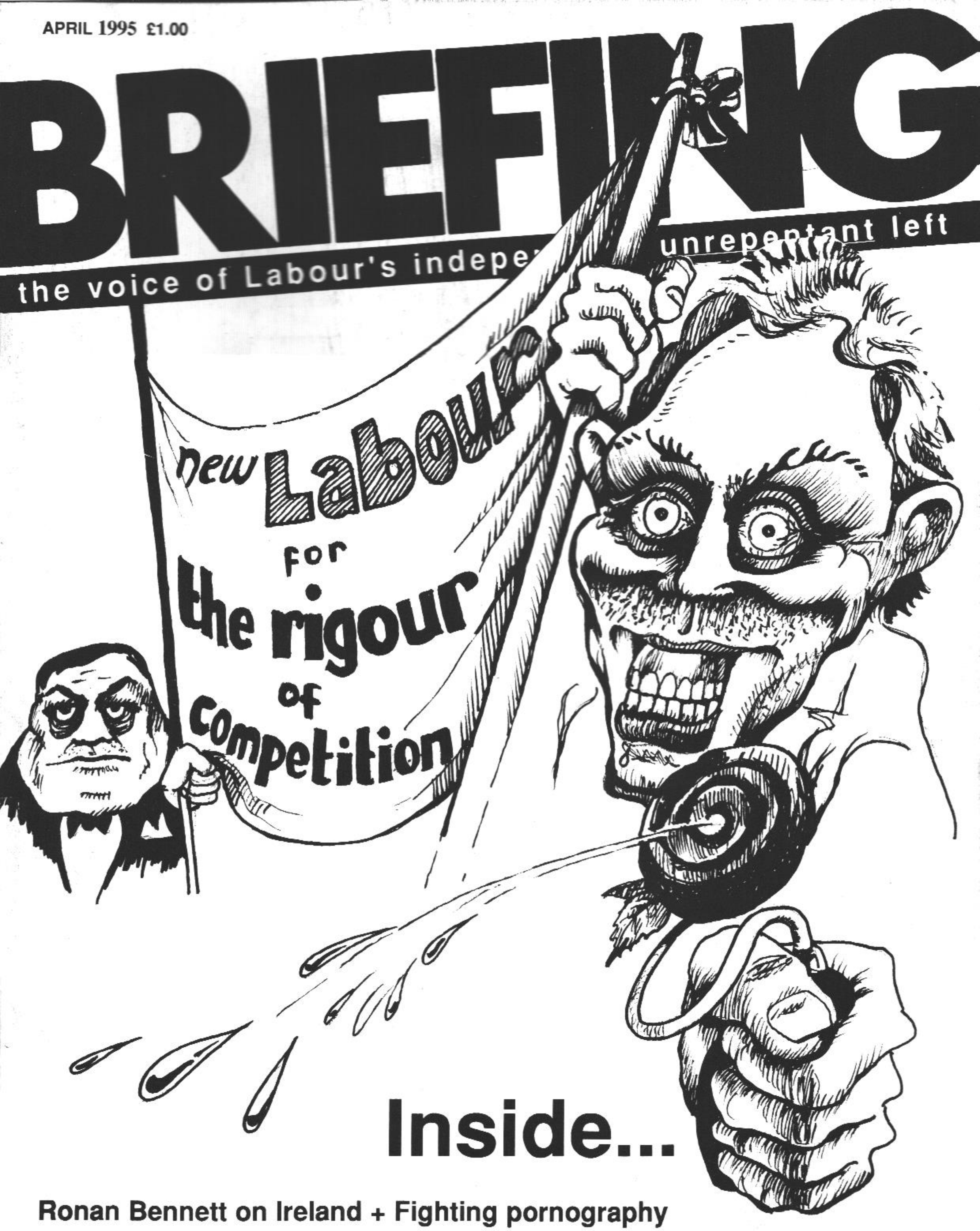
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BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's indepe unrepentant left



Inside...

Ronan Bennett on Ireland + Fighting pornography
Class Traitor + Barings' collapse + Jim Mortimer

LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

Top press

Blair backs Nestlé - part II

AS REPORTED in our last issue, Tony Blair visited the Nestlé factory in York. Our correspondent, Leonora Lloyd, wrote to him explaining why he should not have given Nestlé his seal of approval.

The Labour leader wrote back explaining that he went specifically to see the company's research centre, allegedly a pioneer in bio-technology. In addition, he claimed that Nestlé is now conforming to the codes set down by UNICEF and WHO.

Blair does not seem to realise that Nestlé's promises are as credible as those of the Tory front bench. They have broken them time and again and nothing that they are actually doing now in the developing world - as reported last month in *Briefing* - indicates any real change of heart.

Offline!

Date: February 1995
Place: London, England
From: Chris Smith. Shadow Minister for the Superhighway.
To: All
Message: Labour will make sure Britain is at the hub of the Information Superhighway. It is vital for this country and its citizens.
Reply to: Chris Smith MP
e-mail: Sorry not connected!

CCT to stay?

BARNET Council's Chief Executive - an advisor to the Labour-dominated AMA - told council staff that they should be aware that even a change in government would not lead to a halt in Compulsory Competitive Tendering in local government. "It's not on the agenda," he said.

Notice to our readers

APOLOGIES to our readers. The next issue of *Briefing* will be delayed until after the Special Labour Party Conference on April 29th. Subscriptions will be extended accordingly.

Normal service will be resumed in May!

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Cover cartoon by Gary Drostle

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In place of "common ownership"



FAR FROM giving Labour a new and coherent set of guiding ideas for the coming century, Blair's proposed replacement for Clause IV is little more than an exercise in evasion, with the intellectual depth of the Neighbours' theme song ("Everybody needs good neighbours ... with a little understanding, we can make a better world...").

Though pledging to place "power, wealth and opportunity in the hands of the many", it leaves economic ownership concentrated in the hands of the few, and thus deliberately discards the one practical strategy for realising "the spirit of solidarity" and "community". The new clause contains no objection in principle to a society governed by the drive for private profit. Nowhere does it make clear that public welfare or common good must take precedence over the dictates of the market. Extolling "the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition", it effectively commits Labour to the preservation of a market-dominated system in perpetuity.

The new clause salutes the mixed economy in terms most Tories would accept. It evades the crucial question about any mixed economy: what is to be the balance between public and private? Socialists answer the question clearly; we say the public sector must be dominant if there is to be any democratic control over the economy. If private capital remains in the driver's seat as at present, Labour will never be able to realise its broad aim of social justice or to build a "just society". The new clause talks of democracy and social justice but places severe restrictions on both by excluding them from the economic domain.

The *Guardian* is delighted that the new clause "abandons the pre-occupation with economic means". That is why it is inadequate. Those who claim to be able to address disparities of wealth and power while leaving the bulk of economic ownership in the hands of a tiny minority are living in a dream world. Today in Britain the richest 10% own 50% of all marketable wealth. The richest 3% own 75% of all land and shares - the kind of property that brings real power and influence. This inequality in ownership is the root of Britain's vast and growing disparities in income.

The rich and powerful have nothing to fear from the politics of the proposed new clause - which is why it has won wide support from the media. Tony Blair has accused his critics of "fear of change". On the contrary, it is the authors of the new Clause IV who fear change and fear the challenge to vested economic interests which is necessary if there is to be change.

From the beginning, Party members suspected that Blair's real aim in launching the carefully controlled Clause IV "consultation" was simply to delete all reference to common ownership - and with it, Labour's commitment to a socialist economic strategy. Those suspicions have now been confirmed. In place of the long-term economic strategy clearly articulated by the existing Clause IV, we are offered an empty string of catchphrases, buzzwords and feelgood rhetoric.

The abandonment of the goal of common ownership would represent a drastic narrowing of Labour's ambitions and with it a narrowing of democratic choice in this country. Should the new clause be adopted it would deter those who want to see radical change from joining the Party and undoubtedly hasten its decline as a democratic, campaigning organisation. But the debate over Clause IV has confirmed the continuing importance of active membership of the Labour Party. This debate is only one part of the broader debate about the "end of history", the possibility of an alternative to capitalism and the future relevance of socialism. But in this instance it was being conducted inside the labour movement where it counts. Despite the leadership's best efforts, the arguments for socialism have been and will be raised at Labour Party and trade union meetings and discussions up and down the country. The odds are hugely stacked against us but we have to do everything we can to ensure the largest possible vote against the proposed new Clause IV at the Special Conference on April 29th. The media is already celebrating a Blair victory but the arguments for socialism will continue to reverberate in the Labour Party - and haunt future Labour governments. ❑

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's will meet on March 26th and April 30th. 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.

***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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defend Clause IV

Why you should vote against the proposed new Clause IV:

- It commits Labour to a market-dominated economy.
- It has no commitment to an expanding role for public ownership.
- It deprives Labour of any long-term ambition to re-organise society on a socialist basis.
- It has no commitment to the redistribution of wealth.
- It leaves Labour without any guiding economic strategy.
- It deletes the current constitutional commitment to accountability to Party Conference.
- It does not locate the Labour Party within a wider labour movement.
- It commits Labour only to equality of opportunity, not equality itself.
- It says nothing of the fight against discrimination.
- It makes no mention of race, gender, disability or sexuality.
- It contains no commitment to full employment.
- It fails to demarcate Labour clearly enough from the Liberal Democrats or even many 'one nation' Tories.
- Much of it is verbose, incomprehensible or just plain meaningless.

The strange case of full employment

"FULL EMPLOYMENT is Labour's distinctive policy. It should be written on our banners at every rally; it should be in our manifesto; it should be imprinted on the soul of our Party ... There is no doubt that full employment should be clearly stated in the rewrite of Labour's aims and values ... They have written of equality, security, community and other worthy aims. Yet without full employment these aspirations turn to dust. There can be no equality while millions have no opportunity to work. There can be no security when in every workplace employees fear redundancy. There can be no community when mass unemployment alienates large sections of the population ... Relieved of the fear of unemployment, working people can insist on civilised standards in the workplace ... We can all agree about equality of opportunity, about education to develop talent, about equity and freedom. But the trouble is that these bland statements quickly boil down to some bland and banal support for the greatest happiness for the greatest number. What would transform our society, increase our happiness, reduce our fear and bring us back to a sense of community? What objective is most dearly sought by members of the GMB, by the wider labour movement and by the people of Britain? We all want a fully employed society ... Full employment is the objective that bridges the gap between the long-standing ideals of the labour movement and the day-to-day demands of the British people." - **John Edmonds, GMB general secretary**, the week before the announcement of the proposed new Clause IV.

