October 1994 £1

BRIEFING

the voice of Lab[illegible]s in[illegible]dent, unrepentant left



Inside:

- Irish prospects
- Jonathan Michie
- Fighting the Criminal Justice Bill
- Class Traitor
- Ernie Roberts remembered

BLAIR'S SIGNAL TO WORKERS

Rich

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

Common's hyprocrisy

Jeremy Corbyn MP contrasts the Government's attitude to MPs' pay and its view on the striking signal workers:

"Giving MPs a pay rise twice the level of inflation is an act of hypocrisy. It seems that the Government is happy to pay itself a huge rise and then deny the same to the signal workers. It is double standards. The signal workers do a very responsible job and their skill ensures the safety of millions. They deserve a decent rise and proper pay."

press stop

Free Malcolm Kennedy Justice for Patrick Quinn

Hackney Community Defence Association and Hammersmith and Fulham Irish Community Forum have joined together to fight for justice for both Malcolm Kennedy and Patrick Quinn.

Although Kennedy was convicted of Quinn's manslaughter on 6th May 1994, he has maintained from the beginning that he saw two police officers carrying out the assault on Quinn. He had been convicted and sentenced to life imprisonment in September 1991 but in April 1992 'World in Action' uncovered new evidence that PC Paul Giles and two other officers had lied about the night of the murder. The first re-trial in February 1993 was abandoned and on the day of the second re-trial Kennedy's defence were informed that Giles would not be giving evidence due to mental illness. Malcolm Kennedy was cleared of Quinn's murder but convicted of his manslaughter instead.

Kennedy is appealing against the verdict on the grounds that he did not get a fair trial, and the campaign are calling for a judicial inquiry into the case.

You can show your support by writing to Malcolm Kennedy, prisoner No. MB0292, HMP Swaleside, Eastchurch, Kent, or by writing to the Home Office or your MP expressing your concern about the case. Raise the issue in your trade union, political organisation or community group. Donations for the campaign can be sent to the Kennedy Quinn Campaign, c/o Hackney Community Defence Association, Colin Roach Centre, 10a Bradbury Street, London, N16 8JN.

Public Meeting

Wednesday 7.30pm
28th September.Halkeri Community Centre
92-100 Stoke Newington Rd, London N16

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The reactionary at Labour's helm



IN HIS two months as Labour leader, Tony Blair has fulfilled *Briefing*'s worst nightmares by mounting calculated attacks on single parents, striking signal workers and the minimum wage (not to mention Larry Whitty).

Coupled with his cautious response to developments in Ireland, these events reveal Blair as deeply reactionary - a man committed to social conservatism, the disciplines of the market and the rule of a Parliamentary elite.

Haughty moralistic pronouncements on single parenthood betray both arrogance and ignorance, as do economically illiterate disavowals of the minimum wage. Please, let's have no more lectures on "community" from a man with such contempt for the basic requirements of solidarity.

Solidarity is not a self-indulgent luxury, it is the principle which binds the labour movement and the only counter-weapon to the freebooting power of capital. Blair's scabbing on the signal workers is in keeping with a long and dishonourable tradition of Labour leadership. Never mind that the signal workers' cause is both just and popular, that the RMT's strike action has been democratic and disciplined, that the wider public opposes rail privatisation and blames the Government for the dispute - the British establishment and its hirelings in the media regard any Labour links with the organised working class as unacceptable and they cannot be gainsaid.

Blair's call for both sides to submit to arbitration was made in defiance of what he knew to be the official position of the RMT and the democratic decision of the signal workers themselves. A taste of things to come. Blair seeks the arbitration society in which all conflicts are resolved from above by "experts" in the service of a ruling class consensus.

It is impossible now to look forward to the report of the Commission on Social Justice without trepidation. Despite all the rhetoric, the Thatcher and Major regimes have been unable to break the back of the welfare state. Public spending - the great demon that Thatcherism came to slay - remains unacceptably high to capitalists in Britain and across Europe. However, it is not at all inconceivable that Blair will succeed where Thatcher and Major failed. Under the guise of "modernising" welfare, the social wage will be slashed. Bringing in Frank Field to do the business would be popular with the media - and a measure of how indifferent Blair had become to Party feeling on the issue. Remember, you read it here first.

On Ireland, the Labour leader has placed himself to the right of elements of the Conservative Party. His insistence that the British Government should not act to persuade the unionist communities to come to terms with a new settlement places Labour in the rear of the movement to peace in Ireland. Our unity-by-consent policy could have been exploited to place Labour in the van, but on Ireland Blair is a man of old fashioned prejudices. Will Kate Hoey follow Field onto the Labour front bench?

The "modernising" Blair seems singularly indifferent to the urgent and often terrifying challenges posed by the modern world, the real world beyond TV studios and the Parliamentary media circus: the north-south divide, the globalisation of the economy, the feminisation of poverty, the growth of the elderly population, the decay of public services, huge waves of migration, the upsurge of racism, nationalism and fundamentalism, the environmental crisis, the dangerous and costly burden of military spending, new, super-exploitative labour disciplines, the exacerbation of poverty everywhere. It isn't easy to come up with pat policy nostrums to address these questions, but one thing is clear: none of them can be answered without breaking Blair's cardinal rule and challenging the Thatcherite economic consensus on the primacy of the market.

Two words of warning for Labour activists: Bill Clinton. Blair shares the approach that guided Clinton's Democratic Leadership Council - echoing the right on "law and order", repudiating class and "special" interests, accepting the status quo on military and foreign policy, "modernising" welfare - and which is now leading to disaster in the USA, where Clinton may well succeed in the end only in paving the way for a return of the Republicans and a boost for the reactionary populism of Perot.

Labour's lead over the Tories is exciting but it owes more to profound Tory disarray on Europe and the economy than to anything Labour has done. The longer that lead endures, the more people will want to know from us just where we stand on crucial issues and what they will get out of voting Labour. The sloganising of the modernisers may not be enough. It will certainly not be enough to sustain a Labour government in office or, more important, to enable it to tackle the legacy of Thatcher and Major. ❑

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 October 9th. 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 October 17th.

***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, the Unionists and a new Irish left

Mitchel McLaughlin, Derry City Councillor and Chairperson of Sinn Fein in the Six Counties, outlines the prospects for peace and the opportunities it opens for socialists in both Britain and Ireland.



Republicans raise the Irish flag at the border blockade known as "Dragon's Teeth." PHOTO: *An Phoblacht / Republican News.*

THE IRA cease-fire provides an unprecedented opportunity to resolve the roots of the conflict which have distorted politics and political development in Ireland. It is an opportunity which the Labour and trade union movement in both Britain and Ireland should grasp with both hands.

Because of the historic nature of the moment, it is easy to write in platitudes. We must acknowledge the tremendous inertia which can descend over politics and which can hinder the possibilities of progress. Yet, handled properly, the next few years will provide the Irish people with a unique opportunity to define itself. We now have a chance to look again, critically, at the arrangements by which we have been governed and at new and innovative ways of reflecting in our political structures both diversity and difference as well as the essential unity of the Irish people, particularly and above all its working class.

As the debate and the decisions about the future of Ireland are made it is vital that Irish trade unionists in particular and the Irish left in general are active participants in that debate and in the framing of those crucial decisions. (One can be certain that the Irish political right will). In this sense it is important that when the Forum for Peace and Reconciliation is established in the coming months by the Southern Irish Government that a wide range of community, trade union and women's groups are actively setting an agenda for profound social change and democratic political development.

There is an important role too for the British labour movement, especially if it becomes the Government of Britain in 1996 or 1997. It must not, of course, seek to put any limits on the exercise by the Irish people of their right to national self-determination, a principle grudgingly acknowledged by the Joint Declaration, and which for us remains the cornerstone for peace. In particular it must resist the pressures which are already beginning to be articulated by groups such as Democracy Now to turn back the peace process and to obstruct key elements of the Irish Peace Initiative by calling for the Labour Party to return to a pro-Union position. The Labour Party must stick to its policy commitment to move towards ending the Union with Britain and facilitating agreement between the peoples of Ireland on an all-Ireland basis. It would be a terrible irony if this position was undermined at the very moment when hope for a negotiated settlement of this centuries old conflict is at its height.

The Irish Peace Initiative launched by Gerry Adams and John Hume last year was based on the view that there can be no internal (i.e. Northern Ireland/ British) solution to the conflict in Ireland. Any solution must be on an all-Ireland basis. Of course, what form that solution takes must be determined by negotiation and agreement, not force or coercion. Indeed, that is what is meant by the principle of national self-determination. That is why Tony Blair's statement, that the British government should not seek to persuade the Unionist community into agreeing with the rest of the people of Ireland, is unfortunate, to say the least.

This goes to the very heart of the Irish Peace Initiative and one which socialists particularly should see as central to the political resolution of differences within Ireland. Socialists should be arguing that it is particularly in the interests of Unionist working people that they should see their future in an agreed Ireland - an Ireland whose constitutional shape they have helped to mould and in whose government they would naturally seek to be represented and within which they would constitute a significant section. For Unionist workers, above all, the link with Britain has been a disaster both in political and economic terms, as well as a source of conflict and instability. What is now needed by the British Labour Party, if it wishes to act constructively and positively, is to encourage Unionist workers to begin to develop the confidence in themselves that their numbers alone should give them. This will enable them to negotiate a solid agreement with the representatives of the rest of the people of Ireland - far better than relying on the paper promises and the passing whims of the British state. Against such developments we would be able to see emerge, for the first time in Irish history, a strong and powerful political movement of the left, enjoying strong support throughout Ireland and able to tackle head-on the legacy of sectarianism and British decline. ❑

After the armed struggle ...



Jane Barrett, South African trade union activist, recently visited both Dublin and Derry. *Briefing* asked Jane to compare the Irish and South African experiences.

Did you come across much interest in South Africa in Ireland?

What was astonishing was the extent to which ordinary people related to the South African struggle. Mandela's visit three years ago, when he emphasised the necessity for negotiations inclusive of all parties, has clearly been inspirational. A woman working in a bookshop told us about having heard Robert McBride, an ex-Mkhonto we Sizwe (MK) soldier and death row prisoner, speak at a troops out rally in Dublin the previous week. His message was: "Talk ... but strengthen organisation on the ground."

In Britain and among Unionists, scepticism about the intentions of Sinn Fein and the IRA runs high. Was there a similar attitude towards the ANC and its armed wing, MK?

Remember that the first round of public 'talks about talks' after Mandela's release from prison took place before any ceasefire announcement. In fact, in one of Mandela's first public speeches he called for the intensification of the armed struggle pending the government's accession to the ANC demands for an end to the state of emergency and the immediate commencement of talks on a new constitution. At its first official meeting with the government, the ANC included the MK commander in its delegation. The ANC was making it clear to the world that MK was part and parcel of its structures. Perhaps that made a difference to people's response when the armed struggle was suspended three months later. People knew the ANC could deliver.

The suspension of the armed struggle was not without difficulties for the ANC itself. Many on the ground complained that the decision was a top-down one, that it was a sell-out. There were grave concerns that suspension would leave communities undefended against attacks by the Third Force. Every branch of the ANC debated the issue hotly. By the time the ANC convened its first consultative conference at the end of 1990, consensus had been reached. The conference pledged to strengthen the ANC's community structures and to focus the mass membership's attention on a key set of constitutional demands. At the same time, it recognised the legitimacy of non-militaristic community-based self-defence units.

How did you react to the presence of the British Army in the nationalist communities in the north of Ireland? How does it differ from the South African Defence Force in the townships?

My first response on passing through a check point on the south/north border was to think, "My god, this is like the old South Africa." The armoured cars, the helicopters, the young soldiers staring out from beneath their helmets, scared and bemused - it was all familiar. But in some ways I found the army presence in the north of Ireland more insidious and intimidating. I think it had to do with the level of technical sophistication - the surveillance towers, reinforced steel walls and so on.

There has been a reluctance within the British labour movement to discuss Ireland. What advice would you give to activists here?

I think the labour movement here has hidden behind the argument that political neutrality is the best way to encourage the development of a democratic resolution in Ireland. There has been an abuse of the principle of working class unity, if that isn't putting it too strongly. We nearly fell into that trap in South Africa. There was a time within the trade union movement when people argued against an alliance with the ANC on the grounds that it was necessary to accommodate all shades of political opinion. It was a powerful argument but it was fundamentally flawed and was actually an attempt to avoid real political debate. Fortunately, it did not win the day. Instead, the trade unions got down to the task of identifying fundamental political principles. On this basis, a formal alliance with the ANC was struck. As the negotiations unfolded, the trade unions debated the issues and put forward formal positions to the ANC. They were confident of their ability to bring their constituency with them because they were continuing to deliver on basic needs.

The peace process in South Africa took a long time to unfold, which frustrated many activists. What advice would you give to those now waiting for the Irish process to begin?

People shouldn't forget that the negotiation process in South Africa was often on the brink of collapse. A new word was coined, "breaklock" - meaning the simultaneous occurrence of breakthroughs and deadlocks. At the same time, conflict on the ground escalated and the death toll rose. There was good reason for activists to feel frustrated. At the same time, grassroots structures were consolidated and community-based struggles around issues such as housing and services advanced. In this way the mass of the people began to reap some benefits from the negotiation process, even if only at local level. Their everyday experience in their communities and in their workplaces was that negotiations end in compromise - but a compromise that people can live with. So patience and self-confidence are two important ingredients - along with a determined plan to strengthen struggles around day to day issues on the ground.

Troops Out Movement conference:

Ireland, the politics of peace: developing the case for British withdrawal

Saturday, 26th November
University of London Student Union
Malet Street, London W1

For more information phone 071 607 4463 or write to BM TOM, London, WC1N 3XX.



Strike signals fightback

Daniel Evans, Railtrack signal worker and Willesden Rail RMT Branch Secretary, believes indefinite strike action can win the dispute.

THE SIXTEENTH day of action by Railtrack signal workers on September 8th was marred by the continued refusal of the Labour Party leadership to give unequivocal backing to the strikers.

We had hoped that pressure from the delegates at the TUC Congress would push Tony Blair into taking a more principled stand but, alas, it was not to be. Instead Blair and shadow transport spokesman Frank Dobson continued with the line that there should be no political interference in the dispute by the government or the Labour Party and that Railtrack and the RMT should be allowed to get on with negotiations.

Railtrack, being the bastard offspring of Tory rail privatisation, has in this way gained more than just a little legitimacy in the eyes of the public as the temporary custodians of the track and signalling that once belonged to British Rail. Signal workers are infuriated by the Labour leadership's stand. There have been more than a few voices calling for the RMT to withdraw sponsorship from their eleven or so Labour MPs.

This stance has also undermined our local efforts to get a big turn out in the forthcoming political levy ballot. With Prescott and his colleagues promising only to stop rail privatisation, not to reverse the disastrous policies of the Tories to date, we can only assume that the Labour leadership is preparing a post-Tory stitch-up of the working class in alliance with Rupert Murdoch and Paddy Ashdown.

Our idea of a Labour government is one which will intervene on our behalf against the employers "before breakfast, before dinner and before tea", nationalising where the Tories have privatised or where employers are attacking workers' jobs and conditions.

Most signal workers are now saying that our strike should have been indefinite from day one. I believe this would have led to a quick and victorious result. One and two day strikes have made it almost impossible for us to become self-organised in any really meaningful sense and have, more importantly, allowed Railtrack management to get their act together and run a fairly credible service on strike days.

The threat of sackings is likely to become a reality shortly after the Tory faithful have been whipped into a frenzy at their party conference. We shall be pushing at our Grades Conference on September 17th-18th for the RMT leadership to make the strike indefinite. However, in order to give signal workers the confidence to take such a step after more than three months, we will also be demanding that the Executive Committee launch a campaign amongst all railway workers for a national rail strike in the event of our being sacked by Railtrack, with or without anti-union laws.

Recent newspaper reports have given us a clearer idea what the Tories have planned for the railways. They want to reduce the track miles from 11,000 to 1,600, closing all branch lines and keeping open only the main arteries. They intend to reduce the signalling staff alone from 4,600 to about 1,600. Some time next year they hope to sell off what remains of the ten zones of Railtrack to private companies.

All this is somewhat dependent on defeating the signal workers, which is why we believe that the RMT should have no trouble in persuading railwayworkers that a national rail strike is in all our interests.

● A North London signal workers support group has been set up in conjunction with Willesden RMT. So far nearly £7,000 has been raised in public collections. Meetings to consolidate public support are being held across the area.

Rather than being sent to the RMT's central offices, much of the money raised has been distributed locally, both within the RMT branch to hardship cases and to weaker branches in the area. The effect has been to strengthen morale, with a drop in number of strikebreakers and more signal workers getting actively involved in the collections.

Striking signal worker John Tilley, Chair of the National Strike Committee and a member of the RMT National Executive, spoke to Madeleine Kingston on his return from the TUC Conference.

WE HAD tremendous support at the TUC but the week was soured by the fact that Blair and most of the Labour front bench have failed to back us. It is ironic when you think that it was the RMT delegation at Party Conference last year which pushed through the constitutional amendments which the new leader is so keen on. Even more ironic that it was John Prescott, the son of a railway signalman, and an RMT sponsored MP, who won the day!

