital will demand even greater deflation from a Labour government than from a Tory government simply because it's a Labour government - they'll always give the Tories enough flexibility to get re-elected but they want Labour to lose.

"I think we're living in a fool's paradise if we think that being kind to the City and distancing ourselves from the unions will either necessarily give us victory or give us the authority to tackle the immense problems which will face us when we get into office."

Tony Benn finds it especially tragic that during this leadership race no socialist analysis is being brought to bear on the situation.

"We should learn from the experience of Thatcher. She was a teacher - she hammered home her ideas unrelentingly. We, too, should be teaching ideas — of socialism." ❑

Leading with the left

More than 350 left activists crowded into the ornate rooms of Manchester Town Hall for the annual conference of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network on June 11th. JOHN CRYER and DOROTHY MACEDO report.

THE MAIN theme of the day was the policies Labour needs for full employment, but inevitably there was also debate on the attitude the left should take towards the leadership election.

Seumas Milne, addressing the opening plenary, argued that there was a potential consensus within the Labour movement for a radical agenda including the maintenance of universal benefits, full employment, restoration of trade union rights, rebuilding of the public sector, a cut in arms spending and action against speculators in the City of London.

"None of these demands is revolutionary," he said. "But in the context of British capitalism today they would have very far-reaching consequences and would command support from most unions affiliated to the Labour Party, a significant proportion of what used to be termed the soft left, or Tribune left, the Campaign Group and a majority of CLPs."

Milne exploded the myth that it would be too expensive to bring privatised utilities back into public ownership and argued that the official Labour Party line - that it is not necessary to own something in order to control it - would put a Labour administration at a tremendous disadvantage. The likelihood was that it would once again be "blown off course" by a financial crisis, leading to the return of a Tory government.

Despite a sore throat and a failing voice, Sylvia Pye gave a moving account of the year-long battle waged by Women Against Pit Closures to defend Parkside, the last deep mine in Lancashire.

"The battle between the miners and the government has never been about a market for coal," she said. "There is a market out there but it has been destroyed by the government in an act of vengeance." British Coal, she explained, has now obtained the legal right to sue her personally for costs incurred in the fight for Parkside.

During the afternoon session, workshops discussed arms conversion, public ownership, international strategies, unemployment and racism, the welfare state and trade union strategies.

Resolutions resulting from the workshops included a demand that Labour leadership contenders explain their strategy for arms conversion in view of the expected contraction of 15% in the British arms industry over the next five years.

Conference also called for an extension of public ownership and investment, repeal of the Asylum Bill, closure of Campsfield Detention Centre and maintenance of universal benefits. It supported the repeal of anti-trade union legislation, welcomed the links between the SCGSN and the Sao Paulo Forum (arguably the single most important development on the left at present) and pressed for greater unity between the various Broad Left groups in the trade union movement.

Jeremy Corbyn told the packed hall: "At a time when the Labour movement is changing so rapidly, both under Kinnock and after, the importance of having a network which reaches into every trade union and every Constituency Labour Party cannot be overestimated."

Alan Simpson MP, the chairperson of the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs, argued that the leadership of the Labour movement is increasingly being left behind by an angry public. "Everywhere, people are becoming more militant, more angry and are moving to the left of accepted political opinion," he said. "People are saying, this is what we're doing, this is where we're going, where the hell is the Labour Party?"

Simpson also explained the attitude of the Socialist Campaign Group MPs to the leadership election. He promised to represent the decisions of the Network Conference to the Group.

A list of policy demands on all the leadership candidates was passed overwhelmingly. The main dispute was whether there should be a left challenger to Blair, Beckett and Prescott. Several members of the *Labour Briefing* Editorial Board argued that no candidacy should be declared unless the 34 required nominations from MPs could be secured.

They expressed concern about the left being exposed as weak and divided at the outset of the contest. Steve French, Convenor of the Network Forum, argued, "No candidate, no say" - and warned that left policies would be marginalised without a challenge from an SCG MP.

After a lively, serious and comradely debate, the conference voted by a substantial majority to ask the SCG to stand a candidate.

Spell it out!

The following resolution was agreed overwhelmingly at the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network in Manchester. Its demands reflect majority opinions in the Party and the trade union movement. The Shadow Cabinet elite has either opposed or equivocated on all these issues.

"We call on all candidates for the Labour leadership to declare that the next Labour government will:

- Place full employment as an achievable goal at the centre of government economic strategy, which will include increased public spending on infrastructure and direct investment in job creation.
- Increase direct taxation on high incomes (over £50,000), dividends and wealth.
- Take coal, rail and utilities back into public ownership.
- Maintain and improve universal benefits.
- Repeal VAT on domestic fuel.
- Extend trade union rights, including the right to take solidarity action.
- Impose a minimum wage equivalent to at least one half of average male earnings.
- Cut Britain's military spending to no more than the European Union average proportion of GDP."

Labour movement organisations and individuals are urged to sponsor the resolution and join the SCGSN's call on the candidates to speak out for the movement on these central issues. Send names of sponsors to SCGSN, 3 Blades House, London SE 11.



Last month's Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network Conference. PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths.

Don't forget to vote!

Constituency Section National Executive Committee

Members should receive their ballot papers in August. Vote for the Socialist Campaign Group slate:

Diane Abbott, Jeremy Corbyn, Ken Livingstone, Alice Mahon, Dawn Primarolo, Alan Simpson, Dennis Skinner.

Conference Arrangements Committee: Pete Willsman

The SCG Supporters Network will be issuing leaflets for the NEC slate for socialism. Contact 3 Blades House, London SE11.

SERA sell out

A murky group of environmental campaigners were involved in Labour's setback in Waltham Forest in east London. DAVID POPE probes the depths.

AMID THE euphoria over Labour's gains in the local and European elections, it has generally been overlooked that the Party lost on Waltham Forest Borough Council. A majority of three was cut to a deficit of three and the Labour Group has been forced to form a minority administration.

A factor in Labour's loss of power was the antics of the local Socialist Environmental Resources Association (SERA), who issued leaflets that came close to urging a vote for the Liberal Democrats or Green Party.

SERA is affiliated to the Labour Party in Waltham Forest. It was involved in drawing up the council elections manifesto, which incorporated a motion submitted by it to the Leyton CLP General Management Committee. This was not enough for SERA, which sent a questionnaire to all council candidates seeking their views on local road-building schemes.

Road building is a contentious issue in the borough, due largely to the construction of the M11 Link Road (opposed by the council all the way to Brussels) and British Rail's plan to build a freight road. Labour is not opposed to the latter scheme - provided there are environmental safeguards and benefits to the community - because the road will be on British Rail land and the chances of preventing it are negligible.

The Labour candidates were instructed by the election agent not to respond to questionnaires from any source during the election campaign. The Tories did not reply either. The Liberal Democrats and Greens did, both stating their opposition to road building. SERA promptly issued a leaflet in several wards, highlighting the names of candidates supposedly against roads in large type letters. SERA also issued another, less contentious leaflet, which was delivered to households with one from the Green Party.

Another leaflet, from an organisation called Residents Against Traffic, referred to the response to SERA's questionnaire and was openly critical of Labour councillors. RAT operates from a Party member's private address and appears to be a front organisation for the local SERA group.

After the election, branches submitted emergency motions to the Leyton GC calling for a national enquiry and the suspension of SERA's local affiliation. The CLP chair, acting on advice from the Regional Officer, ruled that the motions should be deferred to the June meeting. A challenge to the ruling just failed to achieve the necessary two thirds majority. The atmosphere was acrimonious, even, one might say, poisonous.

There were other reasons why Labour lost control of the council. In a key ward where the SERA leaflets were distributed, the Liberal Democrats ran a racist campaign calling for the closure of the Caribbean Centre. We had hoped to add to our one councillor in this ward but lost all three seats. In another ward - a three way marginal in 1990 - the Tory vote collapsed and went to the Liberal Democrats.

While the SERA shenanigans continue, the Labour Group has the difficult task of running a minority administration. Opposition councillors have forced a reduction in committee sizes to make tied votes less likely (all the committee chairs are Labour). The task is much harder when some of our Party members seem to be conspiring against us. ❑



Twyford Down - defeat at the hands of a bulldozer. PHOTO: Alex MacNaughton

Road Alert

Last November, after twenty years campaigning against the M11 link road, the chestnut tree, which had been the focus of protest, was finally felled. *Labour Briefing* spoke to Chris from the No M11 Link Campaign.

SEVEN MONTHS later construction is five months behind schedule. Officially a figure of £1/2 million has been given as the cost of the delays caused by the anti-road demonstrators. This excludes the cost of police, security and extra plant and machines.

The No M11 Link Campaign has been directly responsible for the government roads review - cancelling one third of the proposed road schemes and prioritizing the rest. This is remarkable considering that twenty five per cent of Tory funds comes from the roads lobby, and the Tories are not famous for admitting they've made a mistake.

Most of the local people are OK about the demos, etc. but some just don't realise the impact of the road, that it will get filthier and dirtier and never go back to normal, which is what they expect.

The campaigners managed to get some shares in Tarmac plc and attended their AGM last month, demonstrating outside and also going in and speaking until they were finally thrown out.

Three days a week the protesters get into the site and disrupt the work by climbing on the machines. The builders are so far behind now that they haven't even completed the drainage.

For further information on the No M11 Link Campaign contact Chris or Alison on 081 558 2638.

Saturday 2nd July 1994
"Mass Tresspassory Assembly"
at Twyford Down, near Winchester, Hampshire.

This peaceful mass-participation event is to highlight the iniquity of the Criminal Justice Bill currently before Parliament. If passed the CJB would criminalise a hugh range of actions, including peaceful protests, squatting, travelling lifestyles, attending rave parties and many political marches. The event is planned to be the largest anti-CJB outdoors event of the summer.

For further information on this event, contact Road Alert! on 0703 237809.

Saturday 9th July 1994
Save Snelmore Common
Protest Rally
Commemorate Oxleas Wood
Victory - One Year On
1pm Protest Rally against
the A34 Newbury Bypass
(Special buses will be laid on from Newbury BR)

The proposed Newbury Bypass will destroy some of the finest countryside in the UK. Snelmore Common is one of the largest and richest areas of heathland remaining in Berkshire and a Site of Special Scientific Interest. It will also carve its way through the site of the First Battle of Newbury (1643), which is still largely intact, and run past a host of other important sites.

For further information on this event contact Val Oldaker (Newbury Friends of the Earth) on 0635 42446.

The silence of the quangos

John Lister
London Health Emergency

LEWISHAM HOSPITAL Trust made history in June 1994.

Three years after the first opted-out trusts were launched, its chair, chief executive and medical director became the first heads of a Tory-appointed NHS quango to protest at the chaos created by the Tory health reforms.

In a letter to staff and to the local health authority, they pointed out that for a fourth year running the Trust was facing damaging cuts in its budget, facing a £2m gap which they estimate means losing 25 more jobs.

They warn that the present confusion over long-term objectives and crisis in planning, which has arisen from the market-style reforms and been compounded by the 1992 Tomlinson Report, jeopardises the quality and quantity of services available.

The Lewisham chiefs have good reason to feel especially squeezed. For years their local hospital bore the brunt of cuts imposed by the 'flagship' Guy's-Lewisham Trust, which was launched on a wave of redundancies in April 1991.

Since then Guy's Hospital has been threatened with closure, and has been separated off and merged into a common trust with St Thomas's Hospital. Behind the closed doors of the Trust Board a bitter life and death struggle is being fought out over which hospital should survive and which should be sacrificed on the altar of Virginia Bottomley's market-style reforms.

The logical answer, that both hospitals play a vital role in the development of medical science in Britain and internationally, and that no hospitals should close until improved alternative services are already proven, up and running, has been excluded in advance by the financial pressures of the internal market system.

It is clear that some influential Guy's consultants are looking at the possibility of snatching patients and contract income from Lewisham Hospital in a last-gasp effort to make Guy's appear financially viable.

In fact all four main hospitals in South East London (Guy's, King's, St Thomas's and Lewisham) are struggling to keep their heads above water. The giant SE London Health Agency (SELHA) which holds the purse strings is itself only being bailed out of multi-million deficits by temporary hand-outs of 'transitional funding' from Bottomley's shadowy London quango, the London Implementation Group.