NB. "The opportunity for all to work and prosper" (the phrase in the proposed new clause) is not the same as "full employment". The former is a vague platitude to which even the Tories subscribe; the latter (certainly as described by Edmonds) is a specific social and economic strategy. For many, slave labour training schemes provide "the opportunity for all to work". A policy of "full employment" rules that out.

● In January a Gallup poll asked a sample of 1,142 voters whether they were "broadly in agreement" with the words of the existing Clause IV (including "common ownership"). 37% said yes; 28% said no; 35% didn't know. Other opinion polls (including the massive British Social Attitudes survey) record higher popular support for public ownership today than at any time since 1945.

● The proposed new Clause IV makes no mention of either common or public ownership. It makes no mention of the public sector. Instead, "a thriving private sector" is counterposed to "high quality public services" (which may or may not be in the public sector). Worse yet, "those undertakings essential to the common good" (i.e. public utilities, the NHS, education, transport) may be either "owned by the public or accountable to them".

In other words, Labour has no objection in principle to private firms making profits out of the delivery of public services. The new clause makes no distinction between publicly controlled and delivered services and privatised services which are governed not by public need but by private greed.

It sees no advantage in public services - including local government, the NHS and education - being publicly owned. It refuses to draw the lesson which millions have drawn from the privatisation experiences of the last decade: that private greed must be banished from public services if they are to be efficient and accountable.

Under the new clause, compulsory competitive tendering looks set to continue unabated.

What happened to social justice?

UNDER THE proposed new Clause IV, Labour will no longer aim "to secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof." Instead, we have a commitment to "a just society, which judges its strength by the condition of the weak as much as the strong". To the extent that this means anything, it implies an ethos of charity and paternalism.

Where is the commitment to rectifying the inequality that lies at the heart of our unjust society - the inequality of incomes and standards of living? The principle of redistribution finds no place in the new clause. Without that principle, the claim to "deliver" people from "the tyranny of poverty" is hollow.

The new clause promises only "equality of opportunity". What that means was made clear by the Commission for Social Justice, which the NEC has endorsed and whose thinking lies behind the new clause. "Confronted with the opportunity to save someone in the street from death, we will think that we should stop to save them even if the cost is not taking the children to school; but is it fair to save every saveable person from death at the cost of sending many children to inadequate schools?"

Why is inadequate schooling the necessary "cost" of saving lives? Why must that be the only choice we are offered? In a world of advanced technology, vast luxury for the wealthy and flagrant waste, why should we have to choose between health and education?

The continued domination of market forces, to which the new clause pledges Labour, will ensure that better homes, food, education, childcare, healthcare remain the prerogatives of the rich. Because the new clause implicitly rules out seizing and redistributing wealth, it limits the scope of "social justice". The NEC consultation document which preceded the new clause declared: "We do not believe in arithmetic equality. Not all inequalities are unjust." But the socialist ideal was never about arithmetic. Our goal is an equal distribution of society's wealth in keeping with the maxim, "from each according to his or her abilities, to each according to his or her needs." We want to match up individual and collective needs and abilities across the whole of society so as to ensure an equal outcome for all. We want everyone to enjoy equal wealth and power, not just "equal opportunities". We want women and men, black and white, young and old, disabled and able-bodied to live and work together as equals, and we know that we cannot do that while market forces reign.

We don't just want a fairer deal in the rat race - we want to get rid of the rat race altogether.

● "Detailed consultation with the Labour Party on its proposed industrial and economic policies has led to the elimination of several unattractive ideas, including industrial democracy." - *CBI News,* September 1994.

"Britain after (say) 16 years of Blair government would be recognisably the nation we have now." - *The Economist.*

'Community' - behind the latest fad

'COMMUNITY' is one of Tony Blair's favourite buzzwords and it appears several times in the new clause. The media has been delighted by this - 'community' is so much less contentious than 'class'. Of course, socialists work to build strong and vibrant communities. Indeed, we know only too well how our communities can be uprooted and destabilised by market forces. But there is the rub. We are not all and cannot all be part of one big, happy community. There are conflicting interests within the national 'community' (not to mention the international one) and there are conflicts within and between local communities. The authoritarian danger here is that these conflicts are resolved from above by leaders claiming to act "in the community's interests".

The reference to a society which "nurtures families" carries undeniable overtones of exclusivity. Where does it leave single parents, lesbians and gays, homeless people or others who by choice or circumstance fail to conform to the traditional family type? Are they part of 'the community'?

The existing Clause IV pledges the Party to "promote the political, social and economic emancipation of the people". The new clause offers merely a society in which "the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe". In the first place, rights are absolute or they are not rights. Does someone lose his or her right to vote, to a fair trial, to shelter and food, to health care or access to public buildings because their personal life does not meet the standards and "values" set by "the community"? In the second place, what are "the duties we owe" and who defines them? And why are both rights and duties presented as entirely a matter for individuals?

Who decides who is or is not a member of "the community"? Who draws the boundaries of the "community"? Does that "community" end at the bottom of the road, at the English Channel, at the EU borders? In the new clause, the word 'community' gives Labour no help in defining its loyalties or its priorities.

Jeremy Corbyn MP

Defend common ownership

Jimmy Wray MP

Socialist greetings to all comrades

defend socialism

Everything to play for

Alastair Ward, national organiser for 'Defend Clause IV - Defend Socialism', responds to Blair's long-awaited alternative and outlines the final weeks of the campaign.

defend Clause IV

EVEN THE *Guardian*'s Simon Hoggart described the new Clause IV as an "intellectually dead" proposal that "might be the most impenetrable piece of high-minded verbosity ever foisted on a British political party". In contrast, the *Observer*'s Andrew Rawnsley derided supporters of the existing Clause IV as "intellectual pigmies" armed only with "pea shooters". But even Rawnsley acknowledged that the big question was whether Labour's new aims could be achieved without "a radical recasting of society and the economy". Exactly, Andrew.

In the months since October, many modernisers argued that they wanted to update the wording of Clause IV and especially to incorporate the aspirations of the women and black people and recognise the importance of the environment. In the end there is no specific reference to racism or sexism and nothing remotely superior to the existing Clause IV's aim of "the political, social and economic emancipation of the people". This is an insulting slap in the face to black people and women, whom Blair and Prescott have sought to use in their stitch-up.

Along with common ownership and redistribution of wealth, gone are the existing Clause IV's commitments to: "organise and maintain in Parliament and in the country a political Labour Party"; "to co-operate with the General Council of the Trade Union Congress, or other kindred organisations"; and "to give effect as far as may be practicable to the principles from time to time approved by the Party Conference".

The 'consultation' period has ended. The questionnaire was rigged to achieve responses which appear to support "change". However, despite boasts that this was the biggest consultation ever held by a political party only 8,000 questionnaires were returned. Those who responded and supported some rewriting of Clause IV represent only 2% of individual Party members. This gives Blair no mandate for change. In the trade union section there is only a slim majority for 'change' even though the RMT and FBU have mischievously been counted as undecided!

Support for Clause IV has been tested at regional conferences. Whilst the Scottish result was a blow the overall results are not so unfavourable. London and the South West voted to retain Clause IV. Scotland voted to re-nationalise all the utilities. After a mini-rebellion, the North West Executive was forced to meet overnight and offer a statement which supported "all forms of common ownership". Central region were not allowed to debate the issue.

The new clause comes nowhere near satisfying union demands. UNISON wanted a commitment to re-nationalise the utilities and the GMB called for full employment. Edmonds and Prescott have been trying to save face by arguing (incredibly) that "the opportunity to work" is the same as "full employment".

It is difficult to see how Blair's proposal could realistically be added to Clause IV as a new statement of aims and objectives. However we should still argue that the Special Conference must be allowed to "vote on both".

We should seek to refer back the Conference Arrangements Committee's decision that there must be only one 'take it or leave it' vote on the new clause. Mandate your delegates to support this. Better yet, get yourself delegated to the conference - even with an anti-Clause IV mandate, you can help ensure there is a democratic procedure.

In this final stage of the campaign, with Blair's alternative now public, our case is easier to argue. 'Defend Clause IV - Defend Socialism' will be producing a bulletin outlining our position. Please try to get these circulated in your CLP or trade union. Comrades should demand that OMOV ballot papers ask the question: Do you wish to retain Clause IV as it stands? Both the new and old Clause IV's should be reproduced on the ballot paper.

Blair's video is now out of date, but "*The Contemporary Case for Common Ownership*" (directed by Ken Loach) is more useful than ever. All socialists should dedicate the whole of April to the campaign to retain Clause IV. ❑

Defend Clause IV - Defend Socialism

The campaign has prepared a hard-hitting, detailed critique of Blair's new clause for use in Labour Parties and trade unions. The Ken Loach video is also available. Donations are needed urgently. Cheques and information from Defend Clause IV, c/o NUM, 2 Huddersfield Road, Barnsley, Yorkshire, S70 2LS.

- National Committee meeting: 3pm, Saturday, 1st April, Royal Banqueting Suite, Victoria Street, Derby.
- Open committee: 1pm, Sunday, 30th April, University of London Union, Central London.

Blair's post-feminism

What's in Blair's regime for women? Islington councillor Liz Davies finds little of use in the proposed new Clause IV.

"FOLLETIZED" Labour women MPs, eager to board the Blair bandwagon, are peddling the myth that Clause IV is somehow outdated because it was Party policy before women achieved the right to vote. "The world has moved on", they say, and somehow common ownership is no longer relevant. They explicitly counterpose women's interests to democratic control of the economy, and insist that women will best be served by a regulated, not commonly owned, economy.

This argument is echoed within the women's movement, where post-feminists are castigating what they describe as out-dated notions of confrontation. They too claim, "The world has moved on." Demos, the Blairite think-tank, claims that men have now accepted feminism's arguments. They play a greater part in domestic labour while women play a greater part in the workforce. Demos remains concerned over the "glass ceiling" for women managers. "Child-care is a problem," they begrudgingly admit, but come up with no solutions for it.

Both arguments ignore the reality of most women's lives, across the globe. Private and increasingly privatised industries have done nothing for women.

In Britain, women still earn 72.2% on average of men's earnings. They are concentrated in low-paid jobs. They comprise the overwhelming majority of part-time employees. Women who need flexible working hours are exploited by new zero-hour contracts, where employees have to make themselves available, for no extra money, to be called into work by the employer at any time. Contrary to Demos, responsibility for domestic work and child-care still falls overwhelmingly on women. Fewer than 4% of men undertake their full share of housework (although far more men than that thought that they did).

The new caring "feminist" corporations have not compensated for cuts in public child-care provision. Nor have the increased rents in both public and private sector which force single mothers into the poverty trap. And child support is becoming increasingly privatised, as the burden is shifted from the state to fathers.