It just goes to show that the push for 'modernisation' is what we all believed it was - a shift away from the Party's roots in the trade union movement. If the Party leaders believe they can win the next election by attracting the middle class vote they are deluding themselves. Without the support of the grassroots working class there will never be another Labour government.

During this dispute we've seen ordinary hard working people come under direct attack from a vicious right-wing government. It has become clear that the bosses' view is that the signal workers and their union, the RMT, must be smashed into the ground to allow the privatisation process to go ahead.

Strikers have suffered hardship, receiving only three payments of £30 over the whole dispute, and have so far lost an average of £1,000. The average pay of a signal worker is between £160 and £170 per week and they have traditionally relied on excessive and unsafe levels of overtime to make up a living wage. Because of the unsocial shift patterns many of our members' partners cannot take up employment.

No doubt when the dispute is over management will be looking for revenge. Signal workers are in a vulnerable position as they have to sit a rules examination every two years, a process open to abuse from the very same Railtrack managers who have been running scab signal boxes during the dispute.

With sixteen years experience as a signal worker I can categorically state that the system is not safe on strike days. For example, in Merseyside the new £36 million signalling centre is being staffed by five scab managers - two of whom had only ever been in signal boxes prior to the strike to deliver the toilet rolls. On non-strike days there would normally be five trained, experienced signal workers operating the workstation. The question must be asked: if there are the same number of managers running a box on a strike day as there would be signal workers on a normal day, why are the managers running only a 50% service in that area?

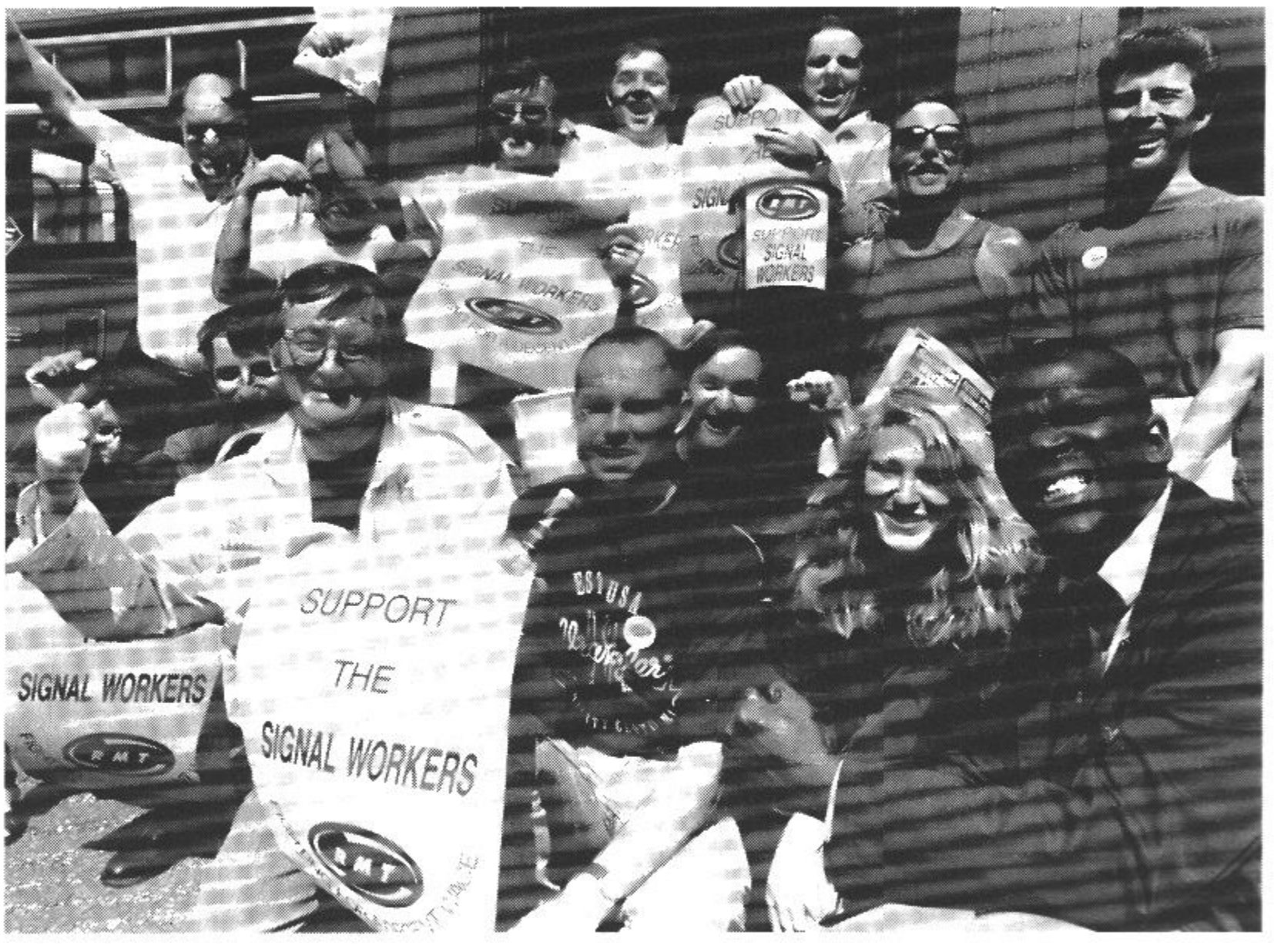
Do we really have to wait until there are dead and injured people lying around the railway system before the government, the employers and, unfortunately, the leadership of our Party, stand up and say: end this unsafe madness?



● Swindon RMT branch has produced a useful pamphlet outlining the signalworkers' case. It catalogues some of the appalling breaches in health and safety perpetrated by Railtrack to break the strike. In one Swindon box, a single man worked without a break for 12 hours! The box is operated by VDU and operators are supposed to break every two hours. Elsewhere boxes normally worked by three signal workers have been run by one manager simultaneously 'training' someone else.

The Health and Safety Executive head is Sir Frank Davies, a Tory government-appointee. Like Railtrack chief Bob Horton, he works only three days a week. He has said that health and safety legislation should create a balance between safety and "prosperity" - in other words, profits first, safety only if affordable.

Bus workers join RMT picket line at Willesden to hand over a £50 donation from 2 bus garages. PHOTO: Mark Campbell.



Can Labour travel beyond the famished road?

Michael Hindley, MEP for Lancashire South, looks at Labour resistance to radical new policies for world peace.

"BUT BECAUSE Britain has a history, it is constantly tempted to do too much. Its armed forces cost more as a percentage of gross domestic product than those of other European nations. It constantly expects special treatment - from the White House, from Europe - and constantly feels slighted when it doesn't get it. These illusions ... are shared by what remains of the British establishment. Britain ... continues to invest too little effort in increasing its means. It squanders too much of the means it does have on meddling in matters removed from its true national interests."

THE CRITICISM is obviously too trenchant to be from an official Labour source, nor is it from Alan Simpson's excellent new pamphlet, *Beyond the Famished Road*. In fact, it comes from the *Economist*. As so often over the last fifteen years, the free market right, anxious to be competitive in a burgeoning global economy, is more prepared to criticise the sacred cows of British politics than the official opposition - and there is nothing more sacred (especially to the Labour leadership) than the Foreign Office.

Labour's eternal apprehension at rocking the boat has always been deepest when it comes to the "nation's interest". One of my own formative experiences in disillusionment with the Labour elite was the realisation that Harold Wilson would not press the binding sanctions on South Africa promised during the 1964 election. And who now remembers that the 1964 Labour government appointed a Minister for Disarmament?

With the brief exception of Nye Bevan - and in the end he too thundered against abandoning nuclear weapons so that he need not go "naked to the conference table" - the Labour Party's foreign affairs front bench has been selected from the extreme right of the Party, with a weather eye on Washington.

When the Labour Party chose a prole to run the FO, mandarin fears were quickly appeased by Ernie Bevin's belief in Empire, his hatred of the Soviet Union and the left at home. In his excellent analysis of Labour foreign policy in the immediate post-war period, John Saville notes Bevin's "officials in the Foreign Office soon discovered that there were no basic disagreements in policy terms" and concludes "No senior civil servants ever felt more safe than did the members of the Foreign Office during Bevin's tenure."

Successfully and succinctly, Alan Simpson's pamphlet unites the themes of radical economic policy at home and radical peace policies abroad. Alan takes up the old theme of securing world peace by securing economic welfare and updates it to take into account the end of the Cold War. I think he does a useful service by this, but he ignores the resistance to real peace policies *inside* the Labour Party.

The brief democratisation of the Labour Party in the early eighties did allow us to get a fleeting commitment to unilateral nuclear disarmament, but since then the democratic process in the Party has been rolled back. The long march to peace (or anything!) via conference resolutions is no longer a serious option for influencing a Blair government.

Alan's restatement of the case for conversion of the arms industry and his interesting idea of turning the armed forces into a kind of revamped Peace Corps or VSO will find little echo inside the ultra-cautious Parliamentary Labour Party. We need broader and more reliable alliances for peace.

The sudden end of the Cold War has disorientated the vested interests which profited from it - still best described in Eisenhower's phrase as "the industrial-military complex". Hence all the hurrying and scurrying to redefine NATO and get the European Union to develop a "security policy" without pausing to ask: who are we supposed to be secure against nowadays? However, the military-industrial complex is regrouping: it is once more recruiting trade unionists to argue for more defence expenditure to save jobs, and hunting out fresh threats to the western way of life.

I think that the opportunity for fresh thinking will not be there for long. Already we witness the depressing sight of Labour frontbenchers waxing indignant about Tory defence cuts leaving us defenceless, without even mentioning the need to adopt a policy of arms conversion.

Alan's pamphlet is part of the counter-pressure, a reminder of more healthy currents in the labour movement and a worthy attempt to prise open the door to peace.

Beyond the Famished Road: New Policies for Common Security by Alan Simpson MP, £2.50 (free postage). Available from Mushroom Books, 10-12 Heathcote Street, Nottingham NG1 3AA.

● Labour Party Conference Fringe Meeting, Tues 4 October, 1-2pm

CJ's Restaurant, Talbot Sq.

A global ban on Nuclear Weapons in 95?

Speakers: John Reid MP, Alan Simpson MP, Bruce Kent (CND Vice-President) and Janet Bloomfield (CND Chair).

● 29 October Rally, London

Nuclear-Free World

or a Nuclear Free-for-all?

March: 12.00 Temple tube, **Rally:** 1.30 Trafalgar Sq.

Speakers, Music, Stalls

CND

A sense of community: a vision of socialism

Alan Simpson MP takes a closer look at Tony Blair's bid to put "community" back into British politics.

TONY BLAIR and I were both part of the much maligned generation whose youth spanned the sixties and early seventies. It was a time when community politics was in full flight. I am not sure if it was the same at the Bar as it was in the inner city, but there is no doubt powerful forces were afoot, fuelling the belief that by acting together people really could change the world. These forces gave momentum to many of the major developments of the era, including the new awareness of poverty and the housing crisis in Britain, a rekindled interest in industrial common ownership, and the rebuilding of factory floor organisation within the trade union movement. They reopened the question of democracy within the Labour Party and the labour movement and helped us rediscover our own internationalism through anti-war movements and transnational activities against apartheid and Third World poverty.

I would give a lot for the return of the dynamism of that era. It is one thing to recognise the importance of 'community', and another altogether to redefine it usefully for today's world. To begin with, the concept of community has to be understood globally as well as locally.

Environmental damage done over the last century will be the biggest legacy (and determinant) for life in the next. It will impinge on the economics not only of what we produce, but where (and how) we produce it. It will certainly require an overturning of the tax regimes that a Labour government will inherit from the Tories and a direct confrontation of the restructuring of capital over the past two decades.

The World Bank acknowledges that some three quarters of world trade is controlled by transnational corporations (TNCs). Almost all primary commodities are marketed by six multi-commodity traders. Twenty agro-chemical companies account for 94% of agro-chemical world trade. Fourteen car companies produce 80% of the world's cars. Ten companies control 66% of the world semi-conductor industry, and nine companies control almost 90% of global telecommunications.

Deregulation of the world's money markets has placed us on a roller-coaster of speculative cash movements. Short-termism has run riot, leaving a trail of ruin across regional and national economies. The World Bank and IMF have foist criminally destructive 'structural adjustment programmes' on the developing world, and drought, poverty, soil exhaustion and environmental pollution are now inextricably woven into the lives not only of the 20 million refugees from civil wars around the planet, but of the additional 20 million refugees from poverty and starvation.

This is the world into which Tony Blair will lead the next Labour government. There are no 'one nation' solutions to the problems we face. Nor is there a 'one term' programme that Labour should look to offer. In housing, education, health, the environment and sustainable industrial production, the work is crying out to be done. The question is: how do we pay for it?

I have never understood why we have difficulty in saying that socialist fiscal policies would be based on progressive taxation (in which the rich pay a greater share than the poor). Nationally and internationally, Labour should push for the introduction of a tax on the movement of speculative capital and adopt fiscal policies favouring long-term investment over short-term speculation.

There are a myriad of ways in which a 'fair taxation' system could be constructed by a Labour government, but all require an acknowledgement that it will redistribute from rich to poor, that it will be based on forward planning agreements (which even economies like Japan demand), and that it will shift the balance from the transnational corporations towards smaller nationally, regionally or locally based enterprises.

It is the fear of clarifying what we stand for that accounts for our paralysis today. In that sense, the rediscovering of 'community' offers some exciting possibilities, though they must be approached with caution. While the eighties may have been a graveyard for prophetic voices on the left, the decades that preceded it offer a rich source of radical ideas whose real time has yet to come.

Tony Blair entered adulthood at the same time as the world was learning of the liberation theology of Helder Camara, the community-based 'conscientisation' of Paulo Friere, RD Laing's critiques of self and society, Ernest Schumaker's ideas on sustainable economics, and the breathtaking works of Ivan Illich on education, the manufacture of ill-health and "energy and equity". He will have grown up too with the explosion of feminist writers on non-patriarchal ways of thinking, being and organising society.

Blair could do worse than revisit those who, in his own 'primetime', were not afraid to confront the issues of exploitation, inequality and ethical responsibility.

In the almost inevitable collisions ahead over GATT and the environment, the World Bank/IMF and underdevelopment, full employment policies and free trade agreements, these voices may yet help Labour develop a more genuinely radical alternative to the mess we will inherit. Certainly, they would give a grounding to our understanding of 'community' and 'society' infinitely more profound than any national network of neighbourhood watch schemes or any vague sense of feeling better about each other.

There is nothing wrong with the Labour Party beginning to redefine its perspectives on socialism around the concept of 'community'. What we must understand, however, is that community itself is neither given, static nor politically neutral. It derives meaning as part of a continuing struggle - to connect, restore, renew and change. In the end, as any socialist knows, it requires policies which address the need for structural, institutional and profound economic change ...

So let the good times rock and roll. ❑

A tale of two conferences

Training? Quotas? Policies? Maria Exall and Leonora Lloyd review the current state of play in women's struggle for power in the Labour Party.

LABOUR NEEDS to win women's votes if it is to win the next election. The Party knows that. That is why, in a half-hearted way, it has accepted the need for quotas and all-women short lists.But there is a snag. It seems that the Party has yet to be convinced that women are ready for power. That is why the annual women's conference is now biannual, with a women's training conference being held every other year as a substitute for the policy-making conference.

The first training conference, at Southport last July, was judged a success because it attracted 600 women (about as many as go to the policy conferences). The policy workshops, addressed by front bench spokespersons, were informative but suffered from lack of detail. The idea of having workshops is to allow more women to speak, but the very success of the conference meant that all the workshops were too large to be of real use.

The skills workshops were of questionable value. The one on "networking" was all about how to get on in the world. It's really quite simple - have lots of business cards and distribute them widely. Forget about equal opportunities; to get good jobs cultivate the right people.