Waiting lists are rocketing, with SELHA attempting to cover up the scale of the problem by insisting that patients should only be placed on a waiting list if treatment can be guaranteed within a year. Nobody knows how many patients have fallen into this limbo.

Yet the pressure is on to cut the numbers of hospital beds available. The closure of Guy's could axe 780 more. The (untested) theory behind the new round of massive hospital closures and bed cuts is that expanded GP services can take the place of axed casualty units and hospital wards.

This same theory underpins the wholesale closure of beds not only in inner London but throughout the capital. Hospitals and A&E units are at risk in Hillingdon, Ealing, Hounslow and Hammersmith to the west, Barnet to the north, Hackney and Romford to the east, and in Greenwich and Roehampton south of the Thames. Despite having already lost 9,000 beds and over 17,000 nursing staff since 1988, London stands to lose up to 5,000 more beds under plans already on the table.

Even where hospitals stay open, they face a continuing cash squeeze. Cash-strapped health authorities and trusts are quoting the superficial generalities of the Tomlinson Report and the new quack theory of substituting GPs for hospital care as a pretext for massive bed cuts.

In Glasgow alone 1,200 beds are threatened, after a massive reduction has already stripped out thousands of beds; in Birmingham at least 1,500 more beds could go. Manchester, Newcastle, Liverpool, Bristol, Sheffield, Leeds and Cardiff are also on the hit list, as is Belfast.

Until Lewisham broke ranks, managers of trusts and health authorities have been content to follow their orders, and keep mum. Not a word of public criticism or even serious questioning has been raised over a policy which left dozens of hospitals struggling through last winter with emergency patients stacked on trolleys in corridors or mattresses on floors, for lack of beds.

Managers have not even bothered to ask for a pilot test-run of the new scheme to axe beds and open health centres, despite the fact that there is no example anywhere in the world of this approach actually working.

There is a political reason for their servility: trusts and health authorities are Tory-appointed quangos. Their chairs, mostly Tory Party members, fellow travellers or business cronies pick up £20,000 a year plus expenses for a few hours' work a week; their non-executive members collect a handy £5,000 a year for even less work, rubber-stamping management decisions.

The managers who sit on these quangos have short-term, high-paid contracts. They want to look successful, to ensure they can continue to award themselves even more 'performance-related pay'.

The Tory reforms have created simultaneously a chaotic, under-funded system of crisis, and a cynical conspiracy of silence among the quangos which are supposed to ensure that the system works, backed up by the intimidation of union members struggling to deliver care at the sharp end, who know how badly it is failing.

The Lewisham Trust protest will have shocked and dismayed Bottemley, but so craven are the stooges she has appointed that we should not expect any sudden outbreak of outspoken comment from trusts elsewhere.

Rather it must encourage health unions across the country to step up the struggle in defence of beds, jobs and services. A key rallying point for this must be the demonstration called by UNISON in defence of Guy's Hospital on July 5th.

London Health Emergency can be contacted at 446, Uxbridge Road, London W12 ONS. Tel: 081 749 2525

Hospital Cuts

Lobby of Parliament about Closures
5th July Tuesday 2pm House of Commons.
5.30 Assemble for march outside Guys Hall entrance, St Thomas St to St Thomas' Hospital - rally.
Organised by Unison, Guys Hospital.
Contact: Chris Robbin 081 852 2842

Public Service Day - Brighton
9th July, Madeira Drive 9am to 12 noon.
Demonstrating about public sector pay policy being imposed and celebrating the services provided (beer tent, street entertainers etc.)
Organised by Southern & Eastern Reg. TUC (SERTUC).
Contact: Mike Connolly 071 636 4030



East Ham Two free at last!

VALERIE VENESS, Secretary of the East Ham Two Campaign, recalls Prem and Sam's road to freedom.

IN 1985 the situation in Sri Lanka had become desperate for many members of the Tamil minority. Massacres and persecution by the paramilitary groups of the state and by Sinhalese vigilantes forced thousands of Tamils to flee all over the world for sanctuary.

Five young friends who joined the exodus ended up in Britain and gravitated to the East Ham area, where a number of Tamils had already arrived, to live in overcrowded and run-down housing. One pledge they made on meeting up again was to put a small sum of cash aside each week to celebrate their first Christmas in London. However, fate was to step in and make the next eight years a nightmare.

Like many groups of exiles, the Tamils in London were riven by petty disputes over a number of things - politics, family feuds, business rivalries, etc. None of the five friends were involved in these arguments but all were vaguely aware of strains between groups of local Tamils. In the early hours of the morning on November 15th 1986, a horrendous firebombing took place at 119 Burgess Road that killed three people and injured a number of others. The initial reaction of both local Asian organisations and the left was that this was a racist attack - a response that was both incorrect and potentially disastrous in light of what subsequently happened.

In fact, the perpetrators were a rival group of Tamils - a fact that the police soon ascertained as they began investigating the case.

The police were under pressure to "get a result" and breathed a sigh of relief when two local Tamils were picked up. One police officer was overheard by a Newham councillor to say: "Don't worry - they did it to themselves".

The two suspects, it has now emerged, were threatened with instant deportation if they did not "name names". Once they started citing local Tamils, they were offered police protection, money and resettlement for "grassing".

The people they named included the five friends, some of whom were picked up. One, Prem Sivalingham, voluntarily surrended himself at a local police station as he thought he was needed on a minor immigration matter.

The subsequent trial saw no convincing forensic evidence offered and not even bogus "confessions", as in other miscarriages of justice. Three of the five friends named were acquitted by the jury. Two, Prem Sivalingham and Sam Kulasingham, were then convicted by 10 to 2 majority verdicts - largely because the jury could not believe the police would not have some reason to arrest these men. The simple fact was that the perjured evidence of the police "grasses" was only possible because of the threat of deportation.

Prem and Sam were sentenced to life imprisonment and locked up to rot in Wormwood Scrubs prison in West London. They never ceased protesting their innocence, and like other victims of British injustice, convinced both their fellow prisoners and even many of their gaolers that a serious error had been made.

They became friends with other wrongly convicted prisoners, including some of the Birmingham Six, and it was through them that I first encountered Prem and Sam. Many veteran campaigners from previous battles joined us in this fight to clear these men - including Judy Ward, herself a victim of a monstrous judicial frame-up that buried her alive for 18 years.

The other pillars of our campaign were the families and friends of the two prisoners - including the three acquitted at the original trial, who poured time, effort and money into vindicating their friends.

The Two appealed to the High Court in 1992 but were cynically rebuffed. Faced with a seemingly hopeless future, Sam Kulasingham went on hunger strike for an amazing 56 days - longer than most of the Irish Republicans of the 80s. Close to death, Sam only relented after the Home Secretary agreed to a new investigation by the Essex Police. When this was delayed, Sam went on hunger strike again.

The excellent Gareth Pierce became the men's solicitor and used her skill and energy to prepare a new appeal. A young barrister and North Islington Labour Party member, Nick Brown, also took on the case, and served as part of Mike Mansfield's team at the appeal.

Finally the Essex Police submitted a report (in six volumes) that showed Sam had been assaulted in custody, that the police informants were probably implicated and that serious errors existed in the original Metropolitan Police case. A packed Appeal Court on May 27th finally saw the judge rule that these convictions were "unsafe and unsatisfactory" and the Two were free!

However, the British legal system had one last foul trick up its sleeve. Prem had been served with a deportation order in 1988 as a result of his false conviction. He was held for an hour while his legal team frantically tried to secure his release. Luckily Jeremy Corbyn MP was with us in Court - Jeremy had been a strong supporter of the Campaign from day one - and his phone calls to the Minister finally secured Prem's release. They walked free to massive cheers and delight from all the assembled campaigners and the waiting media ❑

A message from Prem

Thank you to *Briefing* for taking up our case over the last two years, and particularly for making it public.

The letters and messages we received during our struggle were vital. While in prison any articles or support you get is invigorating!

The first campaign letter I sent out of prison was printed in *Briefing* in early 1992, and I will always remember and appreciate that!

Prem Sivalingham

INTERVIEW

Zero justice

'They interrogated me as an adult, they tried me as an adult, but they sentenced me as a juvenile,' says Emma Humphrey. JULIE BINDER of Justice for Women talked to *Labour Briefing* about Emma's campaign for freedom.

***Labour Briefing*: What is the background to the Humphrey case?**

Julie Binder: In December, 1985, Emma Humphrey was convicted of murdering the man she was living with, Trevor Armitage. Her plea of manslaughter on the grounds of provocation failed. She was 17 years old, imprisoned indefinitely "at Her Majesty's pleasure" and forgotten. Armitage had submitted Emma to extreme violence during their six month relationship, and wanted to control every aspect of her life.

On the night that Emma killed Armitage, with a single stab wound, she was in a state of complete terror. He was about to rape her and she feared he might kill her.

Eight years later, Emma heard of Kiranjit Ahluwalia's victory and wrote to Justice for Women. We spent some time visiting her and her appeal is due to go before the judge in a few weeks. Emma would like as many people as possible to write to the Home Secretary requesting a quick response and an urgent court date. After all, Emma has already served nine years - which would constitute a life sentence if she had been tried as an adult.

LB: What other campaigns is JFW involved in?

JB: Over the three years since we were formed to campaign against discrimination within the legal system towards women subjected to male violence, we have had several successes: the release of Kiranjit, as a result of the work of Southall Black Sisters, the release of Janet Gardner and Ann Ward, the Carol Peters campaign with the active support of her MP, Harry Cohen, and the publicity given to his 10-minute rule Bill in Parliament on domestic violence.

We worked with Yorkshire TV on its documentary, *Women Who Kill*, and with the Association of London Authorities launching their Zero Tolerance Campaign. I think the posters used for that campaign are very powerful but I am concerned about the way domestic violence is being discussed almost at the expense of public violence, for instance rape and sexual harassment.

We must not forget that women are no less frightened of violence outside the home. Women are in danger and vulnerable the whole time and when the climate in society makes us feel insecure this is not by accident. It is men who allow that to happen. I would like to see the Zero Tolerance Campaign address these issues as well.

LB: The rejection of Sara Thornton's appeal received a lot of publicity last year. What is the current situation?

JB: Even though the Home Secretary refused to refer her case back to appeal, we are still fighting for it to be re-opened. Her local MP, Mike O'Brien, has been useless. He obviously does not consider her a deserving case - in fact, he appears to think she deserved to be beaten and that supporting her would be a vote loser. He is a complete and utter wanker.

Sara was jailed for life in 1990 for killing her violent and alcoholic husband. After years of threats and abuse she returned home one night to find Thornton drunk and abusive, calling Sara a "whore" and her daughter "dead meat". As the threats increased, she went into the kitchen in search of his truncheon (he was an ex-policeman) and, unable to find it, picked up a knife in order to make herself equal to him in the face of an imminent attack.

After pleading with him to go to bed and enduring further threats, she stabbed him once.

Just two days after losing her appeal, Joseph Magrail walked free from the same court that had convicted her after being given a suspended sentence for killing his "nagging" wife. The message is clear: at present, there is one law for men and another for women.

LB: What would you like us to do to strengthen the campaign?

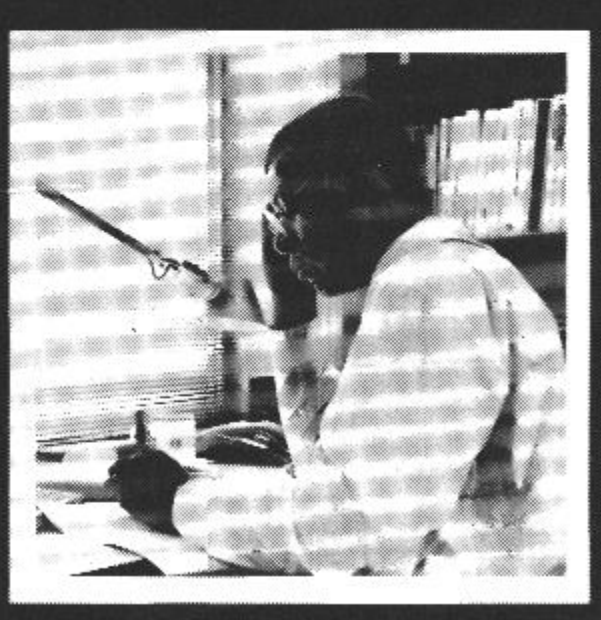
JB: Write to JFW for details of all our campaigns, write to your MP and the Home Secretary, watch the press and let us know of cases in your area and get the issues discussed locally at meetings.