Single mothers are portrayed by the Tories as the greatest threat to civilisation. Women who choose to live outside the traditional heterosexual married couple are stigmatised and blamed for poor housing, crime and declining standards in education.

Globally, women are playing a greater share in the labour market than ever before, but as a super-exploited proletariat, concentrated in unskilled, low-paid jobs, and still expected to carry the burden of domestic duties. In Africa and Asia women work an average of 13 hours more than men each week; in Latin America, six hours; in western Europe, five to six hours.

Tony Blair wants to win women's votes. He is advised that he will do so with more women MPs, "Folletized" in bright lipstick and pastel-coloured suits. A serious attempt by Labour to win women's votes would entail a commitment to full employment, a minimum wage, free child-care, and the right for trade unions to organise.

An expansion of common ownership provides the only realistic framework for those commitments. The argument that it is old-fashioned simply ignores that the conditions women work in are old-fashioned and need changing. That change will come, not from regulated private industry or feminist directors, but from women workers organising for a change in the economic system itself.

Greetings to Women's Conference from Brent East Women's Section

Defend Socialism Defend Clause IV

TUC women give thumbs down to Blair

AT A PACKED fringe meeting at this year's Women's TUC, over 100 delegates heard the case for common ownership and the defence of Clause IV.

Audrey Wise MP told women trade unionists, "You've been had." The new Clause IV did not include race or gender, as had been hinted by politicians attempting to persuade women to support the rewrite.

Michele Emerson from the Communications Workers Union spoke about how workers in a privatised industry, BT, had faced the "rigour of competition". This had meant 80,000 jobs lost and conditions at work continually attacked. The communications industry needed common ownership to spread the benefits of new technology and the information superhighway to working women.

Jennifer Davies for UNISON warned that "the new Clause IV does not speak to Labour's real constituency. Women who are active fighting for their community are seeing the Labour Party as increasingly irrelevant to their politics."

Doreen Cameron from NATFHE said she defended Clause IV as it stands, as a vision of a different society based on economic democracy.

Women trade unionists and Party members will demand that Blair delivers on the issues that working class women care about: a health service that works, schools that provide a fair chance for all children, more and better public transport and a minimum wage that women workers can live on.

defend socialism

Lies and loathing in Leicester

Party members know that skulduggery, sleaze and dirty trickery are common features of Tony Blair's "New Labour". But in Leicester the self-styled modernisers have plumbed new depths. Muriel Pritchett investigates.

DURING MOST of the 1980s Labour-held Leicester City Council was virtually run by Council leader Peter Soulsby as a personal fiefdom. During the early years of his leadership the Council won widespread praise for initiatives on low pay, equal opportunities and the environment. However the onslaught launched against "loony" local councils by both Thatcher and Kinnock resulted in a massive retreat by authorities such as Leicester and the marginalisation of the left within them.

By 1990 the situation had degenerated to such an extent that the words "rotten" and "borough" regularly sprang to the minds of Labour movement activists in the city. Matters were brought to a head at that year's Council budget meeting (the first at which a Poll Tax was set), when ten members of the Labour Group voted against plans to implement massive cuts in services and the leadership was forced to rely on a deal with Liberal Democrats to force its budget through.

Retribution by Soulsby and his allies was swift. All ten rebel councillors were suspended from the Group for six months. Although this sentence was later reduced to six weeks on appeal to the Regional Labour Party, Soulsby continued the witch-hunt by arranging, with the support of local MPs Greville Janner and Keith Vaz, for several of the rebels to be deselected by their ward parties. Those who survived such machinations found themselves excluded from key committees for several years.

Meanwhile Soulsby, who had never made a secret of his Parliamentary ambitions, gained selection in a ward in Leicester West hoping to use it as a springboard to the local Parliamentary seat. His plans were scuppered when Janner decided to delay his retirement.

Following the 1991 elections Soulsby wasted no time in consolidating his position within the Labour Group and maintaining his image as a model Kinnockite. Inevitably this entailed considerable amounts of union-bashing and internal repression within the authority.

The leadership also wasted no opportunity to exploit its powers of patronage with Council funds being diverted towards certain "pet" inner-city projects. These projects happened to employ a number of local Labour councillors, whose continued support for the leadership was thus guaranteed.

Indeed, Soulsby's arrogance grew to the extent that in 1993 he was able to sack three Asian councillors, including Keith Vaz's mother, from the Group Executive, following protests against his refusal to establish a Senior Citizens' Forum within the Council.

Cracks began to emerge in Soulsby's power base following a series of dismal by-election performances in outer-city areas, which reflected residents' deep-seated anger at the quality of Council services. Several erstwhile Soulsby loyalists began to fear for their own seats.

The mood of uncertainty was seized upon by Stewart Foster, previously a close ally of Soulsby, who now appeared to be a serious contender in the leadership election. Although inevitably many initially suspected that a desire for personal advancement rather than ideological differences lay behind the split, there was general acceptance that action had to be taken in order to restore public confidence in the Party. Foster was also prepared to give a significant role to left-wingers on his slate of candidates for the 1994 Annual General Meetings of the Labour Group. For example, veteran trade unionist and Socialist Campaign Group supporter Mustafa Kamal was stood as Foster's deputy.

Soulsby and his allies did not take the threat lying down. Three days before the Group AGM, a statement by 21 "Asian community leaders" appeared in the local media backing Soulsby's leadership. This stunt backfired spectacularly when enquiries revealed that all but one of these "community leaders" lived outside Leicester. Furthermore, several signatories to the statement complained of having been misled by Soulsby.

However, other less publicised methods were used to secure compliance. On the eve of the AGM, several councillors for wards within Leicester West received late-night telephone calls from Greville Janner's office warning of the possible "consequences" of failure to back Soulsby and his team.

Despite the threats, at the AGM on 27th April the anti-Soulsby slate was largely though not completely successful.

Foster and Kamal were elected as Leader and Deputy Leader but Soulsby took over as the Chair of Leisure Services. An article in the *Guardian* on 29th April featured complaints about the AGM (never substantiated) from several Soulsby supporters.

After 13 years as Council leader it was hardly surprising that Soulsby proved unable to come to terms with his demotion, or that he should begin plans to reverse it. The first stage of his

campaign was to make Vaz the prime scapegoat, even though 12 out of the 21 councillors who had voted for Foster had no links with the Leicester East constituency and therefore no ties to Vaz.

The tone of the ex-leader's crusade to regain his former power was set by an article in the *Sunday Times* (whose interest in the well-being of Leicester Labour Party had not previously been apparent) on 22nd May 1994. This featured several derogatory statements by Soulsby about Vaz, together with claims that the outcome of the Group AGM had seriously damaged relations with the Asian community. These claims were disproved three weeks later when this community assisted in Labour's capturing of the local Euro-constituency from the Tories.

Soulsby's next step was to target certain wards where, as he had done four years previously, he hoped to remove key opponents and replace them with known supporters. However, because of the nature of the Party's membership in these wards, he was compelled to forge some strange alliances. For example, he worked with white semi-racists in the outer areas of the city, yet at the same time in the inner-city areas he enlisted the support of Muslim and Hindu fundamentalists.

Analysis of Party membership lists (provided to Soulsby by a sympathetic local bureaucracy) soon revealed that his base of support was insufficient for the task, and that further action was required. A series of outrageous allegations were made to the NEC that Asians in wards controlled by Soulsby opponents were being denied Party membership and a number of statements from individuals were produced to support such claims. However the credibility of these accusations was undermined when it was revealed that several of the statements were identically worded and produced in the same computer typeface.

Nevertheless the NEC were eventually forced to intervene when the membership secretary of one branch, an employee of the Council, contacted Vaz claiming he had been threatened with dismissal unless he gave support to allegations of irregularities in the running of the branch.

The NEC conducted an enquiry into the claims in August 1994 to which all sides gave evidence, but to date no charges against any individual or branch have ever been brought. However, selection meetings in four inner-city wards (including, ironically, the ward represented by Soulsby) were suspended for several months pending extensive membership checks by the regional office.

Meanwhile, Soulsby promoted his cause with a further *Sunday Times* article and features on TV Asia and Newsnight (all of which received heavy attention in the local media). The ceaseless vilification of the local Party and prominent individuals within it was only halted when Foster threatened heavy disciplinary action against the perpetrators.

The witch-hunt took a particularly vicious turn when Allan Gratrix, chair of Leicester East Constituency Labour Party, was suspended from his job as warden of a local elderly persons' home. Many observers speculated on the role of Bhupen Dave, Soulsby's former deputy and one of Gratrix's line managers, especially when details of the suspension were mysteriously leaked to a local newspaper.

Soulsby's attacks often backfired, particularly as many councillors welcomed the changes in the decision-making processes that Foster introduced, noting the contrast with the autocracy of his predecessor. Although Soulsby did succeed in having two of his opponents deselected, these gains were more than offset by the removal of several of his aides in other wards. His anti-democratic proclivities were further exposed when supporters attempted to disrupt several selection meetings.

When Abbey, Soulsby's own ward, was eventually allowed to begin its reselection process, the shortlisting meeting on 13th March 1995 had to t abandoned following an occupation of the meeting venue by over 200 local residents. They were protesting against Soulsby's attempts to replace popular local councillor Gordhan Parmar with Paul Sood, an ex-councillor notorious for his links with Hindu extremist groups.

Although a stream of complaints and dossiers has been sent to Walworth Road, the Party hierarchy has refused to intervene. Whether this course would have been followed if several key members of the NEC had not been extensively briefed on events by local sources (especially Vaz) is not clear.

However, although Soulsby's reselection (probably via the Regional office) seems likely, the chances of him returning to his former eminence appear slim. The left has considerable input into the new regime (several committees are chaired by *Briefing* supporters) but there is still considerable work to do to enhance that input and to maintain the progress of the past twelve months. In the present climate, the left cannot afford to waste the opportunities available to it. ❑

THE SUNDAY TIMES · 22 MAY 1994

Vaz and mother 'in council coup'

by Rajeev Syal and Tim Rayment

SHE was "best man" at his wedding and her photograph has pride of place above his fireplace. Now the mother of Keith Vaz, shadow minister for local government, is embroiled in uproar in his constituency.

Merlyn Vaz is accuse with her MP son, of being ' of a faction that underm of Britain's longe council leaders, er sparture from off nsed councillor a national ' uiry into t' lsby, leade council f' d from bitter cor ge

sticking to Labour group policy I created a very powerful enemy," he declared.