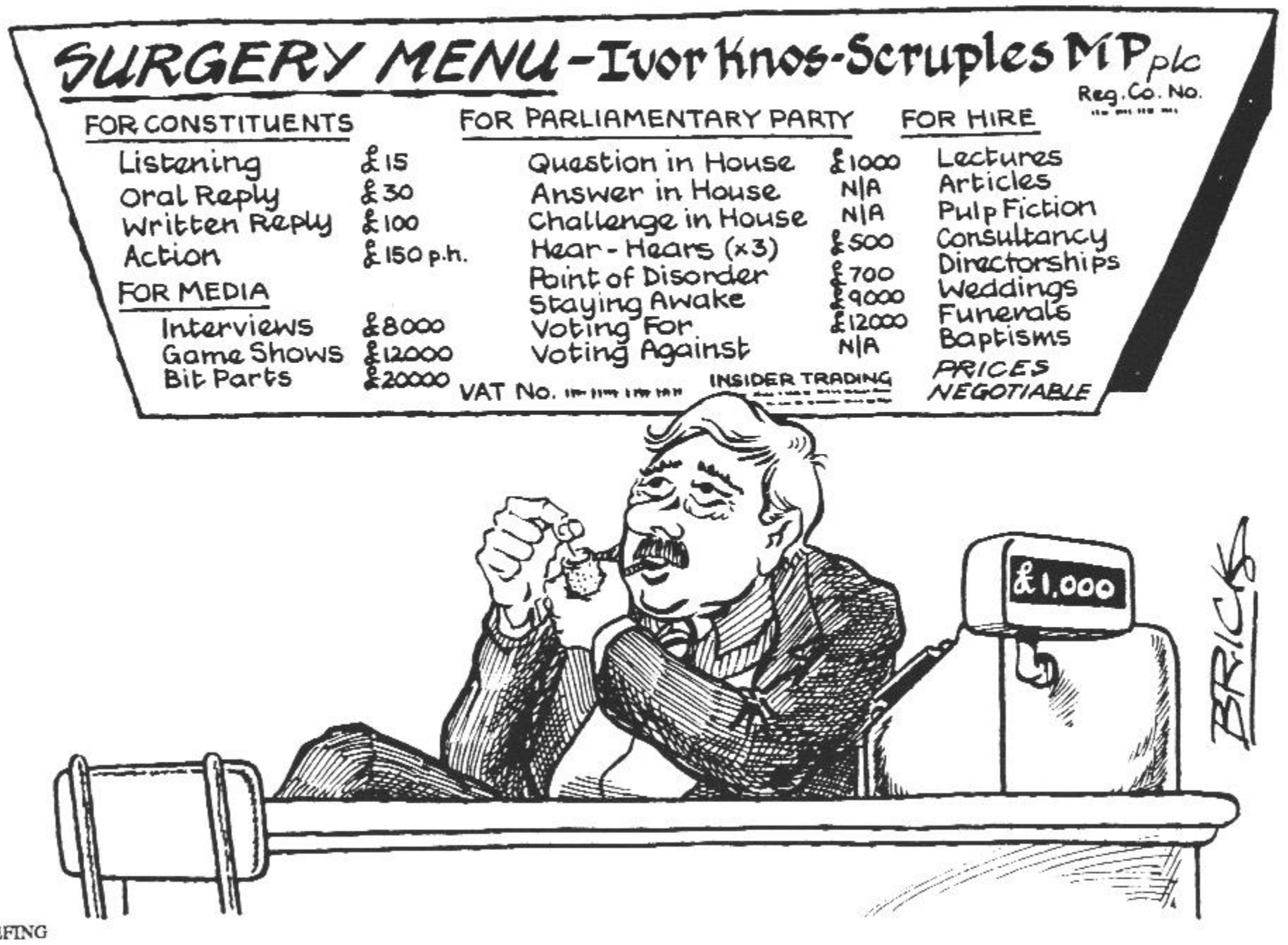
Participants questioned the value of business cards for cleaners and dinner ladies, but presumably they don't need to network. Nothing was said about how "networking" in the Labour Party works in precisely the same way as it does outside: if they know the right people, certain women can get winnable seats.

Regional conferences are also supposed to go biannual. Presumably alternate conferences are meant to give us poor unskilled and ignorant women even more opportunities for training. In London and one or two other regions, the proposal - it is not yet a rule - has been ignored and on 10th September London women organised their annual conference as normal. Not quite normal, actually. As one way of marketing their commitment to women, regional officer support has been withdrawn on cost grounds. So despite lacking skills and with little grasp of policy issues, London sisters did it for themselves.

A wide range of policies covering London women's lives were covered - trade union legislation, the welfare state, health and hospital closures amongst them. An emergency resolution asked the women's committee to seek an early meeting with Tony Blair to discuss the minimum wage. Speakers included London's only female signal worker and there was a collection for the strikers. More black and Asian women attended than at any previous London conference and many of them spoke in the debates.

Even though the theme of the conference was defence of the welfare state, the biggest group of resolutions was on the subject of the women's organisation, underlining the frustration many women feel about the way we are being treated by the Party. Women want more support for women's sections, better implementation of quotas and more democracy.

Meantime, the agenda for the Party's annual conference at Blackpool contains many resolutions calling for changes or an end to quotas. Someone in the Party certainly needs training, but it isn't the women who are active in the women's organisation. ❑



A lifetime striking back

Jim Mortimer, former General Secretary of the Labour Party, pays tribute to the late Ernie Roberts, trade unionist, Member of Parliament, and socialist.



Ernie Roberts. PHOTO: *Morning Star*

THE RECENT death of Ernie Roberts has taken from the labour movement one of its most distinctive personalities. No one was ever in doubt where he stood on the main issues facing the trade unions or the Labour Party. He was uncompromisingly on the side of working people, supporting them, either at home or abroad, wherever they were engaged in struggle, and supporting those policies which he believed were likely to advance the cause of socialism.

In his personal style Ernie Roberts was the opposite of a caricaturist's impression of a militant working-class agitator. Always neat in appearance, he could easily have been mistaken - apart from the red ties which he often wore - for a bank manager or even an old-style army officer. In debate he often irritated opponents by his ability to remain calm under extreme provocation. He was not a person to raise his voice in anger even when he was being subjected to verbal abuse. He surprised even many of his left-wing friends by his liking for sports cars.

Beneath the debonair style was a will of steel. He never buckled under pressure and he endured unjust discrimination which would have deterred many others.

His final contribution to the labour movement, undertaken when he knew he was terminally ill, was to write and complete his autobiography. I saw him for the last time shortly before he died. His enthusiasm was undiminished. His concern was that his book should be widely read and used as a weapon in the political and industrial struggle which was at the very centre of his existence.

Ernie Roberts was born into a poor family in 1912 and started work in the mining industry at the age of 13. He later found employment in engineering and it was there that he began his many years of activity in the labour movement.

He worked in a succession of engineering factories in Coventry. In many of them he was victimised for trade union activity. He served as a shop steward and eventually, at the comparatively young age of 32, was elected President of the Coventry District Committee of the Amalgamated Engineering Union. In 1945 he received the Tom Mann Medal in recognition of his contribution to trade unionism. (Tom Mann, one of the greatest figures of trade union history, himself came from Coventry).

In his earliest period, Ernie was a member of the Young Communist League and then of the Communist Party. Like Eric Heffer and many others, he left the CP not because he had moved to the right but because he found the practice of so-called 'democratic centralism' incompatible with the kind of free-thinking participation in the socialist movement to which he was committed.

He joined the Labour Party and was later elected to Coventry City Council, where he played a leading role in the development of progressive policies. Already, however, he had run into trouble with some of the more right-wing personalities in the Labour Party, who succeeded in denying him the opportunity to be considered as a parliamentary candidate.

In 1957 Ernie Roberts was elected as Assistant General Secretary of the AEU. It was his eighth attempt to win national office in the union. He was successfully re-elected until his retirement.

Much of this autobiography is devoted to the twenty years he spent as an AEU national official. Time after time officials who did not share his left-wing views sought to diminish his influence and deny him opportunities of service available to others. Anyone who wishes to savour something of the conflicts and discrimination which can take place in the labour movement should read this book.

Following retirement from his union job, Ernie Roberts finally secured endorsement as a prospective Labour parliamentary candidate. He was 67 years of age when he was elected as MP for Hackney North, which he describes as the poorest constituency in Britain. He maintained his left-wing views and activities, though he found that being an MP could sometimes be a depressing business. There is, he says, no sense of power in the job, only an awareness of limitations. He answered thousands of letters from constituents and used every opportunity to raise housing issues, denounce unemployment and press for changes in policy in relation to Northern Ireland.

Before the 1987 general election, Ernie Roberts was de-selected in Hackney North by four votes in favour of Diane Abbott. He makes no criticism of Diane and points out in his book that some of the delegates at the selection conference were motivated by a desire to have the first black woman MP.

In his final years Ernie was active in his local Labour Party, supported the anti-fascist and anti-racist movement and sought to foster organisation of the unemployed. He will be remembered as an indomitable warrior for the causes to which he devoted his life.

Strike Back, the autobiography of Ernie Roberts, is available from 13-15 High Street, St. Mary Cray, Orpington BR5 3NL. Price £5.95 plus £1 p&p; cheques payable to *'Ernie Roberts Strike Back'*.

Claws out for Clause IV

From Brighton to Blackpool, we face a battle over basics, warns Richard Hanford (Arundel & South Downs CLP)

COULD CLAUSE IV be axed? Some significant sniping at last year's Brighton Conference went largely unnoticed. Blackburn CLP staged a fringe meeting for their MP, Jack Straw, to present his case for tearing Clause IV from the constitution.

He certainly had his claws out. It was an "irrelevant icon" he spat, stuffed with "hypocrisy and ambiguity". He demanded that it be replaced by the definitive declaration: "Labour wants...a society of freedom, choice, fairness and opportunity...and the community should intervene (in the market) through appropriate measures of regulation..."

"Patterns of ownership have changed", he purred plausibly, "and we need words appropriate to today, that do not deny the mixed economy".

Would-be leader of the wobbly left, Peter Hain, provided a pathetic response to the debate. He meekly suggested that Straw's new clause be added as an appendix.

"Pleasantly surprised at the degree of agreement", and grinning like a Cheshire cat, Straw concluded that their differences were "only of tactics rather than substance". He must now believe that the soft left leave Clause IV a soft target.

There were some sterling socialist successes in defence of Party principles last year. The final hour of the Conference itself brought a clearcut endorsement of Clause IV, "rejecting any attempt to alter what is the fundamental basis of Labour Party policy". This composite, drafted largely by socialist stalwart Walter Wolfgang, was forcefully presented by his erstwhile comrade Eric Messer from Somerton & Frome CLP, backed by Fylde CLP. On the platform, modernisers looked mortified by Messer's motion. The NEC pleaded for remission and several MPs sat silently squirming whilst the vote was carried on a show of hands. Another call for "commitment to socialism", from Mole Valley & York CLPs, won similar approval.

Once the trade union link is broken, and Clause IV gets the correction-fluid treatment, the Party will be over. The late great Eric Heffer's worst fears will be confirmed - the transformation into the SDP mark two completed.

Delegates to Blackpool beware. Halt the march of the modernisers. Fight them in the hall, on the fringe, and on the beaches! Be sure to back composites re-affirming common ownership and continue to argue the case for socialism.

Waltham Forest update

The last issue of *Briefing* reported on the rumpus in the London Borough of Waltham Forest, over leaflets issued by SERA in the council elections. After lengthy discussions the Leyton CLP GC has set up a committee of inquiry. This is expected to report in the near future. The GC has also ordered an inquiry into allegations of threats against SERA members following the local elections.

Socialist Campaign Group Network

Labour Party Conference
Fringe Meeting
"Rebuilding the Left"
7pm, Thursday 6 October
Central Library (Talbot Street), Blackpool.

Dawn Primarolo MP,
Alan Simpson MP
Chair John Nicholson
Signal Worker

SCG Network office during Conference:
16 Leopold Grove
[Join the SCG Network
£5 (£2 unwaged)
3 Blades House, London SE11 5TW]

Socialist Campaign Group

Stand up for
full employment,
common ownership
and an end to witch hunts.

Alan Simpson MP
Secretary
Socialist Campaign Group

Labour's MP for the Shankill

Class traitor makes a timely return to feature Unionist fanatic Kate Hoey.



Kate Hoey. PHOTO: *Morning Star*

BACK IN the early seventies Kate Hoey was proud to attend Irish Solidarity Campaign demos with an Irish tricolour. As a member of the International Marxist Group (IMG) she was well-known for her support of the republican cause and would travel round the country addressing fellow revolutionaries on the subject.

In 1970 she was arrested following a Bloody Sunday protest in Whitehall. Others arrested at the same time were charged with public order offences but, somehow Hoey evaded prosecution.

During her time in the IMG Hoey tried to live down her loyalist background (educated at Belfast Royal Academy, the co-ed Protestant grammar school) but now, at a time when even the establishment is distancing itself from the loyalist cause, she is becoming more vehement in her support for the Ulster Unionists.

Her main campaign is to get the Labour Party to organise in the north of Ireland because she believes the north of Ireland is British! She told the *Irish Post*, "Labour should move away from its blinkered Green nationalist line." Despite Labour Party policy in favour of unity by consent Hoey boasts, "The IRA want a United Ireland. They are not going to get it."

In Parliament Hoey has tabled far more questions about Ulster than about Lambeth and has become known in her Vauxhall constituency as 'the MP for the Shankhill'.

On Saturday November 5th Hoey will address a conference in London entitled 'Let Ulster Speak' along with Enoch Powell and Tory MPs Nick Budgen and Barry Porter. It is believed that the conference has been set up to pave the way for a full-blown Apprentice Boys of Derry March through central London, complete with full regalia.

Denying her former membership of the IMG and renouncing socialist policies has been a consistent Hoey trait since she began to have Parliamentary ambitions in the early eighties. In 1985 she was spouting Tory rhetoric on education and council housing at Party Conference.

Having failed as a Parliamentary candidate for Dulwich in 1983 and 1987, Hoey tried to gain nominations to contest the Vauxhall by-election in 1989. She failed to win support from any section of the local Labour Party, receiving only five votes out of several hundreds cast in various meetings. Hoey was imposed on the CLP by Kinnock's NEC and went on to win the by-election. Vauxhall CLP was prevented from having the chance to select or deselect Hoey for the 1992 general election through a rule change at the 1989 annual conference brought in to ensure that she would not have to face a hostile CLP.

Not long after becoming an MP, Hoey launched into a vitriolic attack on the left-wing Lambeth Council and was quick to call for expulsions from the Party. She attacked the local Labour Party and the Council in the local press without inhibition. During the witch-hunt she worked closely with Keith Hill, Labour MP for Streatham but he has now distanced himself from her because of her Unionist fanaticism.

Her constant public attacks on the council, her tactic of working only with selected tenants' associations which are dominated by older white people and her vilification of councillors damaged Labour's vote and helped lose the council for Labour in the May elections. Prior to the election Labour held 21 out of 24 council seats in Hoey's constituency. After the election it held only seven seats.

Hoey's main aim in Vauxhall CLP has been to build a loyal clique of arse-lickers around herself. Hoey is both arrogant and thin-skinned, hard working on her own behalf but desperately short on imagination, eloquence or intellect. In some branches her union subsidy has gone to pay membership fees, a clear breach of Party rules. When the *Sunday Times* tackled her on this issue she replied, "Everybody fiddles - it's how it is in the Labour Party." During her time as MP the active membership in the constituency has halved.

The same article posed the question, "whose side is Kate Hoey really on - the Party's, the electorate's or her own?" She is clearly not on the side of working people or the Party's. Her support for hospital trusts, the internal market within public services, local management of schools and welfare reform is evidence enough that she has sold out lock, stock and barrel.

But then it must be hard for her to keep in touch with the issues which really affect working-class people from her Manhattan-style apartment complete with glass elevator and atrium lobby overlooking the Thames near Tower Bridge. Her £1,000-a-year membership of an exclusive leisure club places her in a league with Princess Di.

When Hoey resigned her position on the front bench to vote against Maastricht she did so not so much as an act of principle but as an indication that she increasingly sees her career as a politician lying outside the Labour Party. She has said, "I have very little difficulty in agreeing with most things that Liberal Democrats say." She has little difficulty agreeing with Ian Paisley either. ❑

Prices, profits and jobs: who regulates the regulators?

The privatised utilities are coming in for more stick by the day. Michael Furst exposes the super-profits fuelling the privatisation scam - and how Labour should deal with them.

ANGRY HEADLINES about utility companies' profits and prices blazed out from the pages of, surprise, surprise, the *Daily Mail* and *Sun* this summer. They were joined by other papers seizing on recent reports from consumer organisations on the water and electricity industries. Even right wing papers now seem to think that the privatised utilities' profits and prices represent the 'unacceptable face of capitalism'.

Unsurprisingly, the Labour front bench called for curbs on directors' pay, for a ban on water disconnections and compulsory water metering, and for tighter price controls. But that really isn't good enough.

When water was privatised in England in 1989, the Government wiped out £5.2 billions worth of corporate debt, used £1.5 billion of public cash to beef up their finances, and gave them £7.7 billions worth of tax allowances. Significant amounts of public cash were also spent on the privatisations of BT, British Gas and the electricity industry. Treasury sources suggest that the total is well over £10 billion.

Since the privatisations, rapidly rising prices have led to massive increases in profits (up threefold in water) and a major growth in corporate cash and reserves. The price rises are in effect a form of regressive taxation, except that instead of going to the exchequer the money now ends up in private pockets.

So if a Labour administration is to bring any of these corporate giants back into public or social ownership, any compensation given to shareholders and directors must be subject to some form of clawback for both the public purse and twenty million ordinary customers. For social and political reasons water must be taken out of private hands, but it's arguable whether any public money should be spent on de-privatising the other utilities - there will be plenty of prior demands on public spending. If that's the case, then Labour also has to develop some proper policies on regulation of the utilities corporations.

Admittedly, it's a complex task to work out precisely what to do. We now have four individuals wielding immense power as regulators of gas, electricity, water, and telephone services, but they are subject to the most limited forms of public accountability. Having privatised the companies and appointed the regulators, the government has been all too ready to wash its hands of any responsibility for developing an energy policy or making sure people can afford these essential services. Clearly, Labour has to give the regulators a radically different policy framework.

The original price controls set in place by the government at the time the industries were privatised were patently too generous to the companies and their shareholders - not surprising since the main aim was to make the companies financially attractive. New price controls are needed, reversing the regressive nature of current controls, increasing industry standards and helping to protect jobs.

The assumption that regulators must encourage competition has to be changed, as most of these industries are natural monopolies anyway. The current row over competition in gas supplies illustrates the absurdity of the policy: under it, those who happen to live far away from gas terminals will pay a lot more than others, and for many, prices will go up, not down, as a result of so-called competition. And even in telecoms, competition has led to lower prices for large business users, often at the expense of ordinary householders.