Contact Justice for Women at 55 Rathcoole Gardens, London N8 9NE. Tel: 081 340 3699.

Behind these successful men are the women they put in casualty.







Z

Every year 100,000 women in London seek medical help because of domestic violence. It's not just a fact of life, it's a crime.

A·L·A

MILES & ALLEN

McBastards!

The trial of the McLibel Two finally commences on Monday, June 27th, in the High Court in London. After a year of legal wrangling - including twenty-seven pre-trial hearings - McDonald's, the burger behemoth, represented by Richard Rampton QC, one of the country's most expensive libel lawyers, will confront Dave Morris and Helen Steel, two unwaged environmental activists, who will represent themselves in a trial that could last six months.

EVERY DAY McDonald's serves food or drink to one million people from its more than 500 UK outlets (projected to increase to 1000 within the next ten years). It has more than 30,000 employees in this country. In the USA, it is estimated that 7% of the workforce now have their first experience of work at McDonald's. Internationally, the company spends over a billion dollars a year on advertising and promotion.

High Court Justice Bell ruled earlier this year against a jury trial on the grounds of the complexity of the case. With the aid of Liberty, the McLibel Two challenged the ruling but lost in the Law Lords. It seems the public is fit to eat and work at McDonald's, but not to scrutinise its claim to be a friend of public health and global ecology.

Morris and Steel have filed a counter-claim for libel. "Libel is not about seeking out the truth but forcing defendants into silence," explains Morris. "All the burden of proof is on us. But the counter-claim means the burden of proof is now shared. McDonald's has been saying in effect that all its critics are liars. Now we will be trying to force the company to prove this assertion, which we contend is libellous. It's McDonald's, not us, who should apologise and pay compensation for the damage they have done."

The McLibel Two appear to have McDonald's worried. The company has issued a leaflet, available in all its UK outlets, headed "Why McDonald's is Going to Court". It claims the attempt to silence Morris and Steel "is not about freedom of speech; it is about the right to stop people telling lies."

The gist of the McLibel Two's "libellous" charges against McDonald's has been repeated in an Early Day Motion tabled by Islington North MP Jeremy Corbyn (see box). Corbyn's motion is protected by Parliamentary privilege.

Morris and Steel have had to assimilate a huge amount of legal knowledge in a short time. "We're learning as we go along," says Morris. "It's not just about the details of the law. It's about learning to see through the manipulation and hypocrisy."

In their defence, the McLibel Two will call 75 witnesses, including 30 former McDonald's staff members and experts on rainforest, diet, packaging and advertising, from Britain, the USA, Australia, Germany and elsewhere. Morris and Steel are confident that they will be able to refute McDonald's oft-repeated claim that it does not use beef reared on ex-rainforest land.

McDonald's plans to call 90 witnesses, including senior executives from the USA and Britain.

"We've already won because we've refused to be intimidated," Morris insists. "We are the first to defy McDonald's writs. They failed to keep us out of court, despite all the legal tricks. People must stand up against attempts by wealthy corporations to use the libel laws as a means of censorship."

Whatever the judge's final ruling, this legal action will cost McDonald's millions. As both Morris and Steel are skint, the eco-fouling burger-mongers will never be able to recover costs or damages from them, should they be awarded by the court. Clearly, for McDonald's, the purpose of the libel action is purely to silence its critics, who are growing in number throughout the world.

The McLibel Two are appealing for resolutions of support from labour movement bodies and donations to pay witnesses' fares and expenses. Supporters are urged to attend a demonstration outside the High Court on the first day of the trial from 9:30 to 11am.

Contact the McLibel Support Campaign, c/o London Greenpeace, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1; tel. 071 837 7557.

Early Day Motion tabled by Jeremy Corbyn MP

McDonald's and censorship

That this House notes with alarm that, while the McDonald's Hamburger Corporation suppresses criticism by frequent recourse to libel writs, it spends one billion dollars annually on advertising and promoting junk food, whilst also making grandiose, hypocritical and sometimes false claims about its 'concern' over environmental and social matters; notes that McDonald's causes environmental damage and social problems by producing mountains of unnecessary packaging, not recycled after use, by promoting the type of food and diet linked to tooth decay (sugar), children's hyperactivity (E number additives), heart disease, obesity, diabetes and cancer (high levels of fat, sugar and salt, low levels of fibre and vitamins), and food poisoning (meat), by relying on cattle ranching, some of which is on ex-rainforest land, and methane emissions which are a major cause of global warming, by employing advertising techniques exploiting children, by exploiting workers with low pay, poor conditions, authoritarian management and opposition to trades unions and by being responsible for the unnecessary and cruel deaths of millions of animals; and notes that the company has misled or lied about their use of ex-rainforest land beef, chemicals in their food, lack of recycling of packaging and poor nutritional quality of their food."

Hidden attack

Much has been made of Nicholas Scott's behaviour toward legislation for the disabled but KATE ADAMS focuses on a new and insidious assault.

A LOT OF energy and attention has been focused recently on the Disabled Person's Civil Rights Bill, and with very good reason. But the effects of another bill undermining disabled rights have hardly been recognised. The Incapacity for Work, Social Security Bill conceived in the November 1993 Tory budget has passed rapidly through the Commons and the Lords without any visible grassroots protest from disabled people and the left in general, apart from a demonstration in December by people with AIDS.

Now returning to the Commons for its third and final reading, it will almost certainly receive royal assent without any organised resistance. The only opposition is from the Disability Benefits Consortium, made up of representatives from various charities and voluntary sector organisations who were involved in a Department of Social Security consultation document on the Bill. Their monitoring of the Bill's progress and lobbying of MPs has not excited media coverage or stimulated public awareness.

The Incapacity for Work Bill will come into effect in April 1995. It sets out to abolish Invalidity Benefit, the sole income of many sick and disabled people, and replace it with Incapacity Benefit, the qualifying conditions for which are much tougher. The Disabled Income Group claims that, according to the Government's own estimates, 250,000 people currently receiving Invalidity Benefit could be forced off Incapacity Benefit as the result of a review, while another 70,000 will not qualify.

Nicholas Scott, our trustworthy Minister for Disabled People says the Bill seeks to target those people genuinely medically incapable of work, thus implying that vast numbers of claimants are fraudulent.

The truth is that this is yet another cynical cuts exercise by a government determined to make savings at the expense of disabled people. The key factor in deciding who is genuine will be the new medical test, which will measure capacity for any work as opposed to the previous system which took age, job skills and experience into account.

Instead of obtaining a sick note from their GP, claimants will be expected to complete a lengthy questionnaire with a related score chart. Those who score below a certain threshold will be deemed capable of work. This decision will be made by a DSS adjudicating officer with the option of referring claimants to a DSS medical board for a physical examination.

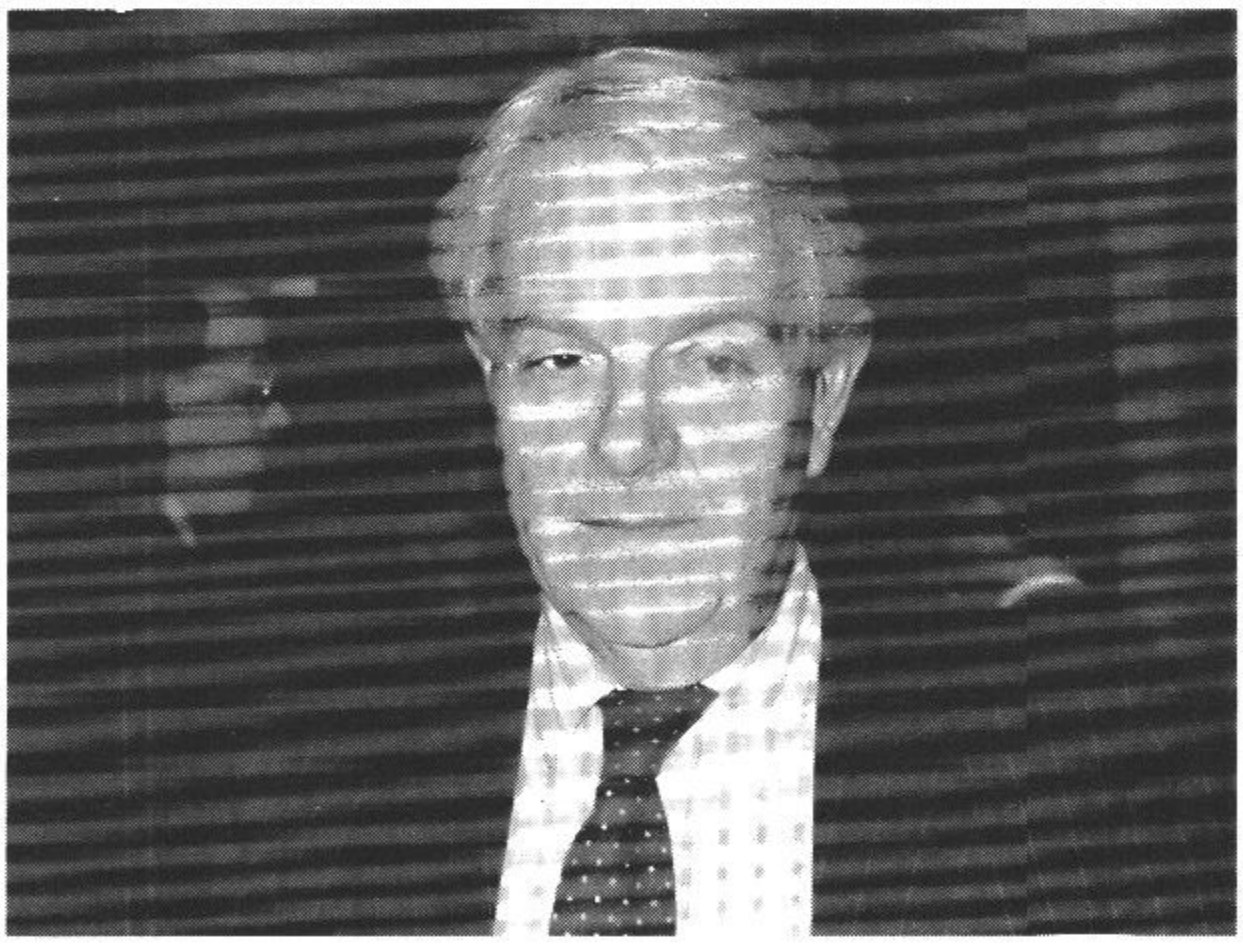
Imagine how stressful this will be for a sick person who simply wants some money to live on. Moreover, it discriminates against people who have difficulty reading and writing because of their disability and who may be discouraged from claiming altogether.

In addition, the medical test fails to measure incapacity in relation to work, it only measures severity of disability. Questions and allotted scores range from the insulting to the ridiculous - for instance, for "no voluntary control over bowels" the score will be 25 points but only 4.5 points will be accrued if you "cannot lift and push an unladen wheelbarrow". Nor is any account taken of the fluctuating nature of chronic conditions like MS, arthritis and ME, where to perform a task once might be in your limits but repeated activity would bring about relapse and exacerbation of the illness.

The real message of the Incapacity For Work Bill which underlies the myth about the deserving and the fraudulent is that sick people are unproductive and therefore disposable. This has to be challenged - the right to benefits at its most basic level is about the right to survival. This paramount civil right must be defended and links made with the Disabled Bill of Rights.

So far, activists have concentrated all their resources on the latter, believing that once the Bill becomes law there will be some leverage against this form of economic discrimination.

Unfortunately, this does not offer a crumb of comfort to the disabled people who fear total loss of income if the Incapacity for Work Bill is passed. ❑



Nicholas Scott. PHOTO: Newsfocus.



Lesbian and Gay Pride Festival, London 1993. PHOTO: Paul Mattsson, taken from *Pride and Protest*, edited by Roz Hopkins, Cassell, 1994. £7.99.

desire

Liberating sexual desire

PERHAPS THAT'S a slight over-simplification.

However, to reject out of hand the idea of loving someone of the same sex is surely irrational. It doesn't make sense to exclude automatically the possibility of relationships with half the population.