The argument was mostly over internal issues. For instance, mother and son believed the city needed a subcommittee to deal with the elderly; Soulsby thought not. Letters from the MP to the Leicester leader, which are being sent to l 's national executive nt of his i uncil affair career.

ne, ma dentic



ested: ex-leader Peter Soulsby

king his post eeking a th

demning their MP's interference. When this was made public Vaz called the signatories together. They argued for more than three hours. "Vaz said he had to interfere in the council to help Leicester," one community leader claimed.

After pressure from Vaz a retraction was signed. However, some signatories maintained last week that they were still unhappy with their MP, but had been intimidated by his status s Britain's first Asian r ntative for 60 years

Merlyn Va no part ll. "I ar like l Th e

***The Sunday Times* 22nd May 1994**

Labour Briefing

London Region: Machiavelli fails modernisers

EVEN BEFORE the London Labour Conference, the right was struggling to deliver for the leadership.

The 20th February regional executive meeting was presented with a statement which proposed that the debate on Clause IV at the forthcoming regional conference "be noted" but that no vote be taken. This was defeated by one vote and the executive then voted to recommend support for the existing Clause IV.

But by the time the final Conference agenda had been printed the following Friday, two emergency motions had appeared. One, from Ealing Southall, was almost word for word the same as the defeated statement. Despite the fact that there were no grounds for calling these motions emergencies, the Conference agreed to accept them for debate.

During that debate, the delegate from Southall, CLP secretary Iain McIntosh, claimed that he just wanted "openness and democracy". How unfortunate, then, that his motion was never actually considered by the Southall GC and had only been passed by what McIntosh called "officer action". When the Standing Orders Committee was informed of this, it appeared that they did not know the Party rule requiring emergency motions to come from GCs. In any event, the following day, it turned out that the Southall Party treasurer had no knowledge of the matter at all.

This was relatively minor compared to some of the other Conference manoeuvres. Standing Orders clearly stated that trade union delegates were to have their own voting cards. But the newly constituted Communications Workers Union delegation leader decided to hang on to all the voting books for his delegation. Both the old NCU and the UCW had pro-Clause IV policies and many in the delegation wanted to vote accordingly, but were prevented from doing so. Party officials and London Region Chair Jim Fitzpatrick thought this was just a boyish prank about which they could do nothing.

In contrast, London full-time officer Margaret McDonagh was overheard encouraging one of the MSF delegation to do her own thing with her own vote.

For the first time, the Conference included a session of workshops, including one on Labour's 'Aims and Values'with two speakers. With breathtaking arrogance, both of the pre-arranged speakers were anti-Clause IV, although after vigorous protest one stood down in order to allow Jim Mortimer to speak. The other speaker introduced himself as from MSF Youth, and only when it was pointed out that this gave the mistaken impression that he was a delegate from MSF Youth did he say he was from Young Labour, although not a delegate, and had just been asked to introduce the workshop. The next day he turned up as a Labour Student delegate and spoke in the Clause IV debate.

When it came to the actual voting, something rather strange happened. The first vote was on the bogus emergency composite. For previous card votes, tellers had acted as counters or scrutineers, together with full-time officials. For this vote, they were turned out of the room where the counting was being carried out. Nonetheless, the emergency was defeated, by the narrowest of margins. For the next vote, on the question of support for Clause IV, the previous procedure was adopted and the composite was passed by 58% against 42%.



Janner deselection threat

LEICESTER WEST MP Greville Janner has come under heavy fire following media revelations about his income from directorships and consultancies.

But the next time the Tory-appointed chair of the Commons Employment Select Committee emerges from his luxury North London home to visit his constituency, he may find that his troubles are only just beginning.

The information that their MP receives an annual income estimated at over £200,000 per year has not been well received in an area where the average rates of pay are among the lowest in Britain. Already four out of the seven local ward branches currently active in Leicester West have indicated that they may refuse to nominate Janner for reselection.

This opposition could be swelled by up to 30 local affiliated organisations, including many trade union branches disgusted by Janner's regular advice to business on how to exploit anti-union laws.

Central Region - democracy denied

DELEGATES TO the Central Regional Conference in Skegness were denied the chance to pass judgement on Blair's Clause IV rewording.

Regional officials, acting on advice from an apprehensive Party hierarchy, ruled that a vote would be "outside the remit of the Conference".

However, they did permit a discussion to take place on the issue and the overwhelming majority of contributors expressed support for the retention of the existing Clause IV.

Roy Stuttard, a delegate to the Conference, told *Briefing* "Blair came to address the Conference but seemed a little subdued and much less sure of himself than usual. Perhaps he had trouble addressing an audience that was far more critical of him than those he's been used to recently."

Official - union members can be paid less

The Law Lords are at it again. David Gordon, firefighter and Kent FBU education officer, reports on the latest judicial attack on trade union rights.

THE LAW Lords' ruling that non-union members can be paid more than union members reflects the continuing antagonism of the judiciary towards the trade union movement and its ideals. Since 1979 the judges have effectively operated as the second arm of government. Union bashing, once a secret vice, has become a fully fledged 'blood sport'.

Before the 1979 general election the Lords were willing to uphold the law in favour of trade unionists, but even then they did so reluctantly. Commenting on the Duport Steels decision, Lord Diplock said that the immunities still "stuck in judicial gorges". Lord Salmon declared that the time had come for the law to be altered - a clear signal to the incoming Conservative Government. The natural bias of the judiciary against trade unions was voiced by a former Lord Chancellor, Viscount Hailsham, when he observed that "there is no such thing as a value free or neutral interpretation of the law". In other words justice is not blind - she has a damn good look to the right first.

The 1906 'immunities' represent the minimum level of protection (not least from the interventions of the judiciary) required to support and promote collective bargaining. The argument put forward by the Conservatives and their allies is that they somehow accord trade unions 'special privileges' placing them above the laws of the land. But did the creation of limited liability for companies give them 'special privileges' placing them above the laws of the land (for example, the laws on debt)?

The recent decision in favour of the *Daily Mail* and Associated British Ports and against the NUJ and RMT effectively licenses blatant discrimination against trade union members.

Section 146 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidated) Act 1992 gives union members the right not to have action taken against them by their employer for the purpose of "preventing, deterring or penalising" them for being union members. However, it was obviously never the intention of the Tory Government to give protection to union members against an employer who wanted a union-free workplace. The European Social Charter, however, recommended that member states prohibit discrimination on the grounds of non-union membership or union membership and the Government felt obliged to comply.

To the Government's chagrin, the Court of Appeal decided in April 1993 that an employer who pays sweeteners as an inducement to sign individual contracts, giving up the right to collective bargaining, breached section 146. Within days ministers introduced an amendment to the Act to protect employers from legal action where they discriminate against employees who refuse to sign away their rights to collective bargaining or union membership.

The new Section 13 allows employers to discriminate against a union member where "there is evidence that the employer's purpose was to further a change in his relationship with all or any class of his employees". The terms of the section seem very wide - and it is clear that the Government sees it as a major weapon in its attempts to de-regulate the labour market and de-unionise the workforce.

The TUC believes that the section is a violation of the International Labour Organisation's Convention 98, which stipulates that no employee should be prejudiced in employment by reason of trade union membership. The section was not made retrospective, however, and therefore it was left to the judiciary to close the last loophole.

Although the full details of the judgement are yet to be published it does appear that the Law Lords had trouble reconciling their inclination to assist the Government with the letter of the law. Hence their reliance on semantics. Three of the five argued that an "omission" to offer increases to some employees because they refused to sign away their union rights did not constitute an "action" prohibited under the 1978 Employment Protection Act. An "omission", they claim, may not be interpreted as a positive act; and it was not accepted by the judges as evidence of an intention to deter union membership, even if that was the end result.

The disquiet of the Law Lords may be summed up by Lord Brown-Wilkinson who found in favour of the employers "with regret". He believed that it "leaves an undesirable lacuna in the legislation protecting employees against victimisation".

I believe that his use of the word "victimisation" supports the contention that David Wilson, Terry Palmer and 140 other trade unionists linked to the case were victims of discrimination because of trade union membership.

We should not be surprised that the Law Lords in their wisdom have once again chosen to uphold the policies of this Government. Let us be clear it is a choice and notions of morality, fairness or even legality had no place in their deliberations. ❑

socialist Campaign group news

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CLASS TRAITOR OF THE MONTH

Superfly

This month's Class Traitor gives ugly people a bad name. That darling of the intelligentsia, Robin Cook MP, is little more than an icon of political cowardice and personal vanity.



ONLY IN a conclave of the terminally lacklustre like the Shadow Cabinet could Robin Cook stand out as some kind of brain of Britain. But let's give him his due. Fluent of speech and intellectually adept, in the mid-80s and early 90s he hit his target on the Government benches more often than most of his front bench colleagues. The pity is that opportunism has rendered his gifts useless.

A grammar school product, Cook was embroiled in Labour students politics in the mid-60s. He stood unsuccessfully for Edinburgh North in 1970 and was elected to the local council the following year. In 1974 he won Edinburgh Central at the age of 28.

In the seventies he clung to the left of the Party and became a passionate campaigner for nuclear disarmament. In 1980, he joined the front bench Treasury team. In 1983 he managed Kinnock's leadership bid and was rewarded with election to the Shadow Cabinet. But over the years Kinnock denied Cook the prominent positions he believed he deserved, notably the Defence portfolio.

A leading light of the soft left "realignment" of 1985, he finally made his mark as Shadow Health and Social Security Secretary between 1987-92. Here he enjoyed the juiciest pickings in the Commons and embarrassed a succession of Tory Health secretaries. But he ran a mile from the picket lines when the nurses struck in 1988.

That year, he managed Kinnock's leadership campaign against Tony Benn and played a key role in torpedoing John Prescott's deputy leadership bid - not the first or the last time he would disappoint his backers on the soft left. As one of his Shadow Cabinet colleagues said, Cook was always "a fly operator".

Over the years, his inability to confide in or stick by others has made him a marginal irrelevance in both the Shadow Cabinet and the NEC.

In 1989, the ardent advocate of non-nuclear defence collapsed ignominiously, with hardly the pretence of resistance, as Kinnock overturned the Party's unilateralist commitment. In 1991, he emerged briefly from the safety of the infamously ineffectual "Supper Club" of closet Labour dissidents to complain about the conduct of the Gulf War. Slapped on the wrist by the leader, he quickly retreated. Even as the massacre was underway on the Basra Road, Cook voted with the NEC majority to reject a call for a ceasefire - twelve hours before Bush himself decided enough was enough.

In 1992, Cook backed Smith against Bryan Gould and was rewarded with the DTI brief - not the Chancellorship he craved but at least a prominent economic portfolio. Along came the assault on the miners and the popular upsurge against it. Cook was found wanting, not just by miners but by Party members who were baffled by his inability (or reluctance) to deliver the knock-out blow to his Tory opposite number, Michael Heseltine, at that time the most despised figure in the country.