This summer, the water and electricity regulators reviewed the respective pricing policies in their industries - to almost universal derision. Although price controls on water will mainly be tighter come 1995, it is clear that they will still be over-generous to the companies. In electricity, the regional companies will still be able to add to their vast cash surpluses and increase their shareholders' dividends at customers' expense. The stock market wasn't slow in realising that the water and electricity companies had escaped fairly unscathed, and their share prices are continuing to do well.

If more proof was needed of the weakness of price regulation, it is apparent in the almost daily moves by the electricity companies to use their cash surpluses to buy back their own shares.

What has been especially sickening has been the rush by the utility companies to get rid of jobs by the thousand, ostensibly because of stricter price controls. *The Guardian* is convinced that there must be a trade-off between jobs and prices, showing it has, as ever, completely missed the point. Pitting workers against consumers in these industries makes no sense. The companies are extremely profitable, supplying essential services to captive customers, and the real trade-off is therefore between profits and prices - a trade-off which can only be implemented under an entirely new regulatory system.

Labour will have to bite the bullet and do something sensible about the privatised utilities. Surely even Blair can see how deeply unpopular these industries have become. The big problem for him is that to tackle the issue it is necessary to say that private profits cannot always be the driving force in economic management. So far consumer bodies have been willing to make this argument, but not Labour. ❑

We won't stop till we kill the Bill

William Pickering reviews the rising tide of protest against the Criminal Justice Bill.



PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths

This summer's march against the Criminal Justice Bill, the Tories' most monumental attack on civil liberties to date, attracted tens of thousands of people from all over the country and from all walks of life, including myself and a group of my friends.

The demonstration was a spectacular success, bringing together a wide variety of people under one banner to fight the Bill through peaceful protest.

There was a great atmosphere on the march with little antagonism between police and protesters. The only tense moment occurred when the demo stopped at Downing Street for the gates to be shaken. This small outburst was a drop in the ocean when one takes into account the vast number of people who marched peacefully through the streets of London. I had hoped to see mainly positive reports in the following day's press, but the negative coverage in the Monday morning papers was typical of the press's approach to the Bill as a whole. To them, the Bill seems aimed mainly at the young, the "yob culture", and since they see the young as the cause of today's ills they believe the young need restricting in some way. This blinkered way of thinking has allowed many clauses in the Bill to go virtually unnoticed.

Rahul Patel of the Coalition against the Criminal Justice Bill describes media coverage of the campaign as "diabolical". Although the music press have covered those aspects affecting raves and free festivals he believes the mainstream press has failed to bring many of its most "pernicious parts" into the open: the locking up of children as young as ten in privately run prisons, the termination of a suspect's right to silence and the "hidden" attack on trade unions.

Clauses that appear to be aimed only at the "alternative cultures" of travellers, ravers, etc. are undermining the civil liberties of all. Campaigning groups are determined to continue their resistance. Protests are taking place up and down the country along with lobbies of Parliament and visits to MPs' surgeries.

The moment the Criminal Justice Bill came into the public eye it was met with revulsion from many corners of society. The Bill, which was slung together by Michael Howard under the old Tory banner of 'Law and Order', was a flagrant attempt to bolster the government's sagging fortunes. It has had quite the opposite effect. By attempting to criminalise vast tracts of the population, Howard has turned many not only against the Bill but against the government itself.

If the Poll Tax backfired on the Thatcher government, the Criminal Justice Bill has done the same to Major - and more. It has politicised my generation - Thatcher's children - a group who up until now seemed loath to become actively involved in political action.

The official Labour Party line on the Criminal Justice Bill is blurred and appears more concerned with amendments than with opposition. Although some of the clauses included in the Bill could be seen as positive these are far outweighed by the wide scope that has been given to the negative ones. Clauses aimed at stopping "aggravated trespass" could be used against those carrying out peaceful protests and will result in the arrests of innocent people. This is also true of the clause giving police the power to stop anyone who they "reasonably believe" is going to a rave under the threat of a fine or arrest.

Although amendments to the Bill are welcome, hoping for changes during the process or after the vote seems too risky.

This Bill, masquerading as a solution to the Tory Party's self-inflicted crime problem, will simply increase this problem by criminalising ways of life and diverting police time and money away from catching the guilty and towards persecuting the innocent.

Demonstration against the Criminal Justice Bill

Sunday 9th October
Assemble 12 noon
Embankment Tube

March to Hyde Park
For more information ring:
Coalition against the Criminal Justice Bill, 071-923-0333.

With the McLibel trial resuming in the High Court on September 12th the ongoing campaign against McDonald's will continue this autumn with various actions throughout the UK.

Saturday October 8th

Nationwide Day of Action. McDonald's stores across the country will be picketed to mark the 20th anniversary of the company's arrival in Britain.

Friday October 14th

Picket of McDonald's European and UK headquarters, High Road, London N2 between 4.30pm and 6.30pm (by East Finchley tube).

Saturday October 15th

National March Against McDonald's - Fight Corporate Censorship!
Assemble Euston station at noon.

The McLibel Support Campaign urgently needs funds to keep the campaign running and make it a success. Donations can be sent to Mclibel Support Campaign, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX.
Tel: 071 713 1269 (cheques to 'McLibel Support Campaign')

Reversing the Euro-recession

Jonathan Michie spells out the radical action needed to bring full employment and prosperity to European economies drowning in their monetarist chains.

THE FIRST year of the European Community's much heralded single market, 1993, was, in fact, a third year of slow growth, and 1994 is witnessing only an anaemic recovery, despite government propaganda to the contrary. The past few years of stagnation meant that in 1993 almost two million fewer people were employed than in 1991 in the twelve member states of what is now called the European Union.

Britain saw negative growth during 1991 and 1992. In the middle of last year, it began a weak recovery but even this - which, in any case, made Britain the only major EU country not in recession in 1993 - was only due to the interest rate cuts and devaluation which followed sterling's departure from the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) in September 1992.

Cutting interest rates and leaving the ERM were clearly absolutely necessary (indeed, abandoning the overvalued exchange rate was inevitable), yet these measures were opposed by the leaderships of all three major political parties. Such policies were castigated as being 'anti-European', as if keeping our economy in recession did our neighbours any favours.

Mass unemployment and economic stagnation are the results of monetarist policies pursued by governments in the European Union operating under the labels 'Conservative' and 'Socialist' alike. The operation of the ERM of the European Monetary System (EMS) caused high interest rate policies, producing widespread unemployment throughout the 1980s in many of the participating economies, most noticeably France and Spain. And it is this economic failure which has been creating growing pressure to abandon the Welfare State, and in Britain in particular to replace universal benefits - paid automatically to all those eligible, as of right - with means testing.

The entire Welfare State is therefore under threat in Britain and across the European Union. Benefit payments, public and local government services and what remains of the public sector nationally are all facing cuts, privatisation or both.

In Britain, the Conservative government's spending cuts have been undermining public services both nationally and locally for years. Further cuts are threatened over the coming year. Even Tory councillors are admitting that the financial squeeze would be ruinous for local government services. On top of all this, a public sector pay squeeze is driving pay even further below that of the private sector. A similar picture is emerging across much of the European Union as the pressures of economic failure under free market policies come home to roost.

Without an expanding public sector as the engine of growth, mass unemployment will continue to undermine the well-being of millions. However, we should remember that mass unemployment is not a new phenomena. On the contrary, it was the full employment of the 1950s and 1960s which was the exception. The fluctuating tide of unemployment in Marx's day gave way to continuous mass unemployment after the First World War. This eventually caused the international financial system to collapse, allowing individual economies to expand. But it was only the Second World War which then delivered full employment.

To return to full employment in the 1990s would therefore require, as in the 1930s, two key developments.

First, there must be a break with the current policies of recession, which are a worldwide phenomenon, but particularly accentuated in Europe. With talk today of the possibility of a 'two speed Europe' - with Germany and the Benelux countries (with or without France) moving more rapidly to monetary union - it is worth recalling that the ill-fated Gold Standard did not collapse in one go in the 1930s; some countries attempted to maintain the fixed exchange rate system, thus heralding a two (or multi) tier system. As shown in the Full Employment Forum's pamphlet, *Co-ordinated Deflation - The Tale of Two Recessions* (available for £2 from 4 Armand Close, Watford, Herts WD1 3SQ) the countries which stuck with the system grew more slowly, while those which left first grew faster. Hence the 'speed' with which countries move towards fixed exchange rate systems should not be confused with the speed at which their economies will grow. In a two-speed Europe the 'slow' lane may be preferable.

Second, for the economic system to absorb the whole of capitalism's reserve army of labour on a sustainable basis would require a break with the present structure of free-market capitalism itself.

The Tories' desire to 'balance the books' has been undermined by the increasingly expensive policy of inequality and poverty wages, with more and more low paid workers having to be subsidised through the public purse. Because of this, there is, at last, a growing recognition that mass unemployment is an expensive, inefficient and divisive state in which to maintain an economy. This recognition must now be matched by policies, using all levers of economic policy, to create full employment. These policies would need to include:

- increased spending on Britain's run-down welfare state, public services and local government services;
- a large scale investment programme on infrastructural projects, from improved public transport to a national childcare scheme;
- further cuts in military spending to match the average of other European Union states, with a large scale diversification agency to ensure that companies switch resources to civil production;
- further cuts in interest rates to help boost private investment;
- increased taxation on the rich to recoup some of the handouts of the Thatcher years, redistributed to the worst off in the community who were hit hardest during those years.

All this requires a rejection of the Euro-monetarist approach of the early 1990s which pushed Europe into recession and mass unemployment. The European Union needs to abandon the reactionary Maastricht Treaty and turn instead to pursuing goals of full employment, an expanding economy and improved public services. As well as calling for this at the EU level and beyond, we must demand that this progressive agenda is in any case

implemented in Britain.

Anything less than a radical break with such past orthodoxy, accompanied by a determined drive to push real economic objectives instead of Treasury and City concerns, would stand no realistic chance of turning around the British economy. To succeed, policies for full employment will need to be forced through in face of opposition from powerful and wealthy interest groups. An incoming Labour government would therefore need much more than good intentions. To see through such a dramatic turn would require widespread mobilisation throughout the country.

Conditions have moved on since the Alternative Economic Strategy of the 1970s, and demand new policies for full employment and economic modernisation. In many sectors public ownership needs to be international, possibly through joint ventures between enterprises in the different nation states. Policies to tackle the speculators are more urgent now than ever. And the deterioration in the economic situation since the 1970s makes the sort of policies advocated then quite inadequate to the tasks faced now. It is still necessary to expand demand, through for example increasing local and national government spending, but equally vital is attention to the supply side. The productive potential of the economy has to be expanded with new firms and even industries being established and developed, and new services introduced as well as existing ones upgraded.

The increased globalisation of the economy, the dominance by transnational corporations and currency speculators, the continued de-industrialisation of the British economy and the creation of mass unemployment across the European Union all mean that to stand any realistic chance of success, alternative economic policies for the 1990s would have to start with exchange controls in place of currency speculation and public ownership in place of the wasteland left by the retreat of private enterprise from so many of the key industries of the future.

Europe needs a New Deal. Yet Europe's political leaders appear paralysed when it comes to any action other than agreeing more of the same - in the form of the Maastricht Treaty. In those countries which have allowed the people to vote on Maastricht, a strikingly different view has emerged from that which reigns at the top. The cosy consensus among Europe's political elite has not been reflected amongst their electorates.

In Britain the leadership of all three major political parties -plus the TUC - supported membership of the Exchange



80,000 people demonstrating against the progression of unemployment in Leipzig, Germany, March 1991. PHOTO: R. Bossin/ Sygma

Rate Mechanism, as well as the Maastricht proposals. The ERM commitment has since, of course, been proven to have been unsustainable.

Much of the trade union leadership across Europe also supported Maastricht, although this is now beginning to change. In part this shift is being caused by a growing recognition that very little is likely to come of the much vaunted Social Charter and Social Chapter. But more fundamentally, the true horrors of the economic processes implied by Maastricht are beginning to be appreciated. And as European governments have tried to prepare for Maastricht with public spending cuts and pay freezes, there has been widespread trade union resistance in several EU countries. The time is now ripe to build on this resistance, and begin to demand positive alternatives to the entire Maastricht process.

Genuine international co-operation and solidarity must be the starting point, including the strengthening of trade union links. The world is not limited to Europe and Europe is not limited to the Community.

But international co-operation must not be set against national economic policies such as public ownership - abandoning the global economy to the speculators and other free market forces hardly constitutes co-operation. On the contrary, international co-operation could be enhanced through the use of public ownership, establishing international joint ventures.

As well as stressing what is needed globally and domestically, we do need to answer the question of what we would want in place of the Maastricht Treaty. The first point to make is that while it could be replaced by a newly negotiated Treaty for European economic co-operation, such co-operation does not necessarily require a Treaty. A co-operative growth strategy could be agreed between governments. Indeed, one of the problems with Maastricht is that it was presented as enhancing co-operation over economic policy, when in reality it withdrew the right of governments to pursue any serious economic policies at all, whether in co-operation or not.

Our starting point must be that a dynamic European economy requires improved public services to deliver quality education and training, health, housing, public transport, and other services, along with an upgraded productive infrastructure (including modernising the public utilities, not privatising them). Conversely, a continuously improving Welfare State requires a dynamic economy to fund it. The two go hand in hand. They either stagnate together, as would be the risk with Maastricht, or contribute to and benefit from a progressive modernisation of society.

A new phase of European co-operation should have full employment in Europe as an explicit goal. The methods of achieving this would have to include:

- expanded public spending, not capping;
- a recognition of the value of public assets, not pressure to sell them off in order to reduce debt, as if an equal reduction in both assets and liabilities together somehow makes you better off;
- and the control of speculative activity which otherwise threatens to undermine any possibility of democratic choice.

We have to ask clearly: who decides? The electorate or the speculators? These progressive economic policies can only be pursued by democratically accountable institutions, not by unaccountable bankers and speculators.

● Jonathan Michie is co-editor of *Unemployment in Europe*, Academic Press, £14.95.

How many babies has the Pope?

In the final instalment of her series on the population crisis, Leonora Lloyd weighs up the achievements of the much-publicised but little understood Cairo conference.

THE POPE lost much credibility at Cairo. First, he refused even to acknowledge that there was a population problem and then, at the last moment, his representatives in the Vatican delegation signed most of the final declaration anyway. One of the questions raised by the presence of Vatican representatives is why they were in Cairo at all. What right does this "nation" of 1000 celibates have to be at a conference on population?

Though women were under-represented at the conference, they made their presence felt. "Empowerment of women" became a keyword. As a result, the discussion was more realistic than at previous population conferences. There was at least some recognition that the key issues are:

- Ensuring women have access to safe and affordable contraception. While economic development, overall health care and the level of women's education all contribute to women wanting fewer children, without effective contraception 'wanting' simply cannot become reality.
- Over-consumption in the developed world is just as important a factor in the population crisis as over-rapid population growth in the developing world. By using the giant's share of energy, water and essential raw materials we in the North are distorting the agricultural and industrial economies of the South.
- The distortion caused by the demands of the World Bank whose "restructuring" of Third World economies has exacerbated many of the trends which lead to population increase and resource depletion.

Before the conference started, it seemed as if an alliance between Catholicism and Islam would scupper it. That hasn't quite happened and it turns out that Islam does allow birth spacing and contraception for health reasons. Islamic families are allowed to limit their families to a size that they can adequately care for. Only Islamic fanatics, who think that contraception equals prostitution (for women, of course), have teemed up with the equally fanatical Vatican.

Abortion has continued to be a sticking point, even for some non-fanatics. It is as hard for governments as for individuals to admit they are wrong. Some 500,000 women a year die of obstetric causes: illegal and unsafe abortions, over-frequent childbirth or giving birth too young or after repeated abortions or in unhygienic conditions. Until governments accept that abortion must be made legal as part of an overall family planning programme including contraception and sex education, this unnecessary and tragic toil of women's lives will continue.

The programme of action adopted by most of the participating countries includes an understanding that population policies must be part of a sustainable development strategy and that both in turn depend on the empowerment of women. An important point fought for by women's organisations is the replacement of the emphasis on "family planning" by stressing instead the concept of reproductive health. An increase in spending on population programmes from the current £3.3 billion to £11.3 billion by the year 2000 was also agreed.

At the end of the day, the issues remain unresolved because the policies agreed will need a conscious determination by all governments to put them into effect. Of course, population increase is an important matter that needs to be addressed, but it is a result and not a cause. Until the causes - uneven development, neo-colonialism, poverty, child deaths, lack of security for the old and above all women's position in society - are all tackled, the world will continue to face a dangerous and uncertain future.

Nuclear chickens

Janet Bloomfield
Chair, CND.

CND'S NEW agenda is around nuclear proliferation, which is creating waves of panic throughout the international community. Proliferation is Pakistan and North Korea playing nuclear cat-and-mouse. It is desperate Russians trying to flog plutonium abroad.

Proliferation is also Trident, the UK's new nuclear programme, which directly contravenes Article VI of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Proliferation is THORP, which will provide 50 tonnes of weapons-usable plutonium.