Nevertheless, that's what a majority of people do, and it's lesbians and gay men who pay the price for their sexual phobias and repressions. We have to suffer the devaluation and denigration of our lives, so that heterosexuals who are anxious about their sexual identity can feel secure and superior in their exclusively opposite-sex relationships.

Thankfully, most queers are more generous than these supremacists. Our suffering has taught us the virtue of compassion and understanding. We are thus fighting for homosexual equality not only for our own sakes, but also for the sake of heterosexuals.

They, too, are diminished by the system of 'sexual apartheid' which proclaims the supposed superiority of straightness, and which seeks to justify itself as 'normality' and 'human nature'. Exclusive and compulsory heterosexuality is neither of these things. Nor is it humane or civilised: it requires the perverse suppression of all sexual feelings towards people of the same sex.

The struggle for sexual liberation is about the right of all people to express the full range of emotional and erotic desires - both heterosexual and homosexual - which are intrinsic to the human condition.

What's the difference between straight and queer sex? A few inches of flesh. We all have a queer potential, argues PETER TATCHELL.

Radical queers have a vision of a sexually emancipated society in which the bisexual potential of all people is recognised and accepted, and where everyone feels free to express his or her homosexual desires without being racked by guilt and humiliated by discrimination.

Is that really such a shocking idea? If not, why is society so hung-up about people 'promoting' and 'flaunting' their homosexuality?

Perhaps it's because, deep down, even arch homophobes recognise that the human capacity for emotional tenderness and sexual fulfilment is not limited to straight relationships. Indeed, the hysteria against queerness is an implicit acknowledgement of the fragile and tenuous nature of exclusive heterosexuality.

After all, if queer sex is so unnatural and loathsome, why does it have to be negated and repressed by the combined forces of Parliament, police, press, and pulpit? And why does heterosexuality have to be so vigorously promoted with special privileges, such as the monopoly of moral validity and financial and legal advantages?

The anti-gay bigots are right. A positive affirmation and acceptance of queer sexuality is likely to lead to an increase in the proportion of the population having same-sex relationships - not necessarily for their entire lives but certainly for significant periods. The number of people who are exclusively heterosexual and exclusively homosexual would probably decline. For the majority, bisexuality would become the norm.

There's no rational reason why exclusive heterosexuality should be the majority sexual practice. With artificial insemination by donor, the argument that we need heterosexuality to reproduce the human species is no longer tenable. Even if there was never again a single act of straight sex anywhere in the world, the perpetuation of new generations could readily be assured by donor insemination.

The liberation of heterosexuality from the function of human reproduction, together with the equal validation of homosexuality, would mean that sexual free will could at last triumph over biological necessity and social repression. As a result, straight relationships would become more of a conscious choice and a rational pleasure, rather than a traditional expectation and moral obligation. Queer love would cease to be a minority desire and instead find expression in most people's lives.

Peter Tatchell is the author of *Europe In The Pink: Lesbian & Gay Equality In The New Europe* (GMP, 1992) and *AIDS: A Guide To Survival* (GMP, 1990).

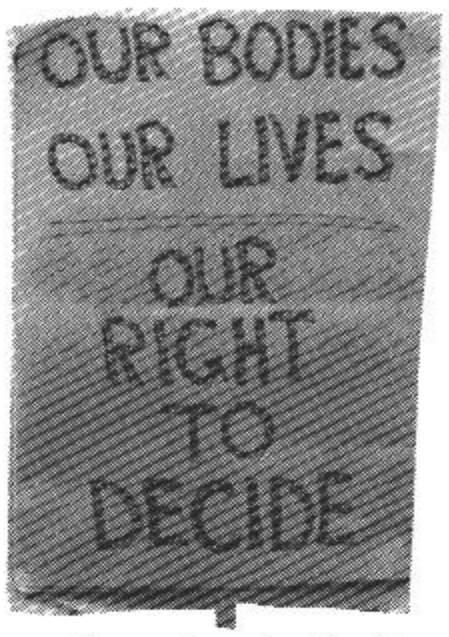
Population control or women's choice?

In the third in a series, LEONORA LLOYD looks at the issues raised by the Population and Development Conference to be held in Cairo in September.

IN THE seventies, the women's movement in the USA and Britain launched campaigns for women's right to freely available abortion and contraception. This coincided with increased spending on population control programmes in the developing world. In the early 60s, the contraceptive pill was tested on third world women. Now long-term, injectable contraceptives and new forms of IUD are being tested in the same way.

While women in the west were arguing that they had the right to decide whether and when to have children, women elsewhere were undergoing enforced sterilisation, contraception and abortions. Feminists set up campaigns, such as the International Campaign for the Right to Abortion and Contraception and Against Sterilisation, which called for women-centred policies. Some women worked to reform the International Planned Parenthood Federation from within.

Since then, there has been a massive change in the message and methods of international agencies. Education and economic advance for women are recognised as more effective than coercion and bribery. But problems remain. Women in the developing world are less likely than before to be used to test new contraceptives, but are still given those considered unsafe for us. A blind eye is turned to the practices of aborting female foetuses and female infanticide, because they mean fewer babies being born in the next generation.



Women-centred policies, such as elective abortion, are still outlawed in many parts of the world where women are forced to undergo sterilisation or to use unsafe contraception.

The Cairo conference will discuss these problems - but it seems feminists will not be able to present a united position. "Women's Voices '94", a document from the International Women's Health Coalition, presented on behalf of many groups involved in reproductive rights, is being criticised by another coalition of women's groups. The latter declares that population policies are inherently "sexist, racist and imperialist".

There is a lot to be said for this position. In the past, every society found ways to control population growth. Women used contraception, abortion and infanticide to ensure that they only had as many children as they, or their tribe, could afford to feed. With the industrial revolution, many old techniques were lost. Death control - improvements in public and personal health - was developed a hundred years before new methods of birth control were generally adopted, leading to massive population growth.

In societies which allowed women free access to contraception and abortion, these were enthusiastically taken up. No-one had to force women to use them.

But women in the developing world were seen differently. First, they were not seen as educated enough to understand the need for contraception nor how to use it effectively. Second, they were supposed to want lots of children, as workers and to guard against a poverty-stricken old age. The reality was that it was often men who measured their virility by how many children they had, who wanted sons to carry on the family name and provide for the future. However, most family planning programmes were - and still are - directed almost totally towards women.

Underlying this emphasis was a fundamental truth: women, given the chance and the choice, do not want more children than they can cope with. Whenever they are given the chance and the choice, the birth rate drops, often dramatically. In the west, women did not need to be offered radios to use contraception. Doctors did not need to be told their jobs relied on how many women they sterilised a month.

It is true that women in the underdeveloped world are less educated, but that did not stop them controlling their fertility in the past. However, they are often up against men who do not stop at taking away their birth control pills, or even removing their IUDs, causing many women to opt for the more dangerous injectables, which their husbands can do nothing about.

The conference in September will be more heavily influenced by feminists than any previous "official" population conference. The emphasis will still be on how male-dominated governments and the medical profession can persuade women to do what - given the choice - they would gladly do anyway. But women want to do it their way. We don't need "population policies".

The documents referred to can be read in full in the latest issue of *Women's Choice*, obtainable from the National Abortion Campaign, 18 Ashwin Street, London E8 3DL, price £1.36 including postage.

Red and green

GEOFF MANN looks at the kind of energy policy a future Labour government could sensibly employ.

ENVIRONMENTAL reasons for advocating a centrally planned economy based on production for real need rather than consumerism are as strong as economic and moral arguments.

Industrialization and capitalism have not only exploited the working class, but have also caused irreparable damage to the environment and severely depleted the earth's resources. Simply tinkering about with the economy will not be enough to stem the destruction. A wholesale reorganization of production is needed based on the use of renewable resources and environmentally friendly processes.

At the forefront of any environmental policy must be the generation, use and conservation of energy. The availability of non-renewable forms of energy is limited. The effects of burning fossil fuels on the environment are of vital importance, and the dangers of nuclear power come into the equation.

The abolition of nuclear power would be a top priority for a socialist government. The resulting shortfall in the production of electricity would need to be made up from other sources and the effect on the employment of workers in the industry would have to be considered.

However, the second point is less important than it would seem because, in the short-term, the decommissioning and decontamination of plant and the safe storage and monitoring of spent fuel would require a large workforce.

The shortfall in generating capacity could be ameliorated by the implementation of energy conservation measures. New building regulations could ensure that the most advanced forms of insulation are incorporated into all new buildings, both industrial and residential.

A Greenpeace International report, *Power to Change*, demonstrates that the technology exists to insulate buildings so that a minimal amount of energy is required for heating even in winter. The experimental construction of houses in Milton Keynes using super-insulation, triple glazing and a heat exchanger/air conditioner shows that most warmth can be contained within the home and hot air can be recycled. The extra cost of building such homes is estimated to be £2,000 which can easily be recouped in energy savings within four years.

More important than regulating private sector housing is the vital need for local authorities to build homes for the homeless. All new construction of social housing should also come up to the highest levels of energy conservation.

In the past, local councils have kept construction costs down, disregarding the high consumption of energy required to heat poorly built homes. Insisting on the highest standards of energy conservation benefits the environment and minimizes energy bills for people who can least afford them. Government funding for super-insulation should be made available, starting with the coldest areas of the country. The Greenpeace report highlights successful improvement programmes carried out on housing estates in the Netherlands, which have cut energy consumption in half.

Measures to reduce the industrial and commercial use of electricity, gas and oil are also needed. Vast amounts of the energy used by industry are needlessly wasted because of poorly designed manufacturing processes and equipment and the use of inefficient electric motors. Three-quarters of electricity used by industry drives motors. As Greenpeace points out: "Variable speed drives (VSDs) automatically adjust the speed of the motor to match the load ... just a bit of slowing can save a lot of energy."

Studies have shown that the replacement of inefficient motors has a pay-back time of between six months and three years. All companies brought into public ownership should have energy audits carried out and capital investment programmes should incorporate provision for the conservation of energy. With such a short pay-back period a socialist government would not be burdened with high levels of debt to fund these improvement schemes, whereas the effect on the environment will be of long-term benefit. Businesses in the private sector should be required to implement similar policies.

With the electricity industry back in the public sector under a socialist government, generating methods should come under review. More research will be required into renewable forms, such as wind, solar, hydro and wave power. The press has recently highlighted public opposition to the siting of wind turbines in areas of natural beauty, but most people will come to realise that having wind generators in their backyards is preferable to a nuclear power station. Such schemes can be localised so that the electricity generated is supplied directly to the community nearby.

For the foreseeable future, the bulk supply of electricity via the national grid will still be generated from fossil fuels. There can be no justification for the use of natural gas as a source of electricity given its much simpler useage as a prime energy source.

The use of oil should also be minimal which leaves coal as the ideal fuel for the production of electricity. Our committment to the coal industry must be coupled with the need to ensure that highly efficient filters are used in power stations to control emissions of carbon dioxide and sulphurous compounds. Coal should be phased out as renewable forms take over.

The protection of the environment must be integrated into socialist policy so that we can build a strong economy based on sustainable growth while ensuring that we all have a future. The interests of international capitalism are barriers to the research and development of environmentally friendly processes. Large-scale planning is needed to develop technology and encourage its speedy introduction. ❑



Sylvia Pye at the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network Conference. PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

Earlestown's other rocket

BERNI CAVANAGH, an activist with Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures, reports from the front line.

LANCASHIRE Women Against Pit Closures do dislike the politics of the individual - so getting one person to sign this article will be fun. Even during the occupations, we always refused to give our names to the media. I'm not from Earlestown, so I can say this: it's a bit of a dull place. Its industrial heart has been torn out. The vast engineering and railway industry (Stevenson built his rocket here) lies derelict. Sankey Sugar (remember that?) passed away to some multi-national eons back. And now they think they're going to demolish our pit!

I've not been involved in organised politics since I left the Communist Party in 1975. Joyce, on the other hand, has campaigned ceaselessly since 1972 - for the miners, to keep her local school open, and more. Cait is involved in the Troops Out Movement and was at Greenham. Until 1982, Shirley was a Tory - now she's one of our best speakers! We're NOT mostly miners' wives: we're mums, grannies, teachers, businesswomen, retired, nurses ...