After Smith's death, Cook was urged to stand for the leadership by a noisy gaggle of political columnists, academics and soft left MPs. Would he or wouldn't he became the question of the hour. Predictably he didn't and the eternal great white hope of the soft left backed Blair, the inevitable winner, when the decision had ceased to mean anything. Only Cook himself could have been surprised that he was not rewarded with the Shadow Chancellorship.

Though it wasn't what Cook wanted, almost everyone in the Party was relieved to see Cook replace Jack Cunningham as Shadow Foreign Secretary. But his first half year in the post has been dismal. Trying to square the circle of Labour's policy on a single European currency, he has sounded increasingly halting and incoherent. On Bosnia, Chechnya, Palestine, Ireland, GATT and the UN he has been invisible. Compared to him Douglas Hurd appears a European giant.

Of course, Cook is hamstrung by the fact that Blair simply wants to have no foreign policy discernibly different from the Tory Government's. But the problem is deeper than that. Over the years, Cook has realigned his political compass so often that waffle has become a way of life and a mode of thought. In recent TV and radio interviews he has sounded constipated, stuttering and gurgling and archly evading all questions of substance. The most fluent speaker and intellect in the Shadow Cabinet simply has nothing left to say.

Cook's recent performance over Clause IV was typical. He let it be known that he was uneasy about Blair's initiative. Then, he affected a posture of independent open-mindedness. Following a publicly advertised period of private cogitation, he emerged briefly to make his own contribution to the debate in a self-declared attempt to inject "radical" and "left" ideas. None of these, however, appeared in his prolix and pointless *New Statesman* essay. He had already ascertained where Blair was heading - indeed had cleared the article with Blair's office - and was determined above all to say nothing that would place him in any conflict with the leader. So this little episode ended, as always with Cook, in cosy accommodation.

Cook's long-standing backing for Proportional Representation has made him the darling of the left-liberal intelligentsia, from *New Left Review* to the *New Statesman* (the *Spectator* likes him too). Seduced by Cook's intellectual gravitas, they have found it easy to overlook his complete inability either to stick to principle or to exercise significant influence behind the scenes. ❑

The cruellest exploitation

Men are not forced to use porn - they enjoy it. Penny Iveson argues that porn cannot be dismissed as just another nasty product of capitalism.

PORNOGRAPHY is the graphic, sexually explicit subordination of women. More than 95% of porn images are of women's bodies being possessed or offered up for men's use. Porn, bought and used overwhelmingly by men, is now the largest part of the entertainment industry, more profitable than the mainstream film, video and music industries combined.

It is therefore a powerful perpetuator of male dominant/female submissive heterosexuality. This includes male gay porn, which worships masculinity, and lesbian porn which, often under an arty gloss, apes hetero-porn with macho roles for women. All porn reiterates the male supremacist central credo of heterosexist society which deeply influences us all, whatever our sexual orientation. Pornography is packed with lies about women's sexuality. Violence is implicated in all porn but overtly violent pornography is increasingly popular.

Around 70% of the mail order porn market comprises the most extremely violent material. All top-shelf porn is without exception full of hatred of woman - "vile sluts" and "filthy wives". Women's body parts are turned into commodities. Titles like *Penthouse*, now on Internet, regularly advertise videos of women being beaten up. A growing taste in both the legal and illegal market (the distinction is increasingly meaningless) is for the invasion of pregnant women's bodies, usually impoverished south-east Asian women.

Pornography sexualises inequality: gender, race, age, disability. In some trendy magazines there are anti-fascist editorials at the front and Nazi porn at the back. S/M eroticises police-state power; as capitalism in crisis bares its teeth, fascism is increasingly and deliberately eroticised in the media-saturated culture. Anti-porn feminists are habitually depicted by Marxists as ignorant of the relationship between capitalism and patriarchy.

Private property supposedly caused women's "world historic defeat" and a mythical era is conjured up when women were equal. But private property was under men's control to begin with. Class society was modelled on the systematic subjugation of women in pre-class society - an early insight of Marx and Engels abandoned quietly somewhere between *The German Ideology* and *The Communist Manifesto*. Because Marxism has no analysis of gender but deals with women's issues using the crude and rusty "logic of capitalism" mechanism, crucial issues like the massive demand for pornography from men are ignored.

Marxists cannot go on interpreting the shocking truth that millions of working-class men regularly pay for images of the degradation of women in terms of its convenience to capitalism. The only rationale for this nonchalance towards the male demand for porn (apart from individual self-protection) is the view that men are the victims of their biology but Marxism preaches the opposite.

Our ideas are created by our society. Desire, then, is constructed by society. The pressure-cooker model of male sexuality, insulting to men, is almost invariably used by those who label us man-haters. The sex industry works because porn is pleasurable to men, not because it is forced upon them by capitalist exploiters. It is invited in and paid for. It is a powerful cross-class alliance which makes women-hatred sexy.

The failure of the left to take up this issue is a self-defeating tragedy, leaving the field open to sections of the right. Anti-porn feminists have struggled alone for decades with the left crying "censorship!" though they would applaud the crushing of British National Party paper sales. Charges of complicity with the moral right - which in any case does not seriously seek the eradication of pornography (unlike abortion) - come as much from the left as the libertarians. We should be as little surprised by the "strange bedfellows" argument as the labour movement was when the National Front supported the miners' strike of 1984.

Pornography is a patriarchal cross-class alliance against women and children, and will militate immediately to help negate or pre-empt any socialist gains or victory. When the Nazis invaded Poland the first thing they did was flood the bookstalls with pornography. Capitalists are far more clever about porn than the male-led left because it's easier for them to be honest about male commitment to it.

Men own 98.5% of the world's wealth, secure 93% of the top jobs, do one third of the world's work while earning nine tenths of its income. 85% of UK women with a full-time job and children live with men who do no housework. Most violence is done by men. Pornography textualises this real powerlessness of women and women must develop the power to eradicate it as part of our fight for economic independence of and equality with men.

The Campaign Against Pornography, 11 Goodwin Street, London N4 3HQ; tel. 071 263 1833.

We *can* make a difference

Alyoscia D'Onofrio, an activist in the campaign Workers Aid for Bosnia, takes issue with the passive pessimism which infects much of the British left's debate on Bosnia.

ALL TOO often, the image presented of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia suggests that nothing positive can be done, least of all by the "ordinary citizens" of Britain and Europe. A recent article in *Briefing* ("War, what war?", February 1995) is a typical example and does nothing to lift the air of defeatism which increasingly pervades discussions on Bosnia.

In fact, there is something that we can and should do about Bosnia. By "we" I mean socialist anti-racists, people who deplore the use of mass rape as a political instrument.

There are two main areas of confusion facing the left: who to support and how. Or to put it another way, the problem of diagnosis and the problem of agency. The first problem has been created through several years of badly informed media coverage, while the second reflects the debilitated state of the left today. Neither of these conditions is irreversible.

On the question of diagnosis, it is crucial to get away from the idea that in Bosnia there are various nationalistic warring factions and then a mass of ordinary people who are simply passive victims of the conflict.

First, this picture fails to distinguish the aggressors (nationalist Serbs, armed and supplied by the Milosevic regime and nationalist Croats, armed and supplied by the Tudjman regime), from their targets (Bosnians, mainly Muslims, but also Serbs, Croats, Hungarians, and children of mixed marriages who are fighting just to stay alive). In so doing, it complements the stand-offish or pro-Serb position characteristic of British foreign policy.

Second, it is quite simply wrong to suppose that Bosnians (of various ethnic origins) are not actively resisting the divisive pressures of ethnic nationalism. There are social forces which oppose the ethnic partition of Bosnia and advocate a multi-ethnic future for the republic, despite the experience of the last three years. These views are embodied in a number of formal political and civil institutions like the Union of Bosnian Social Democrats (with its base in Tuzla), and citizens' groups in Tuzla, Sarajevo and, on a smaller scale, elsewhere in unoccupied Bosnia. But equally importantly, such ideas and values are found in the trade unions, in the army of Bosnia-Herzegovina, in families and schools, on the streets and in the workplace.

This resistance to ethnic nationalism has developed with the odds stacked heavily against it. Inactivity, deprivation, overcrowding, loss of family and blocked trade routes all contribute to social tensions which play into the hands of nationalist politicians. The international community negotiates only with the nationalist parties, that is, on the rare occasions it listens to the Bosnians at all. Without material and political assistance it is doubtful whether this resistance will grow, or even survive. Which brings us to the question of activity and agency: how can these forces be supported?

Perhaps the most common response to the Bosnian holocaust has been to call upon the United Nations to solve the problem. In its left-wing version, this response is usually tacked onto the end of a powerful critique of the UN's involvement in Bosnia "up to now". The problem with this approach is that it completely misconceives the nature of the UN and the political and economic interests it represents. It is not a democratic organisation, and it's not going to be reformed by impassioned pleas, at least not without a powerful international movement to back up such arguments.

Rather than getting pessimistic about the possibilities of a global solution to the problem, it is important to look at what we can do, at what kinds of concrete solidarity action can be taken to support towns and areas where non-nationalistic forces are developing. In so doing, we might even begin to build the kind of movement which could bring real pressure to bear.

This has been the approach of the campaigning group, Workers Aid for Bosnia. It is composed entirely of unpaid volunteers: workers, unemployed people, people with no experience of organised politics as well as political activists from across the left spectrum and significantly, many Bosnian refugees. To date, Workers Aid has taken eight convoys of food, clothing and medical aid to Tuzla in north-eastern Bosnia. The contents of the convoys have reached people through their own local organisations: trade union logistic centres, the university and the hospital.

This is not simply humanitarian aid but aid with a political message: we support your culture of tolerance and understanding; we support your struggle for the right to live together. The quantity of aid taken has been only a fraction of what is required, but its symbolic value has been immense. One university professor in Tuzla told me: "We were so happy when British and French people first arrived with Workers Aid. We realised that not everybody in your countries wanted to see our country destroyed." Food for thought.

At the time of writing, a delegation of trade unionists from Tuzla is touring Britain and France. It is campaigning to get support for a July convoy of material aid and equipment from western European workers to workers in Tuzla. So far the response has been excellent. This kind of solidarity work will probably not, in itself, solve the situation in Bosnia.

But it can make a difference to the kind of society emerging in that country, and consequently to the quality of life for people there in the longer term. Who knows, it might even send some signals to the British Government that its racist foreign policy will be tolerated no longer.

If you want more information on, or would like to participate in, the July convoy, or Workers Aid, please contact PO Box 9, Eccles SO, Salford M30 7FX, or call 0171 582 8834.