However, in April 1995, chickens will come home to roost as talks on extending the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) begin at the UN in New York.

The NPT is an international agreement introduced in 1970 to halt the spread of nuclear weapons beyond the (then) five nuclear weapon states (NWS) and to achieve nuclear disarmament. Non-nuclear states signing the Treaty renounce aspirations to nuclear weaponhood and are granted an "inalienable right" to 'peaceful' nuclear technology.

The five NWS want the Treaty extended unconditionally and indefinitely, but are in a poor bargaining position since disarmament has been conspicuous by its absence. Therefore, continued support for the NPT from the other 157 signatories will depend on evidence that the NWS regard the NPT as more than an endorsement of nuclear weapons holders' right to stay that way.

The next six months are critical: the nuclear states must do some serious disarming, starting with the UK scrapping Trident, due to become operational within months.

There is Labour Party Conference policy to this end, but the front bench has remained mum on the issue. Worse, Party policy on the NPT appears completely in accord with the Government line.

● ***Blueprint for a Nuclear Weapon-Free World*, part of CND's proliferation campaign, shows that the NPT is not controlling proliferation either at home or abroad and demands (with practical suggestions on how to achieve it) policy on NPT renewal that will open the way to global disarmament next April.**

We want what you've got

Barbara Lisicki of DAN - the disabled people's Direct Action Network - calls for a Labour commitment to a hundred day programme of radical action for disabled people's rights.

GRIDLOCK. It's midday, Friday, 2nd September, and heavy central London traffic is at a standstill, tailing back for miles.

DAN - the disabled people's Divert Action Network - is on the streets. About half of the 50 activists present have handcuffed themselves to buses across the four lanes of Whitehall. Some wheelchair users are chained together; some get out of their chairs and sit in the road. It takes almost an hour for the arrests to happen - and the police have no accessible vans. No charges are made and protesters are released. Three hours later they are back outside the Department of Transport "catching" more buses, and there are more arrests. They are featured on all the main TV and radio news bulletins.

This is not a trip down memory lane. It is not 1968 or 1972 because, frankly, disabled people weren't organised then. Women's rights - yes. Black people 's civil rights - of course. But what have disabled people got to do with anything that good hospital and day care facilities can't sort out?

This is 1994 and the answer is simple. Six and a half million people in Britain are systematically denied their rights on the grounds of impairment. One of those basic rights is freedom of movement. A transport network that is fundamentally inaccessible, with no plans for change, illustrates the extent of the discrimination that disabled people experience. And that is before we start talking about segregation barriers, patronage and charity.

DAN has thousands of supporters. It is a network of activists who believe that negotiation, consultation, compromise and all the trappings of the democratic process have failed us. Thus our only option is to adopt the strategies of the black civil rights movements in the USA and engage in non-violent direct action. We don't choose confrontation, but do insist on being heard. Our tactics ensure that we are. It is no longer an option for governments to ignore our issues or believe that they can be dealt with by welfare and charity.

Disability is now on the political agenda and political means must be used to drive our message to the heart of the government and opposition alike.

The Tories think that asking banks and insurance companies to be less horrible to us provides the solution to our problems.

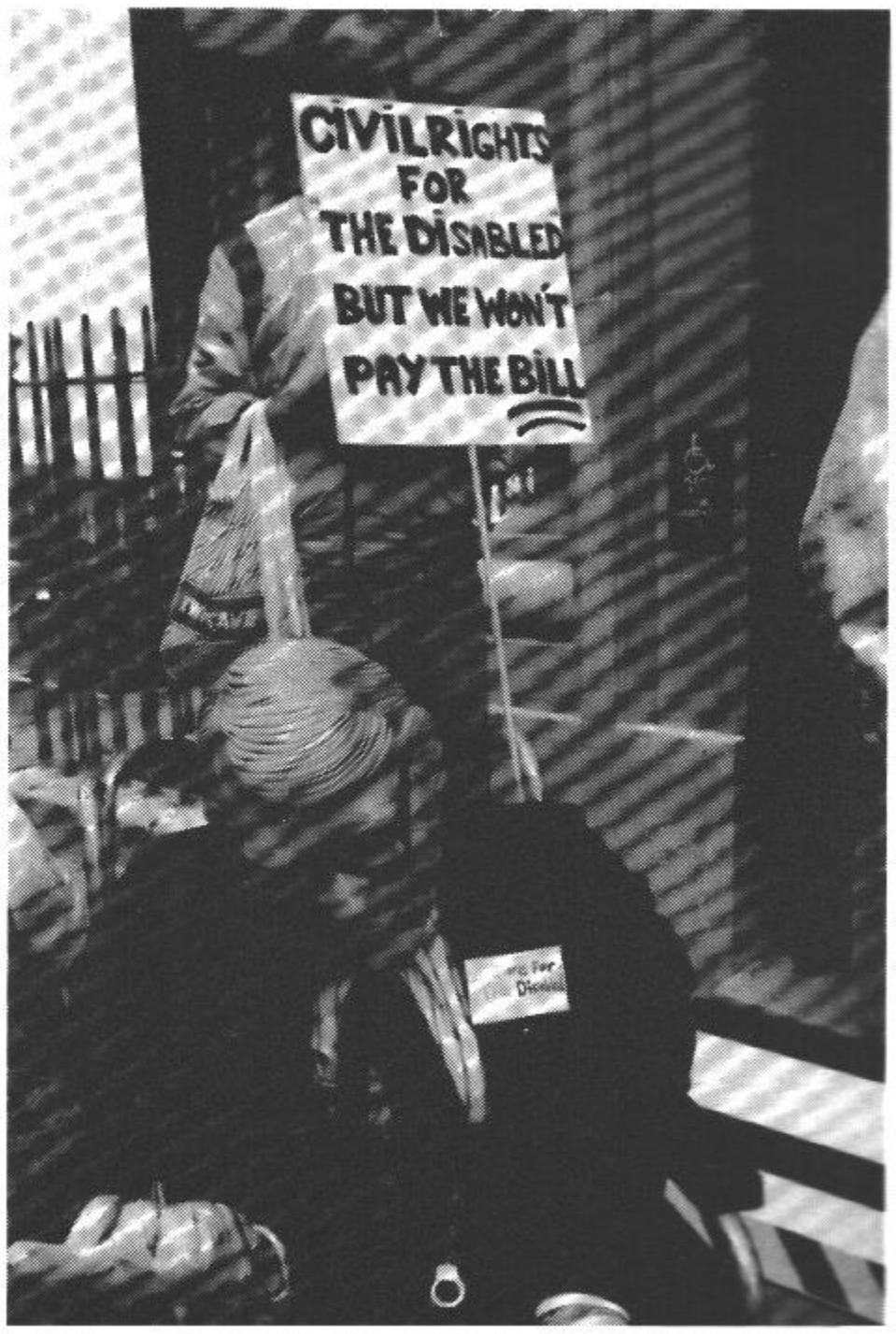
What does the Labour Party think? Can we anticipate a commitment by the Labour leadership to introducing comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, or is the scary figure of between £5 and £17 billion (depending on whom you believe) a political hot potato that will frighten them off? What disabled people need to know is this: exactly how much are our rights worth?

DAN's demands are simple, summed up in the slogan: "we want what you've got".

We ask the Labour Party to have ready its plan, for those heady days when it becomes a government in office. We ask for an end to discrimination, starting with transport, outlining timescales and targets with proper monitoring and enforcement bodies that have input from organisations controlled and led by disabled people - not the worthy, care-for-us controllers who make up the lucrative disability industry.

In the style of ADAPT (American Disabled People for Attendant Programmes Today) who occupied the Democratic Party's headquarters in San Francisco at a critical point in the Presidential campaign in 1992, we ask for a plan and a commitment to action in the first one hundred days in office.

Disabled voters will support you, if you support us. So simple.



A DAN demo on the way to Downing Street. PHOTO: Mark Tew.

And next time you're in a traffic jam on Britain's overcrowded roads, you may wonder if it's road works (again), or some stroppy crips chained to a No.11 bus who just aren't going away.

Support DAN by sending a donation to National DAN 3 Crawley Road, London N22 6AN. Pass resolutions supporting DAN's demands in your CLPs and trade union branches. Get details of future action from National DAN: tel. 081 889 1361; fax 081 888 0796.

Incapacity Action is campaigning for the repeal of the 1994 Incapacity For Work Act which comes into force next April and will replace Invalidity Benefit at drastically reduced rates. The new Incapacity Test could disqualify an estimated 250,000 disabled people from benefit. Under the new test claimants that can pick up a pint of milk or a paperback book could 'fail' and lose their benefit entitlements. Claimants with invisible or fluctuating disabilities such as AIDS/HIV, sickle cell anaemia, ME, arthritis or mental health problems will be particularly at risk along with those without a clear diagnosis of the disability.

Join Incapacity Action, c/o Box 9, 136-138 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS (telephone 081 806 6445).

TUC report

Stephen Overall reports:
This year's TUC was always destined to be overshadowed by the signal workers' dispute. RMT General Secretary Jimmy Knapp - also TUC president - went to Congress looking for strong support amid mumblings that both the Labour Party leadership and the modernising TUC general secretary John Monks found the strike embarrassing.

After an emotional speech by RMT Assistant General Secretary Wilf Proudfoot, Congress gave the signal workers a five minute standing ovation and unanimously pledged total financial and moral support. Knapp pronounced himself "delighted".

At a strike day march and rally through Blackpool, Monks and Labour's transport spokesperson Frank Dobson went further than before in backing the signal workers. Monks promised: "All this solidarity is going to be with you until you get a just settlement." Dobson backed their pay case and went on to say "the right to withdraw labour is a part of democracy".

This year's Congress was Monks' first in charge and the first since the TUC was relaunched in April under its "campaigning for change" mantra. Monks has pushed through the most far-reaching changes to the TUC constitution since the war, suspending all but three of the full-time committees and replacing them with task groups and a strengthened Executive Committee, which used to be the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Some of the more left unions have not been entirely happy with the pace of change. The GPMU and UCATT voiced objections about the unaccountable power of the Executive Committee and the lack of effective consultation. But thanks to some sweeping compositing, approval motions and complaining amendments all got voted on together, giving what appeared to be unanimous support for the changes.

Effective stage-management ensured that the week went by with scarcely a flicker of controversy. The only interruption was Arthur Scargill's attempt to get Congress to back a law-breaking amendment for trade union solidarity action, seconded by the RMT. But, as is becoming the norm nowadays, everybody cheered and clapped him, then voted against him. Congress voted to scrap all Tory anti-union laws in favour of a package of ILO-inspired positive rights for working people, including the right to strike and the right to solidarity action.

On full employment, Scargill called for a 32-hour week, retirement at 55 on full pay and an economic strategy based on Clause 4 of the Labour Party constitution. Once again it was cheers, claps and a big vote against - after the obligatory clash with right-wing Euro-fanatic AEEU President Bill Jordan.

However, the successful resolution on full employment did put some meat on the bones of what the trade union movement wants and guaranteed that the policy would remain the labour movement's central campaign. There are to be targetted regional full employment conferences aimed at the unemployed during the campaigning year.

Congress called for an economic policy based on state intervention, public investment in welfare and training, regulation of the City, public control of the utilities, reduced working hours, public sector expansion and environmental protection measures. Sustained growth must mean bringing down unemployment, trade unionists agreed.

The much-hyped clash with the Labour leadership only highlighted what was already known. Senior Party figures wafted around Congress from time to time but the relationship was arms-length. Many were privately annoyed that Tony Blair told a private dinner that a national minimum wage was "an aim rather than a firm commitment". The national minimum wage based on half average male earnings is a key TUC policy, as Congress affirmed. Alan Jinkinson, General Secretary of Unison, the biggest TUC affiliate, said he had "reservations" about Blair's attitude. Other were far less polite.

David Blunkett was the only Labour Party figure to address Congress. He assured delegates that there would be no further constitutional changes and no changes to the minimum wage and full employment policies.

In some ways the most significant, if quiet, event of the week was the resolution on Ireland. This year, for the first time ever, Congress heard an address from Irish Trades Union Congress president Phil Flynn who described the IRA ceasefire as "the best news the people of Ireland have heard in 25 years."

Congress unanimously called for the lifting of the broadcasting ban and urged the government to stop stalling on peace. It was agreed that the ceasefire marked the beginning of a "unifying peace."

trade union notebook

There is nothing new about cuts in the public sector. But the job losses currently on the Department of Transport's agenda are worthy of note. DoT plans to cut about 3,800 posts, including 450 in the central Department, 700 at the Driver Vehicle Licensing Centre in Swansea, 130 at the Transport Research Laboratory in Crowthorne, 500 in the Highways Agency and 1,500 in the Vehicle Registration Office network (all 52 VROs are to go and their work transferred to the private sector).

Trade unions in the Department have pointed out that if the cuts were reversed and DoT properly staffed and resourced, there would be considerable benefits to road safety and the Exchequer. Due to insufficient staffing, £145 million in Vehicle Excise Duty will not be collected this year. The Scottish Traffic Commissioner has recently complained of inadequate enforcement of vehicle safety regulations. And the Highways Agency, which oversees the roadbuilding programme, is trying to save £20 million on staffing while overspending on contracts by an estimated £1.2 billion.

To make the task of cutting 500 posts easier, the Highways Agency is inviting all staff to apply for their own jobs. Six regional offices will be closed and five others scaled down. Those staff wishing to remain will have to compete with others for a job at a new location.

The Agency has come down to earth with a bump since its inception in April. Over £400,000 was spent on preparations. The Chief Executive was recruited at a salary of £100,000 plus potential bonuses of up to £20,000 and a travelling allowance of £800 a month. Why didn't they try to get Jurgen Klinsmann instead?

The round the clock fight to save Parkside Colliery, the last pit in the Lancashire coalfield, came to an end on August 20th. Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures, who have been monitoring the pit, discovered that British Coal had started to fill in the twin shafts, rendering the pit (which once employed 1,000 miners) irretrievable.

The women broke into the pit for the last time and held a celebratory rally marking their achievements: numerous "illegal" pickets to stop stone being stockpiled, occupations of the colliery totalling nearly four weeks; and a campaign that has kept the pit open twenty months beyond the original closure date of December 1992.

LWAPC are convinced that with more support the pit could have been saved. "We held the fort for twenty months but the cavalry never arrived."

Their fight is now against the victimisation of Sylvia Pye by the state. BC want £16,000 eviction and legal costs off Sylvia. The women and supporters are contesting this and an appeal fund is over halfway to this figure.

● Please send donations and messages of support to: The Sylvia Pye National Appeal Fund; c/o Berni Cavanagh, Common Road Nurseries, Newton-Le-Willow WA12 9JJ.

trade union notebook

John Cryer reports: The end of August saw the deadline pass for trade unions to renew their check-off agreements with both employers and members.

It is difficult to give a complete picture just yet - final figures will probably be out in October or November - but it looks like the Tories' attempt to block the flow of cash into union coffers may have backfired in much the same way as the government's attack on political funds did in the eighties.

The attack on check-off, the system whereby union subs are deducted directly from wage packets by employers, was part of the latest Trade Union Reform Act last year. The new law stipulated that each union member would have to give written approval to continue with the system.

Many newspapers have carried dire prophecies of unions losing 30 or 40 per cent of their members. In June, for instance, rumours were circulating that fewer than 40 per cent of union members had re-signed their check-off agreement.

But the unions have done remarkably well. The GMB held a press conference in London recently to announce that it had actually increased membership by 4% because of the campaign.

The union's General Secretary John Edmonds said: "The campaign has been the biggest organisational venture since the founding of our union. We started early and worked hard. We have learned lessons from the process - it has made us take a fundamental look at the way we carry out our work.

"This Government, in the shape of Michael Forsyth MP [junior employment minister], said that the changes were to 'correct abuse'. The implication being that workers were strong-armed into union membership. The evidence of the GMB has proved the government wrong."

The TGWU has announced that it has signed up 95% of its members. MSF has said that its final figure will be something close to 100%. Unison has not given any figures but will probably get well over 95%. USDAW has re-signed 99.5%. The civil service unions have all achieved well over 90%.

So the big general unions seem to have done pretty well, especially taking into account the fact that such organisations have a turnover of 10%-12% each year. A union like the GMB has to recruit something like 80,000 members each year just to stand still. Among smaller unions, the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation had signed up 100% of its members months ago and the bakers union reckons it will lose less than 1%.

Every union official connected to the check-off campaign admits that it's been a huge administrative burden and a drain on resources but that was always the Government's intention. However, it has revitalised many union structures and produced far greater contact between union officials and members. That certainly was not part of Mr Forsyth's plan.

North America's major league baseball players, whose strike has resulted in the cancellation of the World Series, one of America's premier sport and media events, deserve support from socialists.

Average wages for a major league player are $300,000 a year, so this is clearly not a dispute between haves and have nots - but it is a dispute between haves and have a lot mores. If the players are "greedy", what does that makes the owners? The latter claim that escalating wages are forcing the game into bankruptcy, but have refused the players' demands to open the books. Economists commissioned by the players' union to investigate the owners' finances believe that profits in 1993 were $50 million.

The strike is a defensive move by players to halt the owners' attempt to impose a wage "ceiling" - a "maximum wage" of the type that British professional footballers rebelled against twenty years ago.