Thankfully, a few women did keep Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures going in the years since 1985, campaigning for jobs, maintaining a presence at the annual miners' galas, going to meetings. Joyce, Sylvia and Dot were ready with their energy and practicality in October 1992. It's nothing short of a wonderful gift that I happened to move to Earlestown just before this and was able to join LWAPC and the Pit Camp outside Parkside Colliery. How many of us who are disillusioned with party politics and the dreaded meetings have been in such a fortunate position?

Our membership changes slightly, but at most we've numbered 24, though our supporters are many. And, one way or another, we've maintained a 24 hour rota at Parkside for over 500 days.

Regular supporters come from Liverpool and Lancaster, Manchester and Preston to do shifts. The Theatre in Education group from Lancaster have dramatised the struggle vividly, as well as tending the brazier and doing the washing up on shift. Their livelihoods too are under threat from Tory cuts - the connections are so obvious. We hold women's meetings and supporters' meetings regularly. Rarely do we vote; most of the time we're organising who does what, making plans to sabotage British Coal's plans, sorting out the rota, and giving each other support.

We're an extremely disciplined and co-ordinated group. We've carried out three carefully planned occupations of Parkside, addressed hundreds of meetings, and (mostly) stayed sane living on top of each other (albeit for a maximum of 12 hours) at the pit camp.

We celebrate the strength of human endurance and of the womanly spirit that has kept LWAPC alive for ten years. Mai Finch wrote a song for us, "We are women, we are strong", which reflects the strength we share, and, yes our latest move, even in the midst of evictions, destruction and threats, is to form a singing group!

We established the camp at Parkside on January 18th 1993 and fully expected to be evicted within days.

So far, we have physically prevented British Coal from finally closing the pit. This means that Parkside, Lancashire's last deep coal mine, can still be re-opened providing over 1,000 jobs.

Despite two vicious attacks by riot police, we and our supporters have stood firm. On May 18th 1994, 30 bailiffs and upwards of 200 riot police forcibly removed six of us and demolished the camp. Two comrades were arrested and await trial. The camp was re-established opposite the original site within five days.

In their application for an eviction order, British Coal gave Sylvia Pye as the only named defendant. This means that Sylvia, who is our treasurer as well as the national chairwoman of Women Against Pit Closures, will be personally sued for all the costs incurred by British Coal in obtaining their eviction order, the sum of which could be several thousand pounds.

So we are appealing for donations and asking individuals and organisations to add their names to the list of supporters to help build up political pressure to stop the unjust and political decision to victimize Sylvia Pye.

We have bought a cheap caravan to ferry "LWAPC on the Move". Where will we turn up next? As our beautiful banner proclaims:

"The fight to save the pit continues ... the fight for health, education, jobs and peace continues."

Contact LWAP on 0925 291777; send donations to "LWAPC" (for the Pit Camp) and/or "The Sylvia Pye National Appeal Fund", c/o Berni Cavanagh, Common Road Nurseries, Newton-le-Willows, Merseyside, WA12 9JJ.

TRADE UNION PICKET NOTEBOOK

Trade union

Stopped in their tracks

RAIL SERVICES came to a halt across the country on June 15th as signal workers' patience finally snapped and they walked out as part of their campaign for a decent pay rise.

Signal workers voted by four to one in an 80 per cent turnout for two 24-hour strikes on June 15th and 22nd.

The roots of the dispute go back seven years when British Rail announced that it wanted the workers' pay system restructured. An agreement on restructuring has never been reached and, meanwhile, signal workers have seen their pay and conditions deteriorate compared to other workers.

Some signal workers now have to work a 52-hour week just to earn a decent wage. Pay differentials relative to other workers, including drivers and station staff, have been eroded while a big earnings gap of between £29 and £51 a week has opened up with London Underground signal workers.

As a result, the Rail Maritime and Transport union sent a pay demand of 11 per cent to British Rail in early February. The demand pointed out that the workers had agreed to the introduction of new equipment, had accepted extra responsibilities and cuts in numbers, all without any improvement in pay. The union went on to make it quite clear that no negotiations on pay restructuring would begin until the perfectly reasonable pay demand had been met.

An RMT statement said at the time: "If the board concedes the interim payment, foundations can be laid for constructive discussions on restructuring, whilst at the same time a message will be sent to signalling staff that the board is serious about addressing our long-standing grievance.

"If this course of action is not taken, then the union is of the strong view that obtaining the agreement on restructuring that both the board and Railtrack want will be a difficult, if not impossible, task."

On April 1st, responsibility for signalling passed from British Rail to Railtrack, the new government-owned company. Still, the management would not budge, apart from some simplification of signalling grades which allowed certain workers to earn slightly more money. But the central problem of increasingly poor pay rates was not addressed.

Just before the 15th, Railtrack informally offered a 5.7 per cent pay increase. This was rapidly withdrawn and it soon became clear that it had been blocked by Downing Street and the Treasury, perhaps anxious for a national stoppage to divert attention from the humiliating Euro election results.

This was particularly rich since, on the day before the strike, John Major attacked the strike as "selfish and unnecessary."

The 5.7 per cent would have been on top of the 2.5 per cent deal for the rest of the industry's 100,000 staff. After the sabotage of the offer, RMT leader Jimmy Knapp said: "In 30 years' involvement with the industry I have never seen anything like it. (Railtrack) have dealt a body blow to industrial relations and the integrity of the company is in tatters."

On the wider issues which the strike affects, one London RMT activist commented: "The readiness of the workers to take this action shows the growing anger and militancy in the labour movement."

Scottish lecturers are about to take selective strike action after a majority of 83 per cent voted for action in a ballot organised by the Educational Institute of Scotland, which represents 4,500 further education lecturers.

The ballot is the result of a long-running battle with college authorities over pay and conditions. The lecturers had previously rejected an offer by the employers' association and talks broke down early in June.

The deputy general secretary of the EIS, Fred Forrester, said that the role played by the employers was a recipe for confrontation. The bosses, he said, "have inherited a successful, highly praised, efficient and flexible service but appear determined to undermine the sector by demanding unnecessary changes in conditions of service of the very staff who, for decades, have delivered that high quality service."

Token stoppages will be organised before the summer holiday but, if no progress is made on pay and conditions, action will be intensified during the autumn.

Lecturers have argued that the changes in conditions demanded by employers would mean holidays being cut by up to 19 days, an increase in the working week and the removal of the limit on time spent in class.

Both sides have insisted throughout the dispute that they wanted to avoid adversely affecting the education of the 60,000 students in Scottish FE colleges.

The employers' association immediately attacked the ballot as unnecessary and unhelpful. It has already threatened to abandon talks which are due to begin in September.

Around 600 TSB insurance sales staff have begun a work to rule after they were excluded from a 5 per cent bonus which was awarded to the remainder of the bank's 20,000-strong workforce.

The 600 staff, members of the Banking Insurance and Finance Union, feel especially aggrieved as TSB made a pre-tax profit last year of £301 million.

The action began in mid-April and members are just starting to see its effects filtering through.

notebook



Members of the Banking, Insurance and Finance Union (BIFU) challenged directors of Sun Alliance at their AGM to justify giving themselves a 70 per cent pay over the past four years, while staff have received a meagre 10 per cent over the same period. The shareholders' dividend increased by 18 per cent over the four years.

When challenged over a £50,000 donation to the Tory Party that had not been put to a ballot of shareholders, the chair replied that this decision was within the directors' right to manage the company.

By all accounts, the AGM was a lively affair, with one protesting shareholder ejected by security staff. Last year, another shareholder was removed in handcuffs by the police from an Extraordinary AGM.

BIFU has set up a team of racial harassment counsellors to support its ongoing work against racism, which includes a helpline for members on 081 879 7500.

By two slender votes at its conference in Llandudno, construction union UCATT has voted to become part of the giant Transport and General Workers' Union.

Falling membership, the construction industry recession and increasing private-sector casualisation have all fed into the decision.

But greatest of all has been the union's parlous financial state with an overdraft of £1.4 million and a deficit of £2.2 million. Despite having 135,000 members, only about 70,000 are paid up.

UCATT will now ballot its members late in the summer with a view to a harmonious merging early in 1996 after a transition period during which structures will be brought together.

Under the amalgamation document, UCATT will front a construction section where it will continue to recruit and organise as well as hold biennial conferences, affiliate separately to the Labour Party and keep branches intact.

General secretary George Brumwell will become an Executive National Officer and be entitled to a seat on the TGWU's executive.

Many delegates particularly disliked the fact that regional officials in the TGWU are appointed, not elected as they are in UCATT.

But George Brumwell seemed to carry the day arguing that: "the days of small craft unions are over."

The TGWU will still be unable to challenge UNISON for the hallowed title of Britain's biggest union. The new amalgamated TGWU/UCATT will muster only 1,171,000 to UNISON's 1.4 million.

The often appalling conditions faced by trade unionists working for charitable and "right-on" organisations is highlighted by the case of Deborah Knight, a worker with the Minority Rights Group.

She has been sacked shortly after recruiting the majority of her fellow workers into the white-collar section of the Transport and General Workers' Union.

The MRG refused union recognition. There are no grievance or disciplinary procedures at the organisation, where there is a notoriously high staff turnover.

Deborah Knight commented: "MRG stands for the rights of minorities, yet stands alone among development and human rights agencies in its hostility to trade unions."

The right-wing leader of the National Union of Teachers, Doug McAvoy is facing a stern challenge from his current deputy and Labour Party member, Mary Hufford.

McAvoy has a reputation for doing as little as possible and the difference between the two candidates is rather starkly illustrated by their election addresses.

McAvoy states: As general secretary, I speak for teachers ... Through skilful use of the media, the teachers' case must be kept at the forefront of public attention and on the political agenda ... Industrial action should be a last resort."

Hufford, on the other hand, seems to have a clearer grasp on the reality of teachers' lives: "For five years, the leadership of the union has been ineffective and failed to protect members' interests. Too little has been done to defend ourselves against continued attacks. Use your vote for firm leadership and defence of members and the service."

The case of three Eastbourne refuse collectors has provoked a decision by the European Court which means the Tory government has been breaking the law through its employment policy.

Brian Isteed, Mike Pindard and Neil Johnson, along with more than 30 other Eastbourne street sweepers and refuse collectors, were sacked just before Christmas in 1990 when the services they had provided were contracted out by the local council.

But, under the European directive known as the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations (or TUPE), the three men and their local Transport and General Workers' Union official Norman Meek, fought the case through the courts.

According to the directive, employees' job security and pay is protected when one employer takes over from another. The TGWU has more than 100 writs outstanding against the government over TUPE, covering more than 1,000 workers. European Commissioner Padraig Flynn said that there was "no question" of the British government avoiding changing employment law on this question.

TGWU national officer Jack Dromey argued that the ruling would have very far-reaching effects for Tory legislation: "We believe that this decision will end de-recognition in public services."

Conservative ministers squirmed as they tried to argue that it was all the Callaghan government's fault because it was during Labour's last period of office that the directive was signed.

The two broadcasting unions at the BBC - the NUJ and BECTU - have engaged in two 24-hour stoppages in an attempt to get bosses at the Beeb back to the negotiating table over pay and the imposition of personal contracts.

The second of the two strikes coincided with the Euro-elections and five parliamentary by-elections, which meant that scabbing managers had to do the work of technicians.

BECTU's BBC supervisory officer, Christine Driver, commented: "Our consultations revealed the members do not trust the BBC management to pay them fairly, or appraise them impartially."

French with tears

Andrew Coates
Ipswich CLP

THE EUROPEAN elections were an unmitigated disaster for the French Parti Socialiste (PS). Under the "modernising" Michel Rocard, it slumped to a 14 per cent share of the poll - down 10 per cent from the last Euro-contest in 1989.

Pundits have put this failure down to the emergence of Bernard Tapie's left-of-centre Energie Radicale group and, undoubtedly, Rocard did lose support to Tapie. The real reasons for such a thrashing lie deeper in the "modernising" ideology followed by the former prime minister.

Rocard first came to national prominence for his moral stand against the Algerian war and soon led a small, non-conformist socialist party, the PSU (Parti Socialiste Unifie). He was heavily influenced by the British Bevanite left.

He joined Mitterrand's PS in the seventies and emerged as the national figurehead of the "Second Left", which advocated a mixed economy, constitutional reform, decentralisation, self-organisation and a strong civil society. In other words, the kind of *Marxism Today* agenda now being pursued by the "modernisers" of the Labour Party.