Oh Johnny Boy .....

FOLLOWING the historic meeting between President Clinton and Gerry Adams Ronan Bennett takes a look at the current state of play surrounding the peace talks.

DURING Gerry Adam's recent visit to the United States and his meetings with President Clinton, a new supporter emerged from the shadows into the blinding glare of the Republican cause. This man, with only a few well-chosen words, delivered to the White House in person by his messenger boy and later in writing, achieved more than all those on both sides of the Atlantic who toiled tirelessly to promote Adams' trip. Who was this man? Step forward John Major.

By publicly opposing Adams' visit, by sending Sir Patrick Mayhew, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to Washington to warn of the dire consequences of allowing the Sinn Fein president into the US, Major displayed a level of idiocy astonishing even by his own standards. He not only insisted on fighting a battle he could not win but exposed to the scrutiny of the world's media his own Government's position in respect to the peace process as intransigent and belligerent.

The emphasis Sinn Fein representatives continue to place on their party's commitment to the peace process and the flexibility they have shown in response to developments they do not like - publication of the Joint Framework Document, for example - stand in contrast to the sour and increasingly petulant attitude of Major and his Cabinet who give every impression that they have been stranded by the cease-fire, and that they do not understand that the peace is holding and that the Republican movement is serious about what it has been insisting for the last decade: that the conflict can only be resolved through direct dialogue between all the parties.

The Government's backwardness is undoubtedly partly due to the origins of the cease-fire - it is, for all the Tories' claims to the contrary - a nationalist initiative. But it is also due to the Government's ideological stasis; it is as if, having been for so long wedded to the terminology and ideology of counterinsurgency and conflict, it is unable to grasp the simple fact that, with the cease-fire, there has been a crucial transformation, one that demands a fundamental change in attitudes, priorities, thinking and actions. So far, there is no sign that Major is even aware of the need to make this change.

Major's continuing intransigence and his inept lecturing of the Americans (Adams was canny enough to play on this when he told his American audience to loud applause: "Britain sometimes still behaves as though it has an empire"), have undoubtedly helped Adams and Sinn Fein. But more worryingly, Major continues to set up future unnecessary obstacles to the development of the peace process. To anyone with even a cursory acquaintance with Irish history, the Government's current high-profile demand that the IRA "decommission" its arms is an irrelevance. (Government spokespeople and Unionist politicians talk knowledgeably in every interview of "massive" IRA arms dumps. Those with even medium-term memories will recall how, until shortly before the cease-fire, the Government PR machine used to assure us the IRA was desperately short of war material.)

As in previous campaigns, the most likely outcome is that arms will be stored against the day they may once again become necessary. The point for everyone involved in the peace process is to prevent that day arriving. Sooner or later the Government is going to have to climb down on this point, in the same way it did an about turn on talking to Sinn Fein and on the "permanent" renunciation of violence issue (remember that one?). It is not making the job any easier for itself. But perhaps it is typical of Major that just when a U-turn becomes inevitable he slams his foot on the accelerator. He can thus make a good show of maintaining his course but only has himself to blame if he topples over while having to execute the inevitable turn at 100 mph. Sinn Fein, however, is probably hoping he survives. With enemies like John Major, who needs friends? ❑

Famous last words ...


LONDON LABOUR 40p
BRIEFING
No 48 APRIL 1985
RATECAPPED COUNCILS DEFIANT:
UNITY CAN WIN!
by MARGARET HODGE (Leader, Islington Council)
LABOUR—TAKE THE POWER!

"Out aim must be to strengthen and support all our comrades who are in the front line, so that we can enjoy the widest possible support for a campaign which could inflict massive damage on this Government and which is so crucial in the struggle to protect public services at the local level."
- Margaret Hodge, Leader Islington Council, *Labour Briefing*, April 1985.

Nigeria on the brink

Reporting from West Africa, Sean Coyne reviews new developments in Nigeria and prospects for a solidarity campaign in Britain.

NIGERIA'S military rulers are desperate, and that makes them dangerous. They are losing the few friends they had inside the country, and are increasingly isolated on the international scene.

Observers of Nigerian affairs can be forgiven for thinking that they have seen all this before. Yet another incurably corrupt regime is slipping into the mire of an economic and political crisis it helped to create.

In mid-March the tensions and downright paranoia within the Abacha ruling elite were made public. Scores of senior military figures and leading politicians associated with past regimes were arrested and interrogated about a planned coup. Those arrested included ex-General Obasanjo, considered to be an 'intellectual' soldier and the only military leader to hand over power peacefully to a civilian administration in the seventies. Senior officers of the last regime led by Major General Babangida are still under arrest and face execution by firing squad for treason, while multi-millionaire Babangida himself was reported to be 'helping with enquiries'. This indicates the extent to which the current regime is finding it difficult to maintain its version of order, based as it is on buying military support through the illegal appropriation of national reserves.

As if to underline the fragility, and some would say the surrealism of the current regime, FIFA, the world soccer authority, decided recently to bar Nigeria from hosting the Youth World Cup. It was clear from the start that Abacha wanted the competition to show the world that his regime was in control. Nigerians are keen football fans and international political capital was also a major consideration. Reworking Marx's phrase on religion, one leading magazine headlined: 'Football is the Opiate of the masses!' Millions were spent to try and meet the stringent requirements of the sponsors. The airport was reorganised, football pitches were upgraded and attempts were made to restrict the police and army from their habitual stealing from the populace. But this cynical manipulation does not fool anyone. Abacha's response to the FIFA rejection was instructive. He blamed enemies outside and inside the country who allegedly wanted to undermine the measures he has put in place to restore Nigeria to democracy.

A new Cabinet has just been announced and although none of the portfolios has yet been allocated, it looks like business as usual. It's a rag bag of corrupt civilian politicians and loyal military officers which will do little to satisfy either international capital or the people of Nigeria.

The current situation has been described by one Nigerian satirist as a 'crisis wedding cake where one layer is placed upon another until the whole monolith topples over and is spoiled'.

Genuine democratic opposition in Nigeria is thankfully far from finished. Though the central labour organisation, Nigerian Labour Congress, is in the hands of a government appointed administrator, the unions that make up the NLC are intact and are militantly and courageously pursuing their own agenda. They still represent over four million workers and remain a force to be reckoned with despite the continued banning of the oil workers' unions. There are hundreds of thousands of trade unionists who remain incorruptible, who have a vision of a more equitable society, and who are not prepared to be compliant in the face of barbarism.

The Campaign for Democracy has been re-launched and networks of civil rights bodies, together with progressive organisations of women and socialists, are rebuilding a real opposition based on a programme of mass action and accountability.

At a local level, Ken Sara-Wiwa and his comrades from the Ogoni Peoples Campaign have fought for reparations from the regime and the Shell Oil Company which has destroyed huge areas of land in their rapacious search for oil. Ken and others are now held in appalling prison conditions on trumped up charges of murder, but the international campaign is gaining ground and the regime now has to face the wrath of the world environmental lobby.

The next few months are critical. The

national peace council

Women & Conflict

A day of films and discussions

Saturday 29 April
National Film Theatre
London SE1

Branwen
Confronting the issues around nationalism in Wales and Northern Ireland. Speakers: Angela Graham, *scripwriter;* Elaine Rowan, *Northern Ireland Community Relations Council*

Balkans feature film *plus extracts from*
The Troubles We've Seen
Two film cycles shot in the course of four trips made to Sarajevo. Speakers: Maggie O'Kane, *Guardian journalist;* Vesna Terselic, *Zagreb Anti War Centre;* Vanessa Vasic-Janekovic, *War Report;* Scilla Elworthy, *Oxford Research Group*

Reception at the MOMI

Fearless: the Hunterwali Story

Day tickets £25, £21 *(conc)*. Separate morning/afternoon rates also available.
For tickets contact: NFT, 0171 928 3232.

Contact: NPC, 88 Islington High St, London N1 8EG, 0171 354 5200

regime has to prove to international capital that it can maintain stability, put its own house in order and begin to settle at least a proportion of the huge accumulated debt. Prospects do not look good.

This has not been helped by the US Government criticising the arrest of Obasanjo and others, and the continued detention of Abiola, the winner of the annulled Presidential elections of 12th June, 1993. The British Government shamelessly continues to supply heavy arms to the regime in 'tied aid' deals that make the Pergau Dam affair look a minor indiscretion.

In this country the beginnings of a broad based solidarity campaign are carefully being built. Several groups from within the Nigerian community have come together with other African activists and organisations concerned with arms spending and civil rights. A programme of meetings and speaking tours is planned as are more direct protest actions against the regime.

The TUC at its last congress carried a motion unanimously condemning the regime and calling for the release of detainees. Major's government must be called to account for its appalling record of complicity in the oppression of the Nigerian people. ❑

Standard slip on banana skin

600 banana workers in Nicaragua have filed a law suit against the Standard Fruit Company demanding compensation for damages relating to the Company's use of an insecticide called Nemagon. The majority of them are suffering severe liver, lung and bone problems as well as sterility because of the poisoning.

According to Nicaraguan lawyers, the law suit is also being taken up by victims from Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Columbia, Ecuador, Panama and the Philippines. The Standard Fruit Company continued to use Nemagon in these countries until 1980 even though it had been banned 30 years previously in the US because of its toxic effects.

Guatemala deadlock

THE GUATEMALA peace process is hanging in the balance after talks between the Government and the opposition guerrilla movement URNG (Guatemala National Revolutionary Unity) broke down for the fourth time. Nearly three years after indigenous peoples' rights campaigner Rigoberta Menchu won the Nobel Peace Prize, the Government continues to defy world opinion. It rejects ratification of a UN convention on indigenous peoples' rights, refuses to give constitutional recognition to the Mayan people and opposes regional linguistic autonomy.

With the UN mandate - and budget - in Guatemala due to expire at the end of March, the Government is dragging its feet on the peace accord, which was due to be signed at the end of 1994. The URNG is maintaining political pressure on the Government and stepping up its military campaign against the army - a sign that the long civil war will grind on unless the negotiations deadlock is broken.

Drugs trade booming

THE CALI cocaine cartel is rapidly becoming a significant employer on Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast. Divers and fishermen meet Colombian smugglers at sea to trade fish and rock lobster for cocaine. The Colombians use the fish to launder their cash on the Colombian island of San Andres while the Nicaraguans resell the cocaine for transhipment north or for local consumption. The 500-mile coast is proving a perfect place for drug traffickers wanting to divide, consolidate and reroute their cargo. The army has minimal presence in the area while the resources available to the police are hopelessly inadequate.