The US media has denounced the players, which is not surprising since most of it is owned by the same people who own the ball clubs. The baseball players have built a strong, sophisticated trade union that is not afraid to act as a trade union. Over the last two decades they have used their industrial muscle to win the right to sell their services to the highest bidder and as a result have garnered a greater share of baseball's mega-profits. If the free market is good enough for the owners, they reason, then it should be good enough for the players.

The TUC is organising a Public Services and Jobs week of activity from October 17th-21st. The week will have a different theme for each day's activity and these are likely to be: emergency services and protecting the public; putting people into decision making; public enterprise - the Post Office, energy and transport; education and training; caring for the community and health and social services.

Industrial action is not expected to be a feature of the week's activities.

The battle by the women of Middlebrook Mushrooms for their jobs and for union recognition has come to an end with the payment by the parent company, Booker, of £50,000.

Towards the end of 1992, 89 women workers began a work-to-rule in answer to the company's pay freeze. The firm sacked all of them and locked them out of the Hull mushroom farm.

Some of the women had twenty years' service and an astonishing record of productivity improvements and loyalty to the company. However, after Middlebrook was taken over by the food giant Booker, jackboot management methods soon became the order of the day.

The women were backed by the TGWU and they lobbied Parliament, the company's headquarters, and mounted a protest outside the Booker Fiction Prize ceremony in London (the award is sponsored by the company). They also wrote an excellent book about their struggle, *Our Bitter Harvest*.

Tragically, they were unable to get back their jobs or force Booker to recognise the TGWU. The £50,000 will be divided among them.

The shopworkers' union USDAW is campaigning to save one of its members in Birmingham, Hemlata Patel, from deportation. Hemlata came to Britain in December 1986 from India, to marry a man she had met when she visited India. After their marriage, the husband became violent and Hemlata left him.

Having lived in England for seven and a half years, and with a job, you may think Hemlata would be OK. But the Home Office is arguing that as her marriage didn't last twelve months she should be deported. Whilst dismissing her original application to stay in the UK on legal grounds, the Adjudicating Officer recommended that the Home Office reconsider the case on compassionate grounds. The Home Office decided against this and Hemlata is now awaiting her appeal.

USDAW has taken up the campaign in a high-profile way, inviting Hemlata to speak at their annual conference and backing her campaign which is being run by the West Midlands Anti-Deportation Campaign.

Hemlata is now speaking at trade union meetings, and told a London TGWU branch recently that "in my view the twelve month rule is unjust. The Home Office have said I should stay with my husband or return to India. But my job and my friends are here. Having been divorced would be regarded as a very humiliating thing if I returned to India."

● Campaign materials are available from: West Midlands Anti-Deportation Campaign, c/o Asian Resource Centre, 101 Villa Rd., Handsworth Birmingham B19 1NH, tel: 021 551 4518.

Also, please write to Charles Wardle, Home Office Minister, c/o 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1 and ask him, on compassionate grounds, to stop the deportation; you need to quote Reference No. P199556.

Long way back for the left

Is Berlusconi on the way out? Luciana Castellina, a Rifondazione MEP, and Michael Hindley, Labour MEP for Lancashire South, take a sober look at the mounting crises in Italian politics.

RECENT EVENTS have seriously undermined the popularity of Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, the media tycoon who won an unexpected majority in the national elections in March - a success repeated by his newly created party, Forza Italia, in the European elections in June.

First, his brother, Paolo, head of the family financial empire, was arrested for tax fraud and corruption. Then came the public revulsion against his decree to release some of those arrested in the corruption scandals of previous governments. Finally, there has been a collapse of the lira caused by the regime's loss in credibility.

The trend is unmistakable. However, although the coalition government lead by Forza Italia is shaken, the rightward drift of Italian politics is far from being pushed back. More worrying is the possibility that through the misfortunes of the Prime Minister the strength of the other coalition parties, including Fini's "post-fascist" Alleanza, may increase.

Berlusconi's electoral successes are not freakish phenomena, but the result of a deep-seated process which unfolded throughout the 1980s and saw a right-wing counter-offensive and a concurrent and dramatic set-back for the left. Elections are always a mirror of social change, and the general election of 1994, confirming the trend of the 80s, was no exception. It was a fatal mistake of the PDS (Party of Democratic Socialism, set up by the majority of the former Italian Communist Party) to believe that changing the voting system from proportional representation (PR) would undermine the power of successive cross-party centrist governments composed of Christian Democrats and Craxi's Socialists. Their belief that this would allow a moderate left-of-centre government to emerge has proved to be illusory.

Important factors militated against this scenario. The trades unions have been undergoing their most serious crisis since the war and working conditions are deteriorating without any significant resistance. The old hegemony of the left has declined and there has been a shift to the right among the intelligentsia; there has also been the rise of neo-Nazism and the growing popularity of a creed of individualism, greed and selfishness. In this context, the new electoral system, basically a first past the post system with 25% of the seats "topped up" by PR, brought rewards not for the left, but for the right coalition.

In the March elections, the left was offered a coalition of "progressives" ("I progressisti)", which was itself no easy task, considering that the core of this alliance were two parties, the PDS and the Rifondazione, which had emerged from the bitterly contested demise of the old Communist Party. The impossible was achieved, and a coalition of these two, Greens, assorted leftish groups plus some elements of what remained of the scandal-ridden PSI (Socialists) was formed which agreed to stand only one candidate in each constituency for Parliament and the Senate.

But it was not sufficient to recoup lost ground. The coalition had little time to work effectively and lacked conviction. Moderate voters whom the PDS wished to woo moved further to the right and those who wanted radical reform were frustrated.

The progressive alliance seemed to offer continuity. In contrast, the right presented themselves not as conservatives, but as revolutionaries against the vested interests of the old regime. Thus, the left failed either to mobilise its own people or to capitalise on the desire for real change among wider sections of the electorate.

The double shock of the larger than anticipated vote for Berlusconi and the subsequent inclusion of fascists in the government gave rise to important public demonstrations but the opposition has been unable to react politically or to present a viable alternative.

There are now differences in strategy on the left. A substantial part of the PDS still wants to occupy the centre ground and is prepared to sacrifice its alliance with Rifondazione to achieve this. Rifondazione emphasises the dangers of the current situation: the deep social and economic crisis, the accompanying unemployment and the concurrent political crisis. History shows that it is possible to emerge from such crises through radical reforms (for example, Roosevelt's New Deal or the French Popular Front). It also shows that they can pave the way for fascism (as in Italy and Germany).

Rifondazione does not rule out convergence with remnants of the centre, nor indeed parts of the Northern League, which is increasingly unhappy with Berlusconi, if this becomes necessary to preserve democracy. However, Rifondazione considers that the PDS is making a critical mistake by jettisoning fundamental elements of a left programme in order to appeal to a crumbling centre.

This is most apparent in the field of labour market regulation and public education, where the achievements of decades of struggle are under attack and where it is necessary to mount resistance to the populist, demagogic plans of Berlusconi.

In a period of economic crisis and large scale unemployment, workers are frightened; they look for credible alternatives as well as opposition and resistance. This is why unity of the left is not simply a tactical matter imposed by the change in the electoral system, but a strategic necessity if we are work out plans for a coherent alternative government.

Events in Italy have often presaged events in wider Europe, and the Italian left's chances of developing a strong new programme capable of mobilising a mass movement will depend on what happens in a wider Europe - where similar events may well materialise. ❑

Out of the jungle

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Which way now for the Zapatista revolt? Sue Lukes surveys recent developments in the Mexican opposition.

EVENTS IN Mexico have been taking unexpected turns, especially since the Zapatista National Army of Liberation (EZLN) took to arms on January 1st this year, citing the North American Free Trade Agreement as the final straw.

In August, the Zapatistas organised the National Democratic Convention in Aguascalientes in the Lacandon jungle where they had trained for ten years and from which they emerged to hold the Mexican army at bay.

"We called the conference as an attempt, as a bridge towards getting the transition to democracy through peaceful means, because if that is not possible, it will have to be through violence," said "subcomandante Marcos" in one of several revealing interviews with the international press.

Representatives from all the states of Mexico were invited, from worker, peasant and popular organisations, and 5,000 delegates attended (as well as 600 reporters and 100 intellectual observers), even though the convention was called by an illegal armed group, the 150 buses took 26 hours to get to the site from the nearest significant town, it poured with rain, and the Zapatistas had not expected nearly so many. "It was like a wedding where 500 were invited and 1,000 arrived," explained Marcos.

In effect, the delegates were told that the EZLN was prepared to lay down its arms if the forces in opposition to the PRI could unite to remove it. Although there were many difficulties, in particular some clear disagreements about the extent to which the PRD party of Cuahtemoc Cardenas should be supported, some agreement was reached on key issues and campaigns. The convention finished with a series of resolutions, calling on all those present to mobilise to ensure that the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) and the PAN (a similar political formation) did not win the elections on August 21st. They also rejected NAFTA, demanded the withdrawal of the army from Chiapas and voted for self-determination for the indigenous people, who form the backbone of the EZLN.

"The key aspect is the massive presence of indigenous people in our command structure," Marcos insisted. "The Zapatista is a mixture of tradition and modernity. We say that the result is the unity between Votan, who was the good god, the god of the peoples' hearts, and Zapata, the struggle for the land."

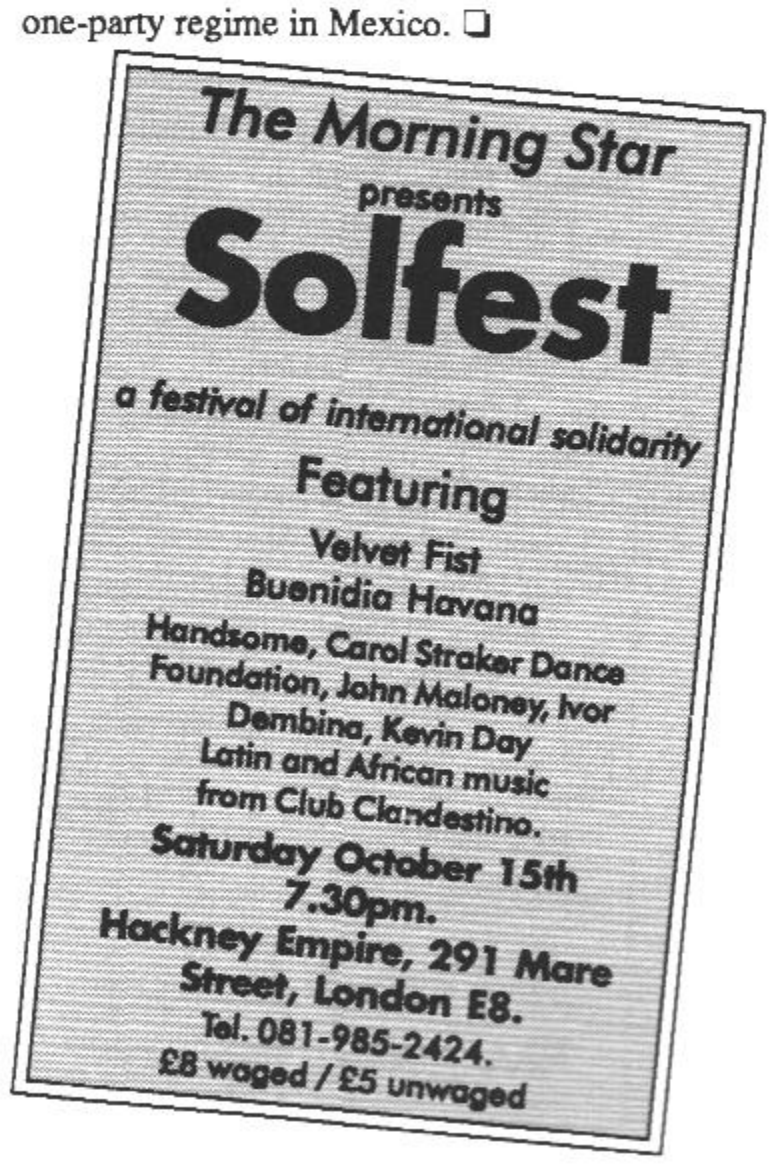
The final statement expressed a preference for a peaceful transition to democracy and the need for the convention to become a permanent forum to bring these proposals to every corner of the country, to continue, after the elections, deepening the road to democracy.

However, on the day of the elections, it was apparent that electoral fraud had again taken place. This time, in Chiapas, thousands of voters were not on the electoral roll, and found that the voting stations which they could attend were not supplied with enough ballot papers. Independent observers from non-government organisations were able to cover almost 10% of the Chiapas ballots, and found 300 irregularities. The PRI candidate, Eduardo Robledo Rincon, was declared elected as governor of Chiapas state, but his position appears untenable. Robledo is accused of involvement in a 1980 massacre of 300 indigenous and peasant adults and children, and of openly calling for the extermination of indigenous groups.

A PRD senator, Irma Serrano, has called on all Chiapas people to resist the governor to the end, legally or illegally, by any means necessary "because in Chiapas the rule of law never existed anyway". Serrano urged the people of Chiapas to support the EZLN if it was attacked, and told her press conference that she was ready to mobilise 4,000 women in civil disobedience for the campaign.

The EZLN is not the only rebel army in the field. Four others are already believed to be in existence, and at the end of August another announced the beginning of its armed struggle: the Insurgent Revolutionary Army of the Southeast (EIRS). They too, reject the results of the elections in Chiapas, support the demands of the EZLN, and demand the imprisonment and expropriation of the corrupt and bloody rulers of their state.

What will happen now to the unity established at the convention between the opposition parties, popular organisations, armed groups and the left? Given the scale of the fraud it is difficult to see how the armed groups will be able to resist calls to take up arms again. As one Mexican commentator put it: the fraud has widened still further the gap between the ruling party and those that they seek to govern. It could well be one of the last events in the history of the one-party regime in Mexico. ❑



INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Pergau comes to court

Harriet Lamb, World Development Movement campaign officer, outlines the case against Major and Hurd - and a popular policy initiative for Labour.

THIS AUTUMN Foreign Secretary Douglas Hurd will be in the dock, charged with abusing aid for the poor. The High Court will be conducting a judicial review of whether by spending £234 million of aid on a Malaysian dam he overstepped his legal powers.

The court case, the first ever legal challenge to the aid programme, is being taken by the World Development Movement (WDM), Britain's leading campaign on Third World issues. WDM is arguing that under the 1980 Overseas Development and Co-operation Act, the primary purpose of aid must be the economic development of a country or the welfare of its people. The government has justified funding the dam on any number of grounds - except Malaysia's development or welfare.

If successful, WDM would restore £234 million to the aid budget -to be spent as it should, helping poor people in poor countries. For years the government has mislead Parliament and the public, denying that aid was used as a sweetener to clinch a billion pound arms deal with Malaysia. As the cross-party Foreign Affairs Committee concluded: "Ministerial replies to certain questions were literally true, though less open and less informative than the House has a right to expect."

The questions would not go away. Why was a record £234 million of scarce aid being squandered on a hydroelectric dam in relatively wealthy Malaysia? Compare this with the £236 million given in 1991-2 to all the world's 47 least developed countries.

Why was Britain's largest ever aid project assessed by two men in two days - not even enough time to reach Pergau? How did the project still get the green light when the consortium of British companies increased their price by a phenomenal 24% - or £81 million - just two weeks after the deal was agreed?

It took a former top official at the aid department, Sir Tim Lankester, to blow the story. Earlier this year he revealed that he refused to sign the cheque because the dam was "a very bad buy" and "an abuse of the aid programme".

But this most senior civil servant was over-ruled by Hurd and Major. They justify their decision on the basis of "wider considerations", citing Britain's diplomatic interests and the jobs at stake. As aid minister Lady Chalker admitted, these wider considerations included the "hope of arms sales".

The Malaysian case is only the tip of a particularly nasty iceberg. Over the past ten years, aid to countries that do not buy British arms has fallen by almost twelve per cent. Yet countries that buy British weapons have been rewarded with average aid increases of almost twenty per cent. Often, as in Indonesia, Thailand and Jordan, aid rises and falls in synchrony with the fortunes of arms negotiations.

So aid to Tanzania, the world's second poorest country, but not a major buyer of British arms, has stood still. Yet aid has doubled for Oman, whose people are richer than the Portuguese - who are aid donors! Oman is the third largest customer for British weapons.

The aid-arms pattern is particularly marked in projects, like the Pergau dam, funded under the Aid and Trade Provision (ATP) which helps British companies win contracts overseas. The scheme has been widely condemned for saddling the Third World with inefficient projects and even the government's own evaluations have found that ATP projects did not benefit poorer people.

The only beneficiaries of ATP are a handful of companies. Since 1978 just five companies have received over 40% of the funds, with Balfour Beatty - which leads the Pergau consortium - scooping up 20%. Nor is Britain, as often claimed, merely following our competitors' lead. Far from it. In 1991, 72% of all British country-to-country aid was tied, compared to 51% of French aid and only 19% of US aid. WDM is calling for ATP to be scrapped and the money redirected into programmes to tackle poverty directly in the poorest countries.

By committing itself to ending ATP, as a first step towards curtailing all tied aid, the Labour Party could help ensure that aid achieves its true objectives. Such a policy would also win popularity at home. In an NOP poll commissioned by WDM, 60% gave helping poor people in poor countries as the most important reason for aid. Only 15% rated winning British contracts as the top reason, while 2% cited winning weapons deals.