When he became prime minister, under Mitterrand in 1988, Rocard pursued a new "social pact" between unions and management - it failed dismally. Yet, after the PS was crushed in national elections last year, Rocard emerged undaunted as the party's national secretary and proposed a new alliance of the entire left under his own leadership.

Unsurprisingly, the Communist Party and the Mouvement des Cityones wanted nothing to do with a man they regard as trying to create a French version of the US Democratic Party.

During the Euro-election campaign, Rocard was visibly unnerved by the appearance of a group of intellectuals - the Liste pour Sarajevo - demanding military support for Bosnia. In a hasty reaction, Rocard declared himself a supporter of bombing Serbia.

Bernard Tapie was thus able to score easy points by noting the "fragility" of the PS leader's personality.

In Rocard and the PS, the very existence of which is now in doubt, there are some grim warnings for the Labour Party. The French politician is, according to most polls, one of the country's most popular figures and is beloved of leader-writers and pundits.

Yet electorally, he's a walking disaster.

The explanation for this paradox is quite simple - media beauty contests do not win elections. In ideology and presentability, Tony Blair has much in common with Rocard, who has led France's once-biggest party to the verge of oblivion.

Oliver's army

LOUISE PURBRICK of the Troops Out Movement charts the British occupation of Ireland and the build-up to a major demonstration on August 13th.

ON AUGUST 14th 1969, British troops were sent to the North of Ireland. British armed forces then totalled 16,000, since increased to over 32,000.

Some might find these figures hard to believe, especially those who have read the jumble of words which is the Downing Street Declaration, where there is no mention of any British armed forces. It is as if the British Army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Royal Irish Regiment (now renamed UDR) do not exist.

Four months ago, Crossmaglen, a small town in South Armagh, was saturated with soldiers. All roads in and out of the town had army check-points. Movement was monitored. Houses were raided. Children were questioned. Military saturation is one of the strategies used in what is officially called a "low-intensity war" in Ireland.

Government censorship and a subservient establishment media machine has ensured that the daily realities of British involvement in Ireland are always obscured. But it is impossible to efface Britain's record of injustice over the last 25 years.

Censorship cannot hide repressive legislation endorsed again and again in Westminster. The Prevention of Terrorism Act has been renewed by Parliament every year since 1974.

The operation of a shoot-to-kill policy and the existence of widespread collusion between the army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Loyalist paramilitaries have been the subjects of documentaries on British television.

British forces in Ireland are not just on parade, nor are they practising how to conduct a conflict somewhere else. Their presence has sustained the sectarianism of the Stormont regime and imposed direct British rule. They have never come close to keeping the peace.

A demonstration demanding British withdrawal from Ireland and self-determination for the Irish people as a whole will take place in London on August 13th. It marks the 25th year of the British troop deployment and is called by the Troops Out Movement, The Irish in Britain Representation Group, Women and Ireland and the Labour Party Irish Society. Its sponsors include, among others, the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs and *Labour Briefing*.

For leaflets, petitions, posters and more information contact: 25th Anniversary Demonstration Committee, BM TUM, London, WC1N 3XX. Tel: 071 609 1743 Fax: 071 607 4463. Sponsorship for the demonstration and for a national press advertisment is urgently required. Suggested rates are: £10 individuals; £20 local organisations; £50 national organisations. Any contributions welcome.

March for British Withdrawal from Ireland

Saturday 13th August

Assemble at Kennington Park (Oval tube)
12.00 noon

August 14th marks the 25th anniversary of the re-deployment of British troops onto the streets of the North of Ireland. On August 13th people in Britain will demonstrate for British withdrawal from Ireland and the right of the Irish people to self determination.

Abandoned - again

The Kurds in northern Iraq have split dangerously and hundreds have been killed. KEITH VENESS unravels the causes of this alarming situation.

THERE IS now little doubt that the Baathist regime in Baghdad, led by Saddam Hussein, has been one of the most brutal and vicious, even in an area replete with dictatorships, family oligarchies and murderous theocracies. At least 182,000 members of the Kurdish and Assyrian minorities perished in the holocaust dubbed "Al Anfal" by Saddam supporters.

The armed struggle for Kurdish self-determination launched by the general Mustafa Barzani that lasted throughout the sixties and early seventies was finally betrayed in 1974. It attracted little support in western Europe and most of the "left" remained blind to the rights of the Kurds and apologetic about the various Arab dictatorships.

The Gulf War between Iran and Iraq, which lasted from 1980 to 1988, was rightly seen by Kurds in Iran and Iraq as an opportunity to strike for freedom - and for democracy as well. Again the British left stayed silent, some even supporting the Iranian Ayatollahs!

During the long years of exile in Germany, Sweden, France, USA and Britain, Kurdish communities split into the usual political factions and groupings.

However, the Kuwait War of 1991 proved to be a watershed in the fortunes of the Iraqi Kurds. With Saddam's defeat by the US-led coalition, the Kurds rose in a truly wonderful uprising that swept the Baathists away. For a few days euphoria swept the region - only to be crushed as the US allowed Saddam to use his aircraft and helicopters in breach of the ceasefire agreement to bomb and strafe the Kurdish cities.

The rest is history: 2 million people fleeing in the snow to the mountains in Turkey and Iran, the "Safe Haven" and "No Fly Zone" being created, the Kurdish militia (the "Pesh Merga" or facers of death) returning to run the region and the subsequent voting for the Middle East's first totally free elections.

The two largest parties were clearly the KDP - the oldest party in the region and now led by General Barzani's son Masoud - and the PUK - a breakaway from the KDP in the late sixties and led by the Jalal Talabani, a former comrade of Barzani's.

However, there were also three smaller socialist parties (KSP, PASOK and the KDPD), the Iraqi Communist Party, the organisations representing the Assyrian and Turkoman minorities and a number of smaller groupings, including the "Toilers Party".

All these groups came together to create the Kurdistan Front, the political body that ran the area until the first elections. It was inevitable that some "regroupment" would occur. The three small socialist groups merged to form the "Hekgirtin" or Unity Party, which then merged into the KDP. The Toilers Party is part of the PUK. This has unfortunately polarised matters into a straightforward choice in most areas and has led to tension.

However, this would not be serious if it were not for the fact that Kurdistan is treated as part of Iraq and subject to the UN sanctions, while at the same time being blockaded and militarily threatened by Saddam. This has resulted in yet more appalling suffering for the Kurdish people, with no proper international trading, no spare parts for anything and a totally worthless Iraqi Dinar controlled from Baghdad as the only currency.

The total lack of international support or recognition has now resulted in a return to a "barter economy", controlled by local clan chiefs, endemic smuggling and a feeling of desperation by the ordinary population. Many skilled and qualified Kurds (and few people anywhere in the world can have a bigger percentage of their young population qualified academically) have fled to western Europe or North America, resulting in even more problems.

Outside powers have started to meddle in the area - particularly Iran, which has financed and armed the local Kurdish "Islamic Movement".

The IM is the only serious grouping to oppose the secular democratic constitution and has attacked women's and leftist organisations in the area. When they attempted to attack the PUK, however, they seriously overestimated their status. After some initial success, they were overwhelmed by the well-trained PUK Pesh Merga and were either rounded-up or fled into Iran.

This resulted in the KDP offering to "mediate", a suggestion that annoyed the PUK as it felt the KDP should have offered support instead! After this clash in February this year, the situation has spiralled downwards with the PUK attacking KDP positions in Shklawa and around the regional Parliament in Erbil. The new army and police force split into its component parts, with the Iraqi Communist Party backing the PUK and the socialists and Islamic groups supporting the KDP. Currently, the elected government has abrogated power and the Parliament building is occupied by the PUK's Women's Battalion!

Over 600 people have been killed and Kurdistan now threatens to split into the Kermanji-speaking Badinan controlled by the KDP and the Orani-speaking areas controlled by the PUK.

Urgent negotiations are going on as we go to print between Barzani and Talabani in the Turkish border town of Silopi. The fact does remain, however, that the British left has failed woefully in any form of support for Kurdistan. A democratically elected regime has been isolated while the left passed on to other issues: Yugoslavia, South Africa and Palestine among others.

The demand must be for the recognition internationally of Free Kurdistan, for the lifting of all the sanctions against it and for real material aid. If this were to happen, the situation could be reversed and the Kurds, in their alliance with the democratic Arab opposition in the Iraq National Congress, could finally remove the nightmare of Saddam and build a multi-ethnic and free Iraq. ❑

Swallowing lies

MIKE PHIPPS looks at a new report from Africa Rights on the background to the slaughter in Rwanda and spoke to one of the co-directors of the organisation, Alex de Waal.

THE MASSACRES in Rwanda in April and May - far from being spontaneous tribal violence as presented in the media - were systematic attempts by the Hutu-extremist government to wipe out firstly its political opponents, regardless of ethnicity, and then the minority Tutsis generally. These are the key findings of a recent report by Africa Rights.

The killings, which began within hours of the downing of President Habyarimana's plane on April 6th, were, according to the interim government, an expression of spontaneous animosity against the oppositionist Rwandese Patriotic Front which occupies many of Rwanda's northern districts.

Yet, the report says, this version of events is contradicted by every independent witness in Kigali at the time. The killings were carried out by the presidential guard. Far from being random, they at first targeted the leaders of opposition political parties opposed to Hutu extremism, especially the Social Democrats who had refused any compromise with the regime. Next came intellectuals, priests, lawyers and human rights activists, academics and business people.

The target of the government attack was civil society generally. Only then did the massacres spread to include Tutsis - on a vast scale. The report notes: "The speed of mass killings in Rwanda in the last two months has equalled the rate at which the Nazis exterminated the Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and others, and it has been done in a country lacking in modern infrastructure and the technology of mass death."

How could this happen? Africa Rights put it down to the ability of the regime to sow confusion - and the readiness of the international community and media to swallow their lies. The myth of "tribal violence" was widespread, despite the fact that "the first few days of killing were the least ethnic and the most political as the presidential guard hunted down and assassinated Hutu opposition in Kigali". UN Secretary-General Boutros-Ghali ignored this when he told the Security Council of "Hutus killing Tutsis and Tutsis killing Hutus."

The government was able to confuse the issue of the four-year-old civil war against the RPF with its own recent genocide. In fact, the RPF areas are among the safest in Rwanda and at the time of the report's publication there had been little sign of ethnic retaliation there, despite government disinformation to the contrary.

> ***The speed of mass killings in Rwanda in the last two months has equalled the rate at which the Nazis exterminated the Jews, gypsies, homosexuals and others.***

The UN's readiness to blame the war for the genocide rather than the interim government closely follows the line of France which has important interests in the region. Hence, international preoccupations with a ceasefire, rather than bringing the murderous Rwanda regime to justice. For the UN to seek to impose a ceasefire on the RPF would amount to a criminal intervention on behalf of a government of killers.

Throughout the crisis these butchers have been represented at the UN Security Council: no moves have been made to suspend or expel them. This failure to condemn the perpetrators of genocide has created a deep sense of betrayal among ordinary Rwandese.

The priority now must be to halt the genocide, dismantle the institutions responsible and prosecute the perpetrators. The report calls on the UN to protect civilian life from the government and appeals for urgent solidarity with the ordinary people of Rwanda.

According to Alex de Waal, co-director of Africa Rights, little has changed since the report was written. There is no evidence that killing by government-backed militias has stopped, even if it is getting less attention in the media. However, international perceptions of this are moving slowly towards a better understanding of the situation.

One new element is the massive population displacement occurring as the RPF advance. "Hundreds of thousands are fleeing the RPF into Zaire and Burundi. So whilst the RPF may not be involved in indiscriminate killing, their advance is deeply destabilising."

How accurate were allegations in the media of indiscriminate retaliation? Uncertainty surrounds this, but de Waal pointed out that the main sources are not very reliable - refugees who were members of the militias involved in the killings. "Certainly the RPF have killed many people suspected of being in the militias, although they are now taking more prisoners."

And he concluded: "An RPF victory is still the best option in terms of the killing being stopped and a broad-based government being formed."

Rwanda: Who is killing; who is dying; What is to be done, available from Africa Rights, Tel 071 717 1224, fax 071 717 1240



Cat's the one

Amid the silly-season's Euro-election stories comes one of **Spartacus** the cat who was somehow placed on the electoral register in **Middlesborough**.