Sandinista deputy Mirna Cunningham sees the drug trade as the latest version of colonial dependence, saying, "It makes perfect sense... we've had ten years of war which tried to crush an alternative economic model and now no reconstruction programme. What else are the thousands of demobilised troops to do? They have been told to reinsert themselves in the world economy. They are doing just that by exporting cocaine to the United States."

Cuba: End the US blockade

Dayschool

10am-5pm,
Saturday 8th April

Conway Hall,
Red Lion Square,
London WC1
(Holborn tube)

Speakers include Maria Florez (Cuban Ambassador), Tony Benn MP, Louise Richards (Unison).



Lies, failures and rogue traders

It has not been Nick Leeson's month. First he lost a few bob on a dodgy bet, then he was summarily shafted by his employers, Barings Bank. Martyn Fryer reports.

THE BACKGROUND to all this has been well reported - well, actually we have only been told half the story. The real issues surrounding Nick Leeson, Barings and the back-handed dealings of the establishment old-boy network have yet to surface.

Established in the last century, Barings has always been seen as a pillar of commercial banking in what the City likes to see as the centre of the financial universe. The bank was originally set up with private money, provided by the Barings family which amassed its fortune from land acquired during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The family connection remains to this day, although only one Baring now remains on the board. Others are placed in positions of power and influence in the myriad of subsidiaries, charitable trusts and subdivisions which are now seen as *de rigueur* in modern finance and banking.

Barings has always been conservative by nature and Conservative by political choice. It is perhaps no small wonder that the Chancellor in his statement to the House of Commons on the Monday after the Bank's collapse failed to state that Barings, in recent years, has actually donated more than £700,000 to the Tory Party. It is perhaps this that Kenneth Clarke was referring to when he appeared on BBC Radio 4 some days later stating that, "Of course I didn't reveal the whole story to the House last Monday."

Until about four years ago, Barings had little experience in dealing in derivatives, having leaned towards caution and speculated on less risky trading. Indeed, at least one prominent member of its staff resigned his position at the end of the eighties specifically because Barings seemed incapable of getting to grips with the huge financial gains that were possible from trading in derivatives.

Barings, however, is nothing if not predictable. The thought of big bucks was too much for any self-respecting capitalist board of directors to ignore for long and a new division was set up. This included an office in the far east. New employees were recruited, Nick Leeson amongst them, and trading began. Leeson, incidentally, was still taken on even though he was initially refused a trading permit because of a County Court judgement over a debt to, ironically, a far east electronics supplier. The fact that he was still allowed to trade with the full knowledge of the supposed regulator, the Bank of England, yet again brings into question the effectiveness of self-regulation.

Contrary to the press reports, Nick Leeson was not in charge of his office, nor was he responsible for monitoring his own work. Barings, the Bank of England and the Chancellor were all anxious to report that Leeson was some sort of "rogue trader", Barings even asked that the Serious Fraud Office be brought in because they suspected that Leeson was some sort of double agent who had infiltrated their inner sanctum with the intent of bringing down the Bank, the Royal Family, Old Uncle Tom Cobbly and all. If he was a double agent he was probably the best ever seen, at least since Tony Blair joined the Labour Party.

Leeson had two direct seniors in his office, both of whom monitored his deals, balanced the books and reported back to head office in London. Barings, as with other such trading institutions, has an elaborate series of monitors and checks to ensure that the bank is at no time over-exposed, that in other words, their trading liabilities do not exceed their capital allowance. These checks and restrictions are carried out automatically by computer and also physically by the trading office managers. These systems are so elaborate that if a trader attempts to purchase above his limit (ie. make too big a bet), alarm bells go off, literally, and the transaction is aborted. Of course the upper limit at which the bell sounds is set by a human - the office manager. Other automatic restrictions and checks work in exactly the same way, all of them pre-set by the managers.

These limits depend on a number of factors, ranging from the experience and skill of the trader, to the current profit and loss position of the group. New traders are set lower limits, traders who are seen to be good earners have high limits. In the twelve months running up to the Barings collapse, Leeson was paid a basic salary of £200,000. His bonus, which was performance related, netted

him in excess of £1,300,000. Clearly, anyone who earns his paymasters enough to ensure that his bonus cheque is of this amount must be seen as a good egg.

His trading limits were raised. He was pleased because it gave him the chance to earn a bit more each month. His managers were pleased because their office's profits could soar and they would be on to a nice little earner. Barings were pleased because they were encouraging Leeson to bet with other people's money, and he was on a roll, and profits could only go up. Caution was being dissolved by greed. Market forces were all prevailing.

Barings had a problem, though. The markets in which they were dealing are fairly transparent. Others can access the current position and exposure of traders and trading companies within the market. In fact, watchdogs such as the Securities and Investment Board and the regulation division of London International Financial Futures Exchange would find it impossible to act were it not for this transparency.

Transparency was worrying members of Barings, because it clearly showed that exposure on the derivatives markets was abnormally high, and the exposure that Leeson had committed the bank to was greater than some institutions had to speculate with in more than a year. There were two roads which Barings could then go down. The option they did not choose was to reduce the amounts that Leeson could trade with. A decision was made to carry on making vast amounts of money and to cloak their actions. It appears that a crime would only be seen to have been committed if they were caught.

The very transparency of these dealings means that the self-proclaimed governors of the system - the Bank of England - have no excuse for missing potentially damaging deals and suspected frauds. It is also interesting to note that both the Tories and Labour seem to have been happy to let this self-governing nepotism carry on unchecked. The reasons for the Tories' unwillingness to deal with lax regulation and control are not surprising, given the donations that flow to the Tory coffers from the City.

Labour's reasons are more to do with a lack of talent and knowledge on the Trade and Industry and Treasury teams and political infighting between two spokespersons both claiming to be "the City spokesman" - Stuart Bell and Alastair Darling. Until the recent Shadow Cabinet reshuffle, the antagonism and rivalry between Gordon Brown and Robin Cook did nothing to minimise the harmful effect a lack of "City policy" was having. It is only post-Leeson that Alastair Darling has spoken out in favour of more regulation - this is, though, nothing more than a knee-jerk reaction, and, in common with almost everything coming from the Labour front benches, has nothing substantial to offer and does not stand up to scrutiny.



Without doubt, this whole episode highlights the dangers of everything that Thatcher taught was great: capitalist greed, self-regulation and Government compliance with City old-boy networks. The fact that this matter has come to light is in itself a failure of the inner circle of claret-drinking, cigar-smoking men who claim to have such a grip on the City and its financial institutions. The very people who were forced into the limelight over the Barings failure are those who always claimed that such a collapse could not happen. And, in the extremely unlikely event of a collapse happening, they assured everyone that "the establishment" would club together and bail out the unfortunate member of the group. Clearly, this ad hoc gentlemen's agreement was found wanting just when it was needed the most.

The attitudes and actions of all those concerned are exactly those that can be expected from most businesses in the private sector. Profits are all. These are the values by which all companies are compared. There is no thought of the wider consequences of actions taken in the search for profits.

The fact that Labour has now called for regulation is little more than opportunism - riding on the back of the media hype surrounding Barings - and hypocrisy given the moves to abandon public ownership and embrace the market. Blair extols the virtues of the private sector at precisely the moment when the search for greater returns on profits, the drive that fueled the derivative dealings, has been so decisively discredited.

Without doubt, Leeson failed, quite spectacularly (in fact there was even a suggestion that he should be named as *Briefing*'s Class Hero of the month). Without doubt, Barings failed, it failed to supervise and it failed its investors and borrowers by putting them in jeopardy in search of a quick buck.

Without doubt, the Bank of England failed; it has failed to supervise, failed to warn, and failed to do anything useful. It couldn't even gather together the relatively small amount needed to keep Barings afloat. If nothing else this was the one thing that was seen as fail-safe. Labour has also failed to anticipate this situation, despite warnings, failed to act, plan, and promote any sort of policy that would get anywhere near tackling the City.

Bell, Darling, Brown, Cook and his successor, Cunningham have failed to address the City, spending too much time on political infighting, seeking votes for the Shadow Cabinet and generally keeping quiet for fear of upsetting the hosts of the prawn cocktail circuit. ❑

Chessington South *Labour Briefing* women readers

say to Derby delegates:

Stick to Clause IV

news & views

We all grow up to be pensioners

The new Pensions Bill means poverty for millions of future women pensioners. Leonora Lloyd reports.

WOMEN'S patterns of work are different from men's. They are more likely to experience breaks in work because of child bearing and caring responsibilities and to work in part-time, casual and temporary work. Despite all the talk of "new men", women still carry the overwhelming responsibility for running the home and childcare, so they are less likely than men to be able to work overtime. They are paid on average 70% of what men get and job segregation is still rife.

All this means that women are less able than men to accumulate the credits for a full state pension, less likely to be eligible for occupational pensions and less likely to able to afford an adequate private pension. In 1991, 15% of retired women had full basic state pensions compared to 94% of men, yet women are much more dependent on their state pensions than are men. While 71% of men receive some sort of SERPS pension, only 28% of women pensioners do so and only 20% of women over 65 have occupational pensions compared to 66% of men. As a result, women pensioners are poorer than men.

The future looks equally bleak. 36% of women currently employed contribute to occupational pension schemes compared to 64% of men. This situation is exacerbated by other changes in our society: one in three marriages ends in divorce; people are living longer; and the value of the state pension has been steadily reduced by a government determined to drive people into the private, profit-making sector. It has been estimated that by the time the Pensions Bill currently going through Parliament comes into full operation, in 2030, two out of three women pensioners will be living in poverty.

Increasingly, men's patterns of paid work are coming to resemble women's - short term jobs, frequent career changes and breaks, more part time and contract work - so it is in the interests of men as well as women to resist the Pensions Bill and ensure that the next Labour Government will reverse it if passed.

The main proposal is to equalise the age of retirement at 65. While equalisation is in general a good thing, in this case, because of the continuing inequalities women suffer from, it will not help women unless and until the other issues are addressed. Neither party shows any determination to address them because of the costs involved. The Government has now agreed to sharing of the couples' occupational pension at the time of divorce, which will certainly benefit middle class women who gave up or scaled down their careers to support their husbands (and vice versa) but will not help working class women for whom division of SERPS entitlement would be more useful. However, this Government is phasing out SERPS (which was introduced by a Labour Government to enable lower-paid workers to build up an increased, portable pension) in order to increase the profits of its friends in the City.

One of the changes made by a former Labour Government was the introduction of Home Responsibility Protection. This was a recognition of women's caring role (although of course it also applies to men where appropriate). Women currently need to work for 39 years to qualify for a full state pension, but under HRP they can reduce the number of years by up to 20 if they are out of work undertaking child care or some other caring responsibilities. There are limits to this. It does not apply to foster parenting and women can lose whole years of National Insurance credits if they do not stop or restart their work at the right time in the financial year. The Pensions Bill, while increasing women's working life by five years, will only increase the period during which HRP is allowed by two years.