A second popular step for which WDM is calling is for an amendment to the Overseas Development and Co-operation Act to explicitly outlaw the linking of aid and arms. WDM needs £100,000 to fight the government in court. By giving to the campaign you can help put a stop to the abuse of aid.



To make a donation or for more information contact: World Development Movement, 25 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR, UK. Tel: 071 737 6215. Fax: 071 274 8232.

Repression and resistance

Reporting on tumultuous events in Nigeria, Sean Coyne warns the champions of the IMF-backed military regime not to celebrate too soon.

THE EIGHT week strike by Nigerian oil workers was built around demands for:

• recognition of the victory of Mashood Abiola in the 'free and fair' elections which took place on June 12th 1993;

• an end to media censorship;

• the release of all political prisoners,

• an immediate return to civilian rule.

At one point, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) called out all its four million members for two days and closed down the Nigerian economy. Despite the prevarications of a section of the NLC leadership, the support for the strike contradicted the regime's claim that it was only in the Yoruba heartland of the south west that the strike had any support.

The impact of the oil strike was immediate and tangible. Lagos, known for its congested highways and traffic jams (the 'go-slows') was deserted. Banks and market places were closed. Despite the inconvenience this caused the population, the oil workers continued to enjoy massive support.

In response, the military regime of Sani Abacha has presided over one of the most brutal periods of repression in recent memory. This has included:

• The arrest on September 14th of leading democracy activists, including Dr Beko Ransome Kuti, an internationally known human rights activist.

• The re-arresting of Comrade Frank Kokori, General Secretary of the blue collar oil workers union NUPENG, who is still being held incommunicado.

• The killing of the leader of the Campaign for Democracy (CD) during a police riot in Lagos last month.

• The harassment and arrest of student activists, socialists and trade unionists.

• The arrest of leading environmental activists including the internationally renowned Ken Sarawa who has been in the forefront of the campaign to demand reparations for the forced removal of the Ogoni people and the catastrophic environmental pollution of their traditional lands by the multi-national oil companies.

• The promulgation of three military decrees giving the regime protection against any civil legal action, extending the period of detention without trial from six weeks to three months, and banning three more newspapers.

• Finally and critically, the banning of the leadership of both the oil workers' unions and the elected leadership of the NLC.

Activists in Britain could be forgiven for thinking that the events in Nigeria are of little world significance, given the pathetically inadequate coverage even in the so-called quality press. But the implications of events in Nigeria are very wide ranging indeed.

Nigeria ranks in the top ten of oil producing nations in the world, and second only to South Africa in the wealth of its natural resources. It is one of the few remaining military regimes in Africa, and continues to embarrass both its international financial backers in the IMF and World Bank and the governments of the New World Order. The Abacha regime's flagrant corrupt practices, its unabashed involvement in the illegal world drug trade and its total inability to repay the massive loans given in exchange for cheap oil and an 'open' domestic market are causing the rednecks of the IMF to have nightmares. This is not because they object to the regime's human rights abuses, but because of the real prospect of a 'domino-style' collapse of the financial system.

At the end of the oil workers' strike, the paltry media coverage in Britain implied that the workers' movement had been defeated and that the Abacha regime had seized the initiative. Rubbish. The Nigerian workers' movement may have lost some ground in the campaign for a democratic Nigeria, but the movement remains intact, even if a few of its ex-leaders have been bought off. At rank and file level, morale remains high. The events of the last two months have underlined the huge potential of Africa's largest trade union movement.

Abacha and his friends may have the fire power, and for now at least the complicit support of the western powers, but the long term prospects of the "boys in uniform" are numbered. It is up to all of us to ensure that the struggle in Nigeria is brought home, and that solidarity action goes beyond conference motions to organising practical support for those on the front line, fighting for democracy now. ❑

London Labour CND Annual General Meeting

Saturday October 22nd 1994
2.30pm

Red Rose Club, 129 Seven Sisters Road N7 7QG
(Finsbury Park tube)

Marjorie Thompson (former chair CND) and Jeremy Corbyn MP Islington North will introduce a discussion on Trident and the 1995 London Labour Party Conference.

We should never be ashamed of socialism

Conference greetings from

Jeremy Corbyn MP

Brazil votes

In October 1994 Brazil goes to the polls to elect a new President. As in 1989 Lula da Silva of the Workers Party (PT) is standing. His election in a country of 150 million people would be the biggest ever electoral triumph in the history of a socialist party. Mike Phipps asks, can he win?

SINCE ITS foundation in 1980 the PT has developed into a broad coalition of trade unionists, human rights activists, landless peasants and movements of women, black people and shanty-town activists. Its leader Lula won 31 million votes (38%) in 1989, narrowly losing to the corrupt Collor who was eventually impeached. Since then, the PT has tasted power at local level in a number of cities and has had on occasion to adapt its socialist ideals to the financial limitations of office.

Earlier this year the PT issued a 112-page draft programme, which many observers see as a move away from the hard left position the PT occupied in the 1980s. Economic policy now focuses on the creation of a mass domestic market and a break with the neo-liberal policies of the Franco government. Instead the PT envisages state control over the rates of exchange, interest and investment, the regulation of key monopolies and foreign trade and steeply redistributive taxation to help the poor.

Land not in use will be expropriated for agrarian reform and the party is committed to the rights of indigenous peoples and legal recognition for lesbian and gay relationships. It seems to be fudging on abortion, a consequence of the PT's strong links with sections of the Catholic Church.

The key issue of the international debt is also fudged. Previously the PT talked of suspending payments: now the emphasis is on attracting investment on such a scale that the debt will simply become less important. Lula's official election manifesto is even more cautious, talking simply of carrying out an audit of the debt before anything else.

During the summer Lula was getting 40% support in opinion polls. Suggestions of financial impropriety surrounding his vice-presidential running-mate (not a PT member) seem to have wounded his campaign, however, as well as showing the difficulties of leading an extremely broad left coalition of forces.

Nonetheless the choice for voters is clear: between Cardoso, the candidate of the IMF, military, land oligarchs and media: and Lula who embodies the aspirations of the workers, oppressed and poor.

To support the PT campaign, contact the Lula Support Group: PO Box 3698, London SW2 1XB.

End US blockade

Tim Young of the Cuba Solidarity Campaign reports: Cuba Solidarity Campaign is organising a week of solidarity with Cuba from Saturday October 8th to Saturday October 15th.

The Week of Action has taken on an added urgency because of the United States' attempt to use the exodus of Cuban illegal migrants to Florida as an excuse to tighten their blockade and impose additional harsh sanctions, such as ceasing Miami-Havana flights and stopping Cuban Americans from sending dollars to their families in Cuba.

CSC is calling for the US to negotiate and fulfil a proper immigration agreement with Cuba and for it to lift its blockade and sanctions. CSC is also calling for the US to hand back the Guantanamo naval base which it forced Cuba to lease at the turn of the century.

In late October, for the third year running, the General Assembly will be considering a motion by Cuba calling for an end to the US blockade and for its right to self-determination to be respected.

As well as contributing to bringing international pressure to bear on the United States, CSC will be urging the British Government to oppose the US blockade. In 1992 and 1993 Britain abstained in the vote on the blockade.

Main events:

• Thursday October 13th: Rally and social at Conway Hall, London.

• Saturday October 15th: Picket of US Embassy with speakers, 5-7pm.

More details from Cuba Solidarity Campaign at Red Rose, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG (071 263 6452).

Sao Paulo Forum

The Sao Paulo Forum Support Group is organising a tour of meetings for Central American speakers in early October in London, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Glasgow. Speakers will also address fringe meetings at Labour Party Conference.

The Forum was set up four years ago at a conference called by the Brazilian Workers Party to open a dialogue across the Latin American left over common problems, such as the neo-liberal offensive and the burden of the debt. At a meeting in Havana last year, the Forum declared its intention to bring the discussion to Europe on the basis that workers and the poor, both North and South, have a common enemy.

Victor Amaya of the FMLN of El Salvador, Teresa Sacchet of the Brazilian PT, Diaz Hernandez of the Cuban Communist Party and a Nicaraguan FSLN speaker will be on the platform.

The London meeting following a day school on Central America, 'Challenging The New World Order' will be chaired by Jeremy Corbyn MP, and will include Mike Watson MP, recently returned from a Labour Party delegation to Central America.

• Liverpool: Friday October 7th, 7pm, Trade Union Centre, 24 Hardman Street, Liverpool 1

• London: Saturday October 8, 5pm, London Voluntary Sector Resource Centre, 356 Holloway Road, N7.

Keeping socialism in sight

Andrew Coates reviews *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* by Ralph Milliband (Polity Press, £11.95) and *Socialist Register 1994: Between Globalism and Nationalism*, edited by Ralph Milliband and Leo Panitch (Merlin Press, £12. 95).

WE NEED to take a long look at the prospects for socialism. To follow fashion is to think that the best a Labour government could bring would be a reformed constitution and industrial modernisation. Ralph Milliband's death on May 21st deprives the left of one of the most trenchant critics of this 'new revisionism' which denies that there is a realistic alternative to capitalism. Tough-minded and deeply-informed, he never lost sight of the potential for more radical change.

Milliband's reputation was made through his studies of the Labour Party (*Parliamentary Socialism*, 1961 and 1973) and the state (*The State in Capitalist Society*, 1969). The former attacked Labour leaders' "dogmatic" attachment to the parliamentary tradition; the latter explored the limitations of reforming parties of the left.

In the 1980s Milliband was faced with a wholly new problem. Former Communists and radical socialists leap-frogged over Labour to endorse what David Marquand called a "new progressive coalition" of the centre-left which repudiated even the modest objectives of class-based reform. In *Divided Societies* (1989) Milliband had to put the arguments for the very existence of class struggle. He admitted, however, that there was a fundamental "crisis of the agencies" of socialism, from unions to parties. From the convulsions in the East, and the dramatic weakening of Mediterranean socialism, to the triumph of Blair, there is ample evidence that he was right.

As its title suggests, *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* takes on board this crisis. But it also addresses the far deeper difficulties of capitalism. This (it seems almost too obvious to state - were it not for the fact that it is constantly ignored) is based on wage-labour - a "morally abhorrent" type of exploitation and subordination.

In a series of sketches Milliband outlines the case against today's social system. Neo-liberal economics have blighted individual lives and entire continents. Despite this, some on the left believe that private enterprise is a source of liberty. This is false. Capitalism and democracy are not friends. As Milliband points out, popular rights are "largely the result of stubborn pressure" from "labour and left movements, against the dominant forces of property and privilege". Weaken them and freedom suffers.

The limited parliamentary control over nationalised industries was, in retrospect, at least a start towards making economic management responsible to an electorate. Unapologetic about collective control, Milliband insists that socialisation of the means of production must replace private ownership. Against the prevailing winds, he asserts: "public enterprise makes possible a democratisation of economic activity beyond anything that capitalism can achieve."

Milliband was often a robust opponent of those who believe that the Labour Party has socialist potential. He was scornful about the lack of Marxist influence within it. It seemed, a few years ago, that he wanted to help form a new party to Labour's left. While *Socialism for a Sceptical Age* describes the failings of Labour's modernisers, it also recognises that new social movements, and small red-green parties, are neither stable nor coherent enough to replace social democracy. Nor are these bodies any more sympathetic to Marxism. We have to have substantial parties, with a collective and strong leadership, that can govern a country. He concludes: "There is little doubt that social democratic parties will for the foreseeable future remain the main political force on the left, or at least a factor of major importance." The immediate task lies in "strengthening left reformism" through grass-roots work, by recreating a Marxist current, and by building coalitions with the oppressed.

Some claim that the globalisation of the economy makes even moderate socialism impossible. The latest *Socialist Register* tackles this issue. Leo Panitch analyses the nation state in the world system and its role in turning hyper-liberal policies into facts of life for its citizens. Far from agreeing that governments must accept treaties (from Maastricht to GATT) dictating permanent free-market strategies, Panitch points to the potential for alternative development. A crucial factor is sheer political will.

Other important articles by Manfred Bienefeld and Arthur MacEwan take up the same theme. They should be required reading for anyone who wants an answer to the globalisers' claim that all reform is bounded by the rules of international finance.

In a short excursion around the history of the year-book, Milliband himself discusses its most important interventions in left debates, including those on Conservatism, post-modernism, Stalinism and the 'new revisionism'. As a guide to the central concerns of the British left the Register has been and remains invaluable, and Milliband played a major role in creating and sustaining it.

He sometimes argued that Labour could never play a positive role in socialist politics. But his best contributions focused people's minds on the real problems faced by all socialists. By laying-down long-term principles for the creation of an egalitarian, democratic and co-operative society, Milliband left us with great resources. Every socialist can profit from his lucid and inspiring writings. ❑

REVIEWS

Free trade - Mexican-style

Mike Phipps reviews On the Line: Life on the US-Mexican Border, by Augusta Dwyer, Latin American Books, £8.99, August 1994.

WITH THE implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement at the start of 1994, this book could not be more timely. It documents the experience of the maquiladoras - the US-owned assembly plants strung out just over the Mexican border - which are expected to proliferate in the American drive for free trade.

Some 2,000 US maquiladora plants have located in Mexico in recent years. They come for the young, highly-skilled, hard-working but above all cheap Mexican workforce. They pay no taxes so the local authorities often have no money to cope with the influx of people looking for work and the resulting problems of infrastructure, sanitation and drainage.

But the maquiladoras also make a more sinister impact on the environment. One hundred million tons of raw sewage, including pesticides, heavy metals and solvents are dumped in the Rio Grande every day. One abandoned industrial site, described as a "toxic horror story", costs the Mexican taxpayer twenty million US dollars to clean up.

Respiratory diseases, ear and eye infections, birth defects, due to chemical emissions, are widespread. Some of those suffering defects are known as "Mallory children" after Mallory Capacitors, the firm which ran the toxic chemical plant in which their mothers worked while pregnant.

Conditions inside the plants are generally horrendous. Accidents - typically electrocution or mutilations - are common. In one incident, 36 workers at Trico, the windscreen wiper company that was the focus of a major equal pay dispute here in the 1970s, were hospitalised with gas poisoning. When 176 other workers complained of feeling sick from the same leak, the plant manager dismissed the symptoms as the results of "auto-suggestion".

Dire conditions of work have other worrying consequences. "Ester" who works at the WR Grace Corp describes the bad air and how the women workers there frequently faint from the fumes. "They spend all day inserting plastic tubes into intravenous bags at incredible speed, 36 per minute", she says, and if they drop more than three onto the floor, they get a report in personnel which could lose them a day's pay or cost them their jobs. "So what everyone does is just pick them up off the floor again," she says matter-of-factly, "and send them on down the line."

The maquiladoras employ largely women workers, 80% in some towns. So women are often in the forefront of struggles to organise the plants. Unofficial strikes occur, often to be betrayed by 'official' union leaders from Mexico City.

Last year 570 workers at a plastic factory in Tijuana decided to form a union. They were fed up with low pay, a six-day week, an assembly line twice as fast as that of the company's plants in the US, the constant fumes and heat, trivial company rules, inedible food and no running water in the bathrooms. When they went to the Labour Secretariat to register they were told they already had a union, affiliated to CROM, the Regional Mexican Workers Confederation. CROM had signed secret agreements with plants all over the city and even ran an office in Los Angeles where they could contact US companies directly before they set up plants in Mexico. Although fifteen workers were fired in the process, the workers were eventually successful in getting an independent union established.

They took their case to the US for solidarity and publicity. There the plight of Mexicans who cross the border for work, often for as little as three dollars an hour, is scarcely better. They face racism, random beatings and worse: there is a two-page list of shootings by the US Border Patrol, evidence supported by the human rights group Americas Watch.

On the Line is a highly readable book which unmasks the real meaning of US business's pursuit of free trade. ❑

The Kurds.
A People's Struggle for Peace and Justice

by Stan Newens MEP

A Liberation pamphlet

A comprehensive historical background to a crucial international solidarity issue.

Available from Liberation,
490 Kingsland Road, London E8 4AE
£1.50



Big brother

"It is good to see that all of **central Liverpool** is to be placed under surveillance by a network of video cameras. I have long advocated a television camera on every street corner as a means of instilling good behaviour in more barbaric communities."

This is how *Daily Telegraph* journalist **Niall Ferguson** regards the people of **Liverpool**. His column in July entitled "Clean the streets with living soap" gave new meaning to the term social cleansing. And what was that about a classless society?

Lambeth scapegoated again

At the Greater London Labour Party organisation sub-committee meeting in July, Greg Cook reported on the **Boundary Commission**'s decisions for south London. Five seats will be lost (34 down to 29). This mainly hits the Tories except in **Lambeth/Southwark**. This was largely because the electoral register used as the basis of the Commission's deliberations was artificially low because of the poll tax. But Cook claimed the low register was caused by Lambeth Council's anti-Poll Tax campaign.

The register fell proportionately even more in **Hackney**, where the council presumably was blameless. Consistency never was the right wing's strong point.

Costly advice

For all those newly elected Labour councillors struggling to come to terms with the rigours of office, **Ian Willmore**, outgoing Deputy Leader of Haringey Council and now an adviser to Prospect Management Consultants has some intriguing advice. In the company's new prospectus he, "counsels new council members" to "let go of the manifesto and consider what to do next."