His owner, Robin White, said - predictably - that it would be a "Major cat-astrophe if the Tories do well" and that he was taking Spartacus to vote.

Robin said that **Spartacus**, a rescued cat, felt that homelessness was a big issue and that "he's also campaigning against VAT on cat food".

Price is right

Periscope surfaced in Tory **Bromley** during the Euro-elections and who should have taken over the old Ratners ("our goods are crap") jewellery shop but Conservative Euro-MP for SE London, Peter Price.

Unfortunately for Peter, the burghers of Bromley, Bexley, Erith and Crayford and other points east voted him out of a job. Luckily, he doesn't have far to go to the job centre - it's next door!

Ban it

At last an excuse for a "World No Golf Day". **Tourism Concern**, which looks seriously at the idea of environmentally-friendly travel, reports that this has been initiated in Asia for very serious reasons.

People throughout the third world are suffering through the introduction of golf courses and complexes for western Europeans. Developers often force people out of their homes, and precious water supplies are used up - along with harmful pesticides - to protect the greens.

In **Indonesia**, Cheppy Sudrajat, a farmer who organised a peaceful protest against a company that had illegally evicted him and other farmers from their land in order to build a golf course, has been jailed.

A little piggie

Campaigners on Irish-related issues, beware! A cretinous *Sunday Express* hack by the name of **Alexander Hitchin** is making pathetically inept efforts to smear victims of miscarriages of justice.

Hitchin, the young fogey son of *Daily Star* editor Brian, described by an acquaintance as "twentysomething going on 13", tries to insinuate himself into activists' favour by claiming to be "a third Irish". At a concert for the Bridgewater Three at the Bloomsbury Theatre in London, he was found snooping around Hugh Callaghan's dressing room - and was thrown out. He went round to Billy Power's house and shouted through the letterbox, demanding details of Billy's personal finances. He turned up at the Battersea Arts Festival on the pretext of "reviewing" a play by Gerry Adams whose producer, **Hitchin** falsely claimed, was his brother. He then told Tory councillors to withdraw funding for the event.

If this creep turns up on your doorstep, treat him with the only kind of courtesy he understands.

Southern Harmany

Ms Harriet Harperson, Labour's brilliant shadow Chief Secretary to the Treasury whose grasp of economic policy is quite legendary, faces a rather tricky situation in her constituency of **Peckham**.

The strongest ward in the south London CLP - Newington - is likely to be taken out and put in Simon Hughes's seat of **Bermondsey** by the Boundary Commission. The commission also proposes taking three wards out of **Dulwich**, whose MP is health spokesperson **Tessa Jowell**, and sticking them in Peckham.

This will make Peckham very safe Labour territory indeed - the problem for Harman, however, is that the three new wards have a larger membership than all those remaining after the removal of Newington.

Ms Harperson is thus placed in an invidious position. Should Jowell contest the nomination for the new seat, she will be in a very powerful position. However, if Harman goes for the redrawn Bermondsey seat, she will face the wily Lib Dem Hughes, who, frankly, is a damned sight too sharp for Harriet to handle.

However, this economics wonder-woman is a true and loyal representative and *Briefing* would like to take this opportunity to scotch rumours that her recent conversations with one or two members for safe Labour seats who are retiring at the next election have any significance.

Bad wind

A fascinating report in *Tribune* revealed that an organisation called **Labour Initiative on Co-operation** (LINC) is about to be launched upon an unsuspecting Labour movement.

The organisation is linked, according to *Tribune*, to Western Isles Labour MP **Calum MacDonald**, former economics adviser to James Callaghan and SDP turncoat David Lipsey, and Labour's general election candidate in Newbury, Richard Hall.

LINC will be a pressure group supporting links with the Liberal Democrats and, as the article points out, co-operation with another party - such as the Communist Party or Militant Labour - is outside Labour's constitution and can result in expulsion.

However, *Periscope* wonders just how far up the Labour hierarchy this urge to get into bed with Paddy Ashdown goes. We note with interest one **Neil Kinnock**'s comments on Euro-election night - after a particularly poor showing for the Lib Dems during which they only managed to win two seats out of a projected five or six, the Walworth windbag repeatedly congratulated Mr Ashdown on his party's efforts as part of the anti-Tory forces.

Damned if you do...

Expelled socialist councillor **Greg Tucker** gritted his teeth and did his duty in May's local government elections in **Lambeth** by voting for all three official Labour candidates in his council ward, where a Militant Labour candidate was also standing.

At the count that night, as Labour's losses became apparent, one of the candidates for whom Greg had voted punched him in the mouth.

A case of adding injury to insult.



History's fool

Pity poor **Barbara Roche**, MP for Hornsey and Wood Green, and normally an ardent moderniser.

Last year she was appointed **Margaret Beckett**'s PPS with a brief to keep a watchful eye on the deputy leader, who was not fully trusted by the Blair-Brown axis in the Shadow Cabinet.

Now, loyalty to her nominal mistress has compelled her to nominate Beckett for leader and deputy - though she is a known supporter of **Tony Blair** and would dearly like to vote for him.

Blair-faced cheek

Since **Tony Blair** has gone out of his way to assure *Tribune* readers that he has been pursuing the case of **Frank Johnson**, the Irishman now serving his nineteenth year in prison for a crime he did not commit, *Periscope* feels obliged to point out the following:

- Free Frank Johnson campaigners are aware of only one letter **Blair** has written on this matter to the Home Office - merely asking for details of the case.

- **Blair** responds to members of the Free Frank Johnson Campaign who write asking him to do something for Frank by advising them to contact ... the Free Frank Johnson Campaign! **Lord Soper** was astonished that Labour's Shadow Home Secretary would respond to his appeal on Frank's behalf by referring him to the Campaign, which had asked him to write the letter to Blair in the first place.

- When approached several years ago about the Guildford Four **Blair**'s response as: "Tell me again, how many of them are there?"

- Privately, **Blair** told campaigners he believed the Birmingham Six were released "on a technicality".

- In an interview on the right to silence, **Blair** implied to TV viewers that miscarriages of justice were a thing of the past.

- On his visit to the USA last year, he met with the FBI and the New York City Police, not the American Civil Liberties Union or Human Rights Watch (which has been critical of abuses in Britain).

REVIEWS

Last of England?

GEOFF MANN, a dedicated member of Middlesex County Cricket Club, reviews *Anyone But England: Cricket and the National Malaise* by Mike Marqusee, Verso, 1994.

THIS BOOK will be welcomed by all socialists with an interest in cricket who struggle to reconcile their egalitarian principles with their love of an elitist, hierarchical and undemocratic sport.

It is, in fact, far more than a left-wing attack on the cricket establishment, comprising a carefully argued and well-researched analysis of the development of cricket since the eighteenth century and an exploration of the complex issues surrounding the ban on South Africa from international cricket, the Packer Affair and the row surrounding the tour of Pakistan to England in 1992.

It concludes with a look at the international developments taking place in the sport and offers some helpful suggestions for the reform of the organisation of cricket in this country.

Marqusee's love of cricket shines throughout this book like the floodlights at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. It is a delight to read of how this American came to England and discovered the game in the 1970s, going on to become a regular at the grounds of Somerset County Cricket Club.

One of the many strengths of this book is the liberal sprinkling of personal anecdotes which are used to highlight the issues raised by the author. It is a joy to share the experiences of Marqusee, as a youth worker, taking a group of black youths to the 1983 World Cup Final at Lord's. As India, the underdogs, overturned the mighty West Indies, Marqusee "couldn't stop giggling. It was such a marvellous reversal of fortune. Infatuated with the moment, hopelessly opportunistic in my cricket attachments, I became, then and there, a wholehearted Indian supporter."

In contrast to these reminiscences, the first half of the book examines the myths which surround the history of cricket in England. Far from being a social leveller, the sport is clearly defined as an instrument of the ruling class to maintain their control over the proletariat, both within the game and throughout society at large.

The system of patronage and the distinction between Gentlemen and Players is condemned with forthright argument and amused incredulity. Marqusee reserves his most venomous attack for the Marylebone Cricket Club. He demonstrates how, over 200 years, the MCC succeeded in dominating the game, not only in England but everywhere in the world where cricket is played.

Attempts to challenge the power of the MCC were ruthlessly defeated. The author is pleased to report that the MCC finally lost control of the International Cricket Council, as the Third World cricketing countries began to assert themselves.

The myth that cricket has pastoral roots and reflects the social cohesion of the landowner and the honest yeoman is clearly debunked, and yet Marqusee recognises that cricket fans still hold on to this myth as an antidote to all that is ugly about the modern world.

The structure of county cricket, to Marqusee, reflects the dominance of the landowning elite and is an obstacle to mass involvement in the sport. However, he places too much emphasis on the alienating aspect of the county clubs. He fails to recognise that, despite the reorganisation of local government, many people still identify with the old county boundaries and the affiliation to the local county club is a definite assertion that the old counties are alive and kicking on the cricket field at least.

The painstaking research carried out by the author into the exclusion of South Africa from international cricket and the "cheating" of Pakistan's cricketers in 1992 makes fascinating reading. Marqusee exposes the hypocrisy of players, past and present, administrators and the media. The old argument of "keep politics out of sport" is demolished, not least by the assertion that if "representative" teams take on the name of nation-states then by definition the sport is politicized.

The success of the ban on South Africa was achieved despite most of the cricket establishment in England making repeated attempts to foster links with the apartheid state. Marqusee draws a parallel between the perception of apartheid through the blinkered eyes of Gatting, Gooch & Co. and the old-fashioned view of cricket as a vehicle for order and stability.

The blatant racism of the media in relation to the Pakistan bowlers in 1992 is skilfully chronicled, with the finger pointing mainly at the *Daily Mirror*'s Chris Lander. It is regrettable but necessary that Marqusee exposes the racism of many English cricketing heroes, thus tarnishing their reputation in the eyes of socialist cricket fans.

This book is enlightening, informative, entertaining and controversial. There are a few annoying idiosyncrasies on the part of the author: the use of obscure words such as *quondam* and *autochthony*; the emphasis on the author's American background even though he is fully qualified to play for England (in terms of residence, though possibly not in cricketing ability); and the constant use of the *Who's Who* format of placing a player's school and college in brackets (no doubt intended to emphasise the elitism of most players).

Nevertheless, socialists should read this book (possibly with a dictionary by their side) as it is a major contribution to the debate around politics in sport. Marqusee has suggested some important reforms in the running of the game which would open it up to a much wider group (including the involvement of many more women).

On this basis, it is also a book which should not be ignored by the cricket establishment, though it most probably will be. ❑

Democratise or perish

REVIEWS

Mike Phipps reviews
Interrogating Inequality
by Erik Olin Wright.
Verso Books, 1994,
£13.95 paperback.

FIVE YEARS after the collapse of the Stalinist regimes in eastern Europe, Marxism has entered a profound crisis. This is not so much a crisis of principles. Indeed the problem is that Marxism is in danger of becoming not much more than that - a set of traditional beliefs. But in terms of its development as a framework for understanding society, there is paralysis. The retreat of Marxists from the field of philosophy, in terms of articulating a world view, has left the way open for a revival of dead-end nationalism and arid post-modernism.

Fashionable agnosticism poses as theory. Root causes, we are told, are unknowable, society inexplicable. The surface phenomena have the same significance as the deeper processes. Since the allocation of resources is seemingly random, it must make sense to privilege your nationality, tribe or religion when the goods are being distributed. To oppose this approach is to fly in the face of rational choice. Political roles are predetermined by unchangeable identities. Through such mechanical determinism, post-modernism and reactionary nationalism feed each other.

It is in this context that the contribution of sociologist Erik Olin Wright is so vital. Wright aims not just to defend Marxism as a fixed set of beliefs or to borrow its methodology as a framework for debate: he seeks to contribute actively to its development as a world outlook. This is the achievement of his new book *Interrogating Inequality*.

The most interesting chapter of this book concerns 'Capitalism's Futures'. Wright re-examines the traditional propositions of Marxism on this problem: that the contradictions inherent in the capitalist system make its reproduction increasingly less viable, that these contradictions create the essential preconditions for socialism and at the same time produce the class capable of realising that possibility in practice. From this, Marxists have traditionally argued that no alternative basis of social organisation besides socialism is generated by the inherent logic of capitalist contradictions.