After establishing your core values, which "might" include "redistribution of wealth" as well as "efficiency" and "effectiveness" (yawn) - what a pity **Willmore**'s values don't prevent him from prostituting himself to some corporate firm of city spivs - you "should start thinking about the structure of your council".

Willmore advises those following in his footsteps to "pay for a strong centre", for a "leaner, tougher organisation" and to "make cuts elsewhere if you have to" in order to achieve this.

Finally, comrade **Willmore** advises the new councillor to pay for outside advice from consultants, such as his own, in order to complete this restructuring, presumably with the cash saved from cuts in education, housing and other local services. It would appear that the only redistribution of wealth **Willmore** is interested in is from local tax payers to firms of city hustlers like Prospect Management and via them to his own pocket.

Don't mention OMOV

If **OMOV** is so wonderful why can't it be used to elect the new **General Secretary of the Labour Party**? After all every trade union general secretary is elected by OMOV.

Why have the modernisers and the LCC gone quiet on OMOV all of a sudden?

Pay off

Anti-nuclear campaigners may well have come up against the group **Trade Unionists for Safe Nuclear Energy (TUSNE)** - fair enough if workers in the nuclear industry wish to join together. But do they advertise the fact that much of their financial backing comes from **Nirex** - those nice people who carefully store our nuclear waste for the future - as revealed in their annual report given out at this year's TUC.?

Offside

A dilemma from the world of soccer? **Professional Football Association** Chair Phil Kelly on the influx of foreign players to English clubs: "Not so long ago we were teaching the Americans to play. Now I've got work permits for them piling up on my desk." Easy enough to find a socialist response to that, but Newcastle Chair Sir John Hall retorted, "I won't have a trade union man telling me who I can employ in my own company."

New model council

Meeting in secret conclave on an "away weekend" over September 17th-18th, **Islington Council**'s Labour Group agreed a cuts package and a new personnel policy - without the slightest consultation with the Labour Party, the trade unions or anyone else in the borough.

Under the relentless supervision of Chief Whip **Stephen Twigg** (a former NUS president), the Group sealed itself off in the Esher country house which had served the EETPU for years as a hideaway. Pictures of **Frank Chappell** and **Eric Hammond** stared down approvingly at the proceedings.

A personnel policy statement which promised a "swing away" from collective bargaining to individual contracts was approved at a "workshop" attended by nine Labour councillors. It will go to the floor of the Council as Party policy despite never having been discussed by any Party body or by the Group as a whole.

So this is democracy moderniser-style - secretive, selective and impervious to popular or Party pressures of any kind. It makes a City shareholders' meeting look like a soviet.

Coal feast

Last month **British Coal** put on a bash for its managers and spared no expense in the process. Two hundred and thirty **British Coal** bosses were invited to a feast at the Chiswell Street Brewery, by way of a thank you for working so hard over the past year closing down the mines. Not only did **British Coal** pay for the meal but also put up all the managers in first class hotels. Isn't it reassuring to know that the coal industry is being managed so efficiently?

Modern anarchy

In a surprising change of tactics has ***Class War*** finally found a target which will bring the establishment to its knees? The anarchist group plans to make its mark by protesting against noisy roadworks, in the leafy London suburb of Muswell Hill and threatening a campaign of sabotage against the contractors. Could it be that ***Class War*** has its own brand of modernisers?

No parking

Following hot on the heels of the news about the hundreds of **royal residences** which are given to various upper class hangers-on, it has been revealed that a firm of contractors has done away with most of the parking concessions for **disabled people** in the royal parks.

All that's left for orange badge holders (which entitle disabled people to parking concessions throughout the country) is a few disabled parking bays. **The Queen** was unavailable for comment.

Get your Conference Guide!

Pete Willsman, the holder of the CLP seat on the Conference Arrangements Committee, has recently produced the fifth edition of his 12 page guide to Conference procedures. It has been sent to every CLP Secretary.

For a copy of the guide send an SAE (6.5" x 9.5") to CLPD, 10 Park Drive, London NW11 7SH.



'It's Tony Blair rock — it says nothing all the way through'

Sports forum

Louise Kawakami reports: Individuals from various backgrounds and interests gathered for an informative day of discussion and debate at the conference on sport organised by *Labour Briefing*. Numerous themes and topics were discussed on the day with the main emphasis placed on racism, class, economics and democracy in sport.

The first part of the day was devoted to the wider issues of sport with contributions on the historic aspects. Mihir Bose spoke of race and racism in cricket and Robert Govender referred specifically to the case of South Africa. Amanda Kendal, sports writer for the *Morning Star*, addressed economics in sport focusing on the role of money and vested interests, the input of television and on who should fund and be the beneficiaries in sport.

The rest of the conference was on the role of spectator and participant rights. Dave Hammond addressed class and sport. Jane Connor spoke of gender and stressed the importance of fighting sexism in both participant and spectator sports. Football writer Eddie Horton emphasised the need to inject politics back into the dialogue around football. Throughout the day, numerous issues and questions were raised. These included: building a forum for anti-racist/anti-fascist activity within sport, legislation and policing in sport, violence and the role of women in sport.

It became apparent that there is great interest in the politics of sport and a need for further discussions within the left. It was decided to create a forum for socialists interested in sport to take on the task of further debate and exchange of ideas.

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Conference Fringe Meeting

Question Time -
Who needs David Dimbleby?

8.00pm Monday 3rd October
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Tony Benn MP, Alan Simpson MP, Alice Mahon MP, Bernadette McAliskey invited.
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No 42 AUGUST 1984
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LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

Famous last words ...

London Labour Briefing, August 1984
"The exploitation and oppression of women within the family doesn't need to be spelled out. Perhaps not so obvious is the way the family fragments society, isolating us fom each other sexually, socially and economically."
Jane Stockton, StreetLife Supplement.

"The government of the Polish People's Republic, despite hypocritical condemnation of the activities of the British police in the columns of the regime's press and by the regime's pseudo trade unionists, is profiting from the export of coal to Britain... The slave labour of the Polish miner serves to break the resistance of the British miner."
Resolution in support of the British miners by underground Solidarnosc in Mazowsze Region, Poland.

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



Despite Labour's lead in the opinion polls and the fact that the Tories are deeply discredited the Government continues its assault on the Welfare State. For example:-

- Elderly people are increasingly driven to the private sector for long-term care.
- The desperate competition between NHS trusts in the internal market is producing disastrous results for both patients and staff.
- The Government plans to take away any right for homeless families to get permanent accommodation from local councils, to cut Housing Benefit, and to replace Unemployment Benefit by a restricted Jobseekers' Allowance.

What is needed is to draw the existing scattered campaigns, defending hospitals, nurseries, benefits, pensions, and schools, into a concerted national mobilisation.

For a long time the left shied away from attempting to organise such a mobilisation because the task seemed too difficult. Now the left has taken up the challenge. The Socialist Movement Trade Union Committee and the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network have sponsored a broad committee - the Welfare State Network: rank-and-file co-ordination to save the Welfare State' - which held its launch meeting on Sunday 18th September in London.

The campaign has launched an initial statement; is inviting trade unions, Labour Parties and campaigns, to sponsor the Network and send representatives to its meetings; and intends to work with all the groups active in the field, including the public service workers' trade unions, the 'Defend the Welfare State Campaign' and 'London Health Emergency'.

Contact: Trudy Saunders at 071 703 3493, or 22 Maude Road, London SE5 for copies of the statement, a report of the initial meeting or more information.

Yours fraternally,
Trudy Saunders,
London SE5.

The Church of England's treatment of "atheist priest" Anthony Freeman, of nearby Staplefield, provides a striking contrast to attitudes in the modern Labour Party.

In our 'broad church' one is expected to dismiss Clause IV - the cornerstone of our constitution - as outdated and irrelevant. It is those of us who retain a commitment to common ownership who are regarded as heretics and risk expulsion.

Perhaps we shall soon see a "modernised" Church, modelled on Tory Blur's Labour Party, led by atheist Archbishops.

Yours fraternally,
Richard Hanford,
Henfield.

In South Africa, the Workers List Party, founded by the Workers Organisation for Socialist Action to fight the recent elections, fears an imminent witch-hunt following its role in the recent strike wave. At the end of August press reports reached a pitch of hysteria when 3,000 truck drivers blocked key roads to put pressure on management in negotiations for higher wage.

A political analyst for the *Weekend Argus* said "the devastating, out-of-the-blue blockade had all the hallmarks of classic Trotskyite subversion". A *Sunday Tribune* headline spoke of "clandestine extremists" and "militant ultra-left troublemakers".

Sixty-eight trucks were involved in the blockade on the key Johannesburg to Durban N3 highway. The action was organised by the Turning Wheels Workers Movement and took official union leaders by surprise.

The government vowed to get tough, with ANC Transport Minister S'bu Ndebele saying that the protest would not be tolerated. Activists in WOSA and the Workers List Party fear a climate of hysteria is being deliberately orchestrated to prepare a wave of repression against the left.

Yours fraternally,
Mike Phipps,
Brent.

K.A. Gilchrist's letter (*Briefing*, July) which lambasted *Briefing*'s "revolting leftwingers" for writing on Richard Nixon's death was a classic and proves that *Briefing*'s sense of humour is still up to the mark.

Paraphrasing Lord Byron, I offer this epitaph to the old mass murderer:

Posterity will ne'er survey
A nobler grave than his:
Here lie the bones of "Tricky" Dick
Stop, traveller, and piss.

Yours in solidarity,
Alan Bedford,
Goole.

LABOUR RESEARCH

How high should Labour set the minimum wage? Why do British lone parents lose out in the jobs market? Are Europe's unions more militant? And which employers give gay partnerships equal status at work?

Labour Research, the UK monthly written from a labour movement perspective, has all the answers to the questions affecting the trade union and labour movement. It tells you all you need to know about directors' pay and company profits, equal opportunities at work, employment rights, health and safety, and the impact of European Union developments on working people.

And it's the magazine behind the headline-hitting stories revealing MPs' business interests and companies' political donations.

I would like to take out a year's subscription to Labour Research and enclose payment for £24.95 (cheques payable to Labour Research Department).

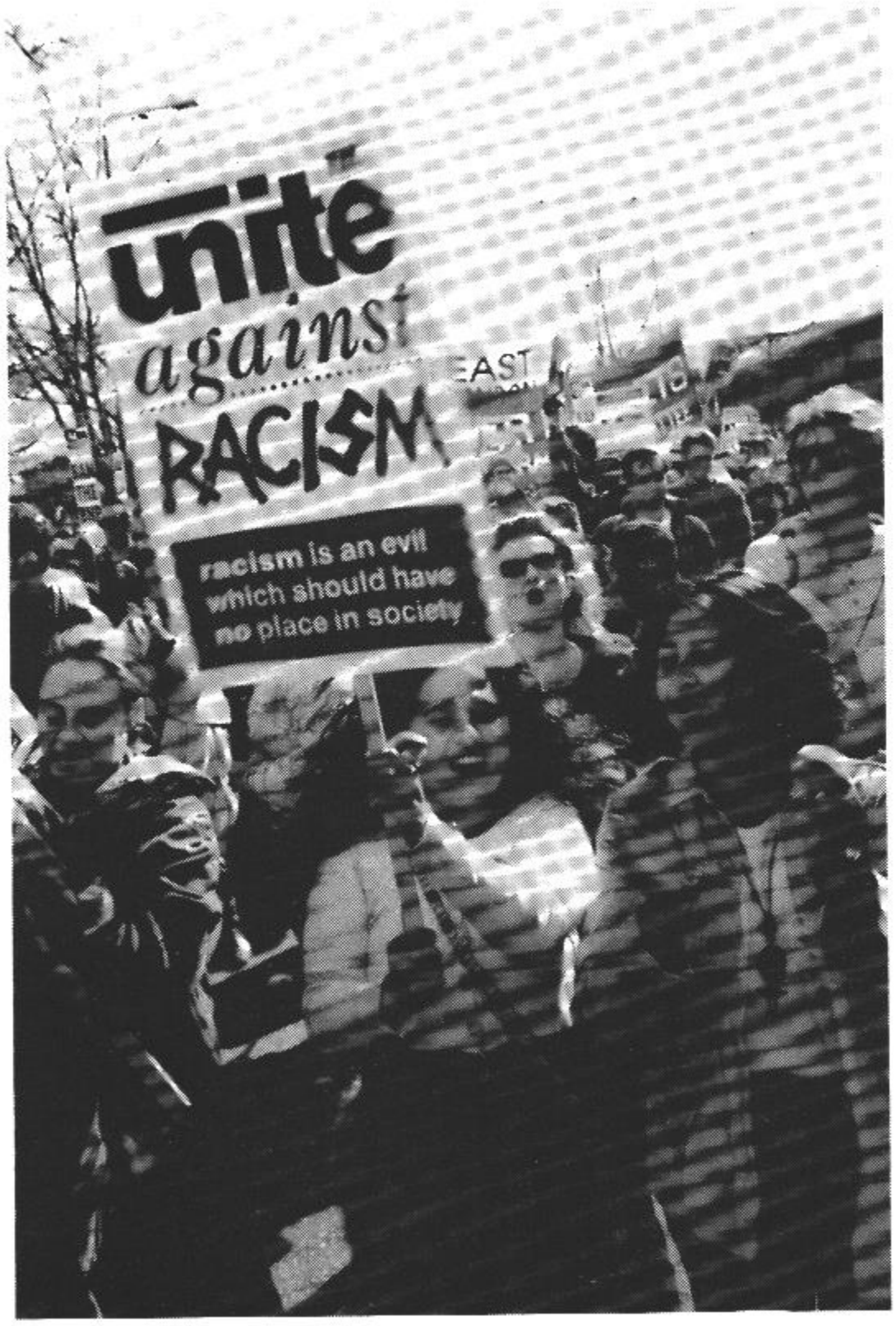
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United against racism. PHOTO: Bryn Griffiths.

Racist purge of London councils

Jon Rogers, Lambeth Unison, reports: Unison's London Local Government Committee recently convened an unprecedented meeting of representatives from London boroughs to discuss what has been described as the "ethnic cleansing" of council workforces in London.

Unison activists have been taken aback over the past year as statistical information has confirmed a grass-roots perception that London local authorities are singling out black staff for the sack.

In Lambeth's housing department, for example, where a little over half the staff are black, black staff account for three quarters of all staff disciplined between 1991 and 1994 and for four-fifths of all disciplinary dismissals. Put another way, black staff are more than two and a half times as likely to be subject to formal disciplinary action as their white colleagues.

Lambeth housing is not an isolated example. Across London in Haringey, Hackney, Islington and Southwark, the pattern is similar.

This attack on black staff coincides with a general tightening up on discipline at work. Shop stewards are finding that "offences" which would have been worth a warning a few years ago now lead to the sack. New "offences" are also being created - dozens of Lambeth staff have been dismissed for benefit fraud, even where this is irrelevant to their job.

Workers in London local government are witnessing a long drawn out revenge for the gains made during the era of "Equal Opportunities" in the 1980s. For a while, many of the managers who were in place before the brief heyday of the Labour left paid lip-service to anti-racism. Now that Labour councils have ditched high profile commitments to equality, these people have a free hand to sack and to discriminate.

The challenge to unions like Unison and to anti-racists in the Labour Party, is to understand the way in which this racist purge is operating, to expose it and to mobilise against it. Meanwhile, the coming weeks will see yet more black workers sacked by London councils that once proclaimed their determination to stamp out racism.

German anti-fascists on the rack

Kevin Flack reports: Over the summer German anti-fascists were subject to mass arrests under legislation that combines the worst elements of the Criminal Justice Bill and the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

Members of Autonome Antifa (M) told *Briefing* how special forces and other federal and local police units simultaneously stormed the homes of seventeen of their activists in Gottingen in Lower Saxony. In addition, rooms in the student parliament building of the local university, a bookstore, workplaces and relatives' homes were searched.

The arrests were the culmination of investigations by the authorities under Law 129a (prohibiting propaganda for, support or membership of a terrorist organisation). AA(M) has been the subject of a three-year surveillance programme during which police collected press releases for fingerprinting, confiscated rental contracts for lecture rooms and hired vans, observed group meetings and private homes and tapped phones. Search warrants were issued by defining AA(M) as a criminal organisation under Law 129a and the group is also charged with supporting the Red Army Fraction following its call for the release of all political prisoners. However, the AA(M)'s anti-fascist initiatives have attracted support from Greens, Social Democrats, trade unions and citizens' groups.

Despite having been warned by the state attorney's office that anyone appearing as an AA(M) member at a lecture or event would be arrested, the group is continuing to function and organise in public. Donations to the AA (M)'s defence fund and requests for more information should be sent to London AFA, at BM 1734, London WC1N 3XX.

On the first anniversary of the brutal attack that left him permanently brain damaged Quddus Ali has sent a hand written letter to John Major. Quddus was in a coma for three months after the beating and although a year has now passed police are still no closer to finding his attackers.

It is now clear that he will never fully recover from injuries that have changed his life forever.

The letter reads:

Dear Mr Major,

One year ago today I was attacked by racists they left me for dead. I am alive but I can't work, can't do most things.

My life has been destroyed. Why are you letting my attackers get away with destroying my life?

I am not able to feel at ease with my life. Are you at ease with this?

Printed by Wernham Printers Ltd (TU), 4 Forster Road, London N17