Wright believes this to be false. He argues that whilst the working class may be formed in the course of capitalist development, its capacity to assume the leadership of society and reorganise relations of production may be blocked, perhaps indefinitely. Whilst these ideas are not in themselves new, they have not traditionally been explored by Marxists, and those who have asserted them have done so by rejecting a Marxist approach. Wright, however, reconsiders these problems with reference to the cornerstone of Marxist analysis: the mode of production.

I CANNOT SUMMARISE here his argument concerning different modes of production and the tendency for capitalist contradictions to throw up statist solutions which have little to do with real socialism. But his conclusion is instructive: "Socialists must be much more self-conscious about the character of the alternative they are struggling for ... in advanced capitalist countries this means that projects for socialist transformation should be militantly democratic."

Thus it is not enough to argue for the provision of new welfare services or to demand the nationalisation of core industries: we have to focus on democratising the form in which the service is delivered or the administration run. Accountability becomes a necessary condition for quality.

What Wright does not say, but which I think flows from his arguments, is that the political project structuring the fight for socialism also needs to be rethought.

The historic failure earlier this century of broad reformist parties to achieve socialism - indeed their betrayal of it - led many genuine socialists, particularly in Europe, understandably to adopt forms of organisation based on the Bolshevik Party which led the Russian Revolution. That so much of the left persists with that model today - or often a distorted caricature of it - demonstrates not only a failure to absorb all the lessons about the degeneration of the Russian Revolution. It reveals again the inability of contemporary Marxists to ponder creatively problems of self-organisation in radically different conditions.

The picture of '57 varieties' of Leninist organisation in Britain is illustrative. Ironically, like the Heinz prototype, more unites than divides these groups. All share a belief in vanguardism, a rigid application of democratic centralism and a faith in the supremacy of programme and a 'correct line' at the expense of practice. Rather like a capitalist market in which too many similar products are competing, each group, to justify its existence, must emphasise its difference from the others, rather than seeking the common ground as a basis for unity in action.

The result is sectarianism, the missing of classic opportunities to realise a united front across the working class and the rapid burn-out of militants, who are lifted out of grassroots activity and put to work building an organisation on lines specifically designed to prevent the unfiltered impact of external reality.

Instead we need to put forward democratic, inclusive forms of organisation, which are rooted in and so can learn from the political struggle, which celebrate a diversity of ideas, whilst seeking the broadest possible common ground for unity in activity.

Problems of organisation, of policy, of overall objectives are all familiar and in need of an overhaul. Wright doesn't tackle all of these issues but his voice is one of those genuinely committed to socialism who see the need to learn all the lessons from the collapse of the Stalinist regimes and apply them to our own anti-capitalist movements in the west. ❑

Briefing AGM

Saturday 2nd July 1994,10am-5pm
Camden Irish Centre, Camden Square,
London NW1
(Entance in Murray Street)
Camden Town Tube or
Camden Road North London Line
£5 waged/£2 unwaged (free for outside London)

Morning Session
World Briefing chaired by Jeremy Corbyn MP,
with Jane Barrett on South Africa and
Ghada Karmi on Palestine

Guest Speaker:
Bernadette McAliskey

Afternoon Session
Campaign Briefing with John McDonnell on
Justice Campaigns and Jenny Fisher
on Lessons from Tower Hamlets
Labour Briefing, with reports and elections
Creche: notify Bryn on 081 985 4731
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Notice to *Briefing* readers

Briefing's (long) summer break

Over the summer *Briefing* will be reorganizing its production team - the next issue will probably not be produced until the end of September, in time for Party Conference. This is a one month bigger gap than normal so all subscribers will have their subscription extended by one issue. We look forward to producing an even better magazine after the summer break.

Advance notice

Labour Briefing

Day Conference on
The politics of sport

Sunday 11th September
at University of London Union,
Malet Street, London WC1

The Power of Money -
The Struggle for Democracy in Sport
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For further details & registration forms,
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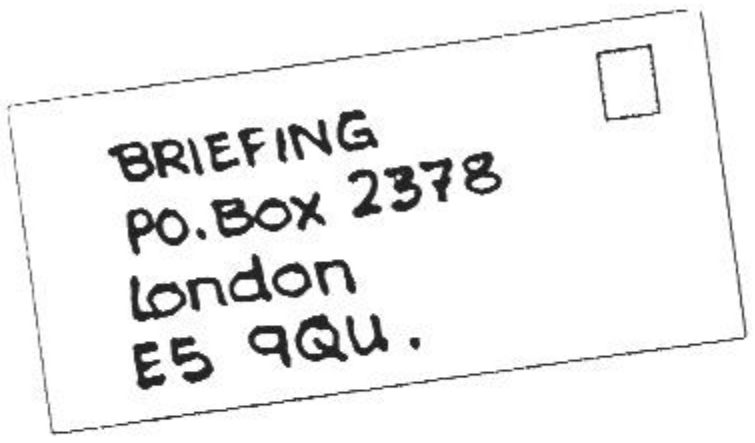
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Anti-Fascist Action has always enjoyed a positive working relationship with *Labour Briefing* supporters, which, hopefully, will continue, but the shortsightedness of "Millwall victory - the inside story" by Mike Marqusee (*Briefing*, June 1994), cannot pass without comment.

When Derek Beackon became Millwall's British National Party councillor in September 1993, with 1,480 votes, the left threw up its hands in horror. In a borough where Tower Hamlets Council itself admitted that 44% of housing stock is "unsatisfactory" and a quarter of all households lack at least one basic amenity - inside toilet, hot water, etc. - a section of the white working-class had rejected the political status quo in favour of an openly racist but seemingly radical alternative.

Tower Hamlets became a Liberal council because of local disgust at the corruption and injustice of decades of Labour control. The Isle of Dogs remained a Labour stronghold partly because of the rottenness and incompetence of the Liberals. Eventually, a third force entered the arena to harness growing discontent with the parties of the political establishment. Sadly, this force was the BNP.

From September to May 1994, the left's response was, simply, "if you don't want a Nazi for a neighbour, vote Labour". Millwall's Labour Party was split and discredited. In the absence of credible local activists, Labour's Millwall campaign in the run-up to May was footsoldiered by the left in a non-aggression pact with the Labour leadership. As Marqusee coyly has it, "This time, the left were reincorporated".

With Beackon gone, the left declares "victory". Yet, as Marqusee admits, Beackon's vote increased by more than 500 and "the local white working-class appears to have split its votes equally between Labour and the BNP". Add to this the 32% the BNP polled in Newham - some victory! Labour promised Millwall residents 1,000 houses if it took office. Local councils can only spend 25% of capital (received from council house sales, etc.) and rebuilding and housing subsidies have been slashed to the bone.

With Labour already writing begging letters to the London Docklands Development Corporation, this was a promise made to be broken. Given that the election campaign identified left-wing activism and anti-fascism with Labourism, the only party which can benefit from this is the BNP.

Elsewhere in *Briefing*'s June issue, Liz Davies observed that "Labour councils preside as landlords over the most appalling housing conditions".

The consequence of this is that substantial numbers of working-class people are, rightly, antagonistic to Labour. As long as the left continues its tightrope act rather than coming down on the side of the working class against Labour, then the "radical" pretensions of the BNP will remain unchallenged.

At present, the Labour left's dialogue with the working class can be summarised in a single phrase: "You keep swallowing the shit and we'll keep shovelling." Unless the left recovers in practice the tradition of militant, independent, working-class organisation which choked the growth of fascism in the East End in the thirties - the militant, anti-fascist confrontations, the rent strikes, anti-bailiff campaigns - the British National Party's project will continue apace.

Liz Davies says, "Labour must be seen to be on the side of council tenants, not against them". In reality, Labour councils have already taken sides against the interests of local tenants.

The left, therefore, can either take the side of local tenants, or take the side of Frank Dobson and Nick Raynsford. The Labour left's belief that there is some middle ground between these two positions is the vacuum the BNP continues to fill.

Nick Stone,
Anti-Fascist Action, BM 1734,
London WC1N 3XX

Nixon's death was "not nearly long and lingeringly painful enough" for you supposed radicals (*Periscope, Briefing*, May 1994). I thought that only sadists and right wingers enjoyed the thought of anyone suffering pain! Thank you for enlightening me as to how revolting some "left wingers" can be.

Yours,
Katharine A. Gilchrist,
Canterbury

PS. Perhaps (*Periscope*, May) Tristan Garel Jones neither buys nor steals milk. Can you give me one good reason for humans to drink a liquid which nature intended for calves?

RUSKIN COLLEGE OXFORD

Ruskin College is a residential college in Oxford which gives adults a second chance to study. It has a tradition of attracting students who have a keen sense of social justice and a desire to serve the community.

Students come from a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds and from many different countries. You do not need any formal qualifications to go to Ruskin. Motivation is more important to them than educational achievement. One year diploma courses are available in various subjects. Even if you are uncertain or unsure if you should apply, still telephone or write to the College and ask for more details of their courses.

Further details are available from Chloe Davis, Ruskin College, Walton Street, Oxford X1 2HE.

Close Campsfield

SIX HUNDRED people marched fifty miles from Oxford town centre to Campsfield Detention Centre on Saturday June 4th. Coaches travelled from Manchester, Bristol and Leicester to join the demonstration, which was organised by the Campaign to Close Campsfield.

Marchers heard speeches from Jeremy Corbyn MP and Tess Kingham (the local Euro-candidate), as well as representatives of the Algerian Community Association, the National Union of Refugee Organisations, Corezag, NSC/TUC Race Relations Committee, the Anti-Racist Alliance and the West Midlands Campaign Against Deportation.

Sally Newby
Close Campsfield Campaign



PHOTO: Oxford and County Newspapers

The controversial detention centre has been riddled with problems since it was opened at the end of last year, with many of the inmates going on hunger strike in an attempt to highlight their unjust treatment at the hands of the Immigration Service.

The situation deteriorated further the following day when Ali Tamarat, an Algerian detainee was given 24 hours' notice that he was to be deported. It took several hours of pleading with the Home Office by Jeremy Corbyn to get a deferment of deportation for a further two days to give Mr Tamarat time to get his belongings together.

A riot broke out shortly after this episode as the men and women in Campsfield became increasingly angry at the treatment they were receiving. This took place just one week after Elizabeth Blanchard, a Nigerian woman, had been handcuffed and dragged out of Campsfield, and eventually hospitalised.

Six detainees escaped and four were taken to hospital with injuries. One hundred police officers (including riot police) were drafted in as the private security firm Group 4 lost control of the situation. Four of the detainees are still on the run at the time of writing. There has been too much dragging of feet on the whole issue of detaining asylum seekers and it has not yet been successfully linked in with the wider anti-racist campaigns.

As always, the Labour leadership has little to say, afraid of upsetting potential voters. The hunger strikes, however, have not been given widespread support on the left and this must change.

Britain's treatment of asylum seekers has always been appalling. Omasese Lumumba attempted suicide while in detention, airlines are sued for flying in "bogus" refugees, and detainees are often forced to go on hunger strike to draw attention to their plight.

Many asylum seekers are fleeing brutal regimes which are often a by-product of Britain's vindictive colonial past.

Contact: Campaign to Close Campsfield, c/o 111 Magdalen Road, Oxford OX4 1RQ ; tel. 0865 724452/727718.

Ram family must stay

Bakhshi Ram died from a severe asthma attack on December 5th, 1993 while awaiting the outcome of his appeal against the Home Office decision to refuse him, his wife and daughter asylum in this country. The family had claimed asylum on the basis of Ram's well-founded fear of persecution from Sikh militants and the police in the Punjab, India. The appeal was dismissed in January 1994.

Mrs Surinder Ram and her 11 year old daughter will now be required to leave the country. Her solicitors have appealed to the Home Secretary to use his discretion to allow her and her daughter to remain in Britain on compassionate grounds. If his decision is unfavourable, the Ram family will face deportation proceedings to India.

Friends and supporters should write letters to the Home Secretary urging him to allow Mrs Ram and her daughter to remain here on compassionate grounds.

● Please send copies of letters and donations to: The Ram Family Must Stay Campaign, c/o Southall Black Sisters, 52 Norwood Road, Southall, Middlesex UB2 4DW; tel. 081 571 9595; fax: 081 574 6781.

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