Organisations such as the Fawcett Society are calling for HRP - a negative 'benefit' - to be replaced by the payment of National Insurance credits in the same way as for those who are unemployed and sick, and for as long as the caring responsibilities apply. At the moment someone who never works and is always registered unemployed can get a full state pension. A married women who works throughout her life caring for children, sick and elderly relatives, will get a much reduced pension.

Other problems arise for women when their husbands go into long-term residential care, taking their occupational and SERPS pensions with them. Changes in the rules on how such care is now paid for can leave the wife in poverty. Age Concern and other groups are proposing that the couple's pensions should be split when this happens.

The Labour front bench is now proposing that people can retire at any age between 60 and 70, with the full pension not being available until 63. This is an improvement on the Government's proposals and would enable women to work longer if they so wished to build up more credits to cover earlier gaps. But they also need to propose the continuation and strengthening of SERPS, strong action to implement equality legislation, minimum wages, reform of HRP, reversal of the new rules on residential and community care and above all restoration of the value of the basic pension if we are to ensure that all pensioners are to have the decent standard of living which they deserve. ❑

Greetings to all delegates at Labour Women's Conference 1995

Diane Abbott, MP

Even Tories want it scrapped

Labour Against the Child Support Act is a broad-based campaign which is rapidly winning a wide range of converts, although not, sadly, from the Party's front bench.

LABOUR Against The Child Support Act (LACSA) was formed last year to increase pressure on the Labour front bench to take a position with its own grass roots against the Act. It was so-called "ordinary members", along with activists, who overwhelmingly supported resolutions to Conference 1992 and 1993 calling for the Act to be scrapped. This did not become Labour policy.

At last year's Labour Party Conference, there was not even a debate on the issue. The Liberal Democrats and many Tory MPs want the Act scrapped. The Government, with such a small working majority, has only Labour to rely on to keep the Act in place against us. For example, it is now Labour policy to review the Act, even though the Tories are already reviewing it.

In January, Peter Lilley, the social security minister, was forced to propose changes to the Act, trying to defuse a growing anti-CSA movement which has the Government on the run. But Lilley's changes are an insult to women and men who find themselves up against the agency. For example, an allowance for travel-to-work costs which would give only 75p a week to a man travelling 200 miles, while his new partner's travel costs are not taken into account although all her income is. The benefits to most will be pennies and the unemployed will not benefit at all.

Another proposal is a maintenance credit of at most £5 a week payable to mothers on income support or the Jobseekers Allowance to be paid when waged work is taken up - such a small amount that it will hardly even approach the cost of a few months' childcare.

The changes confirm the view that the principle of the Act is to get women off Income Support and end the responsibility of the state for the welfare of mothers and their children.

All mothers must have the right to decide whether or not it is in their interest to claim maintenance. All families, including those on benefits, must have their individual circumstances taken into consideration when maintenance is assessed.

As the movement against the Act has become stronger and more visible, the Child Support Act has become more of an issue with trade unions. The TUC is now calling for the Act to be scrapped - CPSA was the only union to vote against this resolution. CPSA, IRSF, GMB, NALGO, NUCPS, T&G and UNISON have all passed resolutions in opposition to the Act or calling for it to be scrapped. Unfortunately GMB has done a turnaround and is now calling for review - but there is a rumour that it's changing back again!

LACSA is taking part in the week of action to scrap the Act from April 4th-8th, celebrating the Child Support Agency's second -and we hope last - anniversary. LACSA has joined the major organisations in the UK-wide movement of single mothers, new partners, "absent mothers" and "absent fathers" to issue the following statement for endorsement by any other groups:

"We demand that the Child Support Act be scrapped and the Child Support Agency abolished. We further demand that, after the widest consultation, a new, fair maintenance system, enforceable where necessary, be set up. The system must be publicly accountable and based on the individual circumstances and welfare of all children, women and men."

For the week of action, there will be a women's lobby of Parliament and speak-out chaired by Mildred Gordon MP and Selma James of the Campaign Against the Child Support Act on April 4th; pickets of the CSA London headquarters and other CSA regional centres on April 5th; and local events all over the UK on Saturday April 8th to let the Government know we still want the Act scrapped. Please get branches to endorse the statement and join in events or organise your own.

This movement has many Tories in it who are ready to go against the Government on the perfectly reasonable issue of protecting working class people's income. LACSA feels strongly that the Labour grassroots must have a presence in this movement -supporting and participating - against the Labour front bench which stands with the Tories against it. This is a party-political issue, but there are Labour and Tories on both sides.



Photo: Christine Clarke

A self-help handbook, *The Child Support Act - Your Rights and How to Defend Them*, by Legal Action for Women, now recognised as the standard handbook for people affected by the Child Support Act is available by post - £3 to people on benefits, £12 to funded organisations, £6 to others - from Legal Action for Women, 71 Tonbridge Street, London WC1H 9DZ (0171) 837 7509.

Let's hope that the Labour Party will take a position against the Act before it's scrapped.

We are always ready to send speakers. For more information, copies of the endorsement statement or details of the week of action contact LACSA, 56 Highfield Drive, Mossley, Ashton-under-Lyne, Tameside OL5 0DW Tel (0457) 83604) or (0161) 678 0957.

Trade Unions

The normally refined and genteel workplaces known as the county cricket grounds are at the moment going through some turmoil. No, it's nothing to do with a lack of cream for the teas. Industrial relations have come to the fore and the gentlemen of the counties are being taken to task by the players.

The cricket professionals are up in arms about their pay and fighting to guarantee a decent minimum wage for all County professionals. With the amount of money being thrown at the game from Sky and other broadcasters, not to mention money that will probably come in from the National Lottery, and crowds up at Sunday League games by around 40%, the players' demand for £20,000 per year for a player who has been selected for his national side does not seem unreasonable.

For many years now the players have been subjected to poor wages and contracts more befitting a forced labour camp, and this effort to gain proper recognition for what can turn out to be an injury shortened career deserves to succeed. It is about time that the money spent on hospitality in the committee rooms was diverted to the revenue earners out on the ground.

A packing firm has been ordered to pay more than £16,000 in fines after magistrates heard how safety inspectors found children operating unprotected razor sharp machinery in its factory. Inspectors from the Health and Safety Executive found children as young as 13 working with unguarded guillotine cutters and bare electric wires at Independent Packaging Ltd of Leek in Staffordshire.

Leek magistrates were told how the young workforce was illegally brought in at evenings and weekends to stuff toys and sweets into children's lucky bags. They fined the company a total of £16,500 with £387 costs after it admitted eight charges brought by the HSE. Its inspectors believe they have lifted the lid on a national scandal in which an army of "latch-key kids" across Britain is being recruited off the streets to work for employers who have no regard for their safety.

Speaking on behalf of Independent Packaging Ltd James Buchanan pleaded guilty to all charges but said it was not a child "sweatshop" and it had never been intended to flout the law. "It was all out of sheer ignorance," he said. "The careers adviser from Leek High School even sent children to our factory on work experience."

After the case, Mr Buchanan said the company was shocked by the size of the punishment and added: "At the end of the day they were kids who would otherwise have been knocking about on the streets. They were looked after and given proper breaks."

Speaking outside the court, Mr Flanagan of the HSA said children all over the country were being exploited. "Statistics show that this case is just the tip of the iceberg," he said. "Accidents are happening in illegal situations and these are things that children should not be exposed to."

The company also fails to recognise trade unions, a situation which Labour seems to have failed to grasp as being important. It is just this type of action that the current anti-trade union laws have allowed to happen. Until Labour makes policy to repeal these laws, such events, and worse, will continue to occur.

The pay dispute which led to staff at the Clydesdale Bank striking ended on March 13th when a revised pay deal was agreed. 85% of the workers voted in favour of the deal which gives most staff a minimum rise of 3.5%.

This is a great victory for collective action after the Bank initially offered one in ten staff no pay rise at all.

Lecturers at Southwark Further Education College have voted for indefinite strike action over threatened job losses. This vote comes in the midst of one-day strike action across the country in a long-running dispute over contracts between college lecturers and the College Employers Forum, backed by the Government.

The NUM is to step up its campaign on wages at the privatised RJB Mining company, with the possibility of a ballot on selective industrial action in early May. The NUM executive have said that the miners are particularly angered by the fact that RJB boss Richard Budge received a 23% pay rise, upping his salary to a massive £290,000 last year.

A recent report from the Low Pay Network has shown that official Government figures are hiding increasingly massive regional divisions in pay levels in Britain.

The average earnings of those in full time employment for the year to April 1994, rose by 2.7% to £325.70. But these figuers hide wide variations between the regions.

Workers in Wales are paid on average £291.40 per week which is more than £124 less than their equivalent in London.

In sectors such as textiles, where wages councils have been abolished, the pay actually dropped by 3%.

MSF
MANUFACTURING • SCIENCE • FINANCE

The Union for Manufacturing Science and Finance Industries.

The Kent North West Branch meets monthly at the Glentworth British Legion Club, Lowfield Street, Dartford. 8.00pm, 3rd Wednesday every month. All M.S.F. members welcome.

The dangers of Lyons made

Jim Mortimer reports on the serious financial dangers facing the giant MSF union and fears that potential cost-saving measures might be a threat to democracy.

AT THE February meeting of the National Executive Committee of MSF it was announced that there had been a sharp deterioration in the financial situation of the union. Right up to this announcement the General Secretary, Roger Lyons, and the Assistant General Secretary, John Chowcat, had been assuring all concerned that the finances of the union were steadily improving.

In November and December 1994 the monthly deficits amounted to £167,000 and £184,000 respectively; figures for January and February are awaited with some apprehension.

Some of the more discerning members of the union have been less surprised by the announcement of the financial downturn. Indeed, they have been critical for some time of what they felt was the optimistic but misleading impression being conveyed to the membership.

The financial report presented to the 1994 annual conference revealed current liabilities totalling more than £10 million and long-term liabilities of more than £8 million. True, these were more than covered by tangible fixed assets, investments and current assets. Nevertheless, the situation was worrying.

At the January meeting of the NEC it was reported that arrangements had been made for the union to borrow up to slightly more than £9.5 million from Unity Trust Bank and the Co-operative Bank. Rising interest rates have increased the burden of this massive borrowing.

At the February meeting of the NEC various emergency measures were suggested. Some were adopted for immediate implementation. By suspending the operation of some of its sub-committees and changing meeting times to avoid overnight accommodation, the NEC is hoping to reduce its own operating costs.

The NEC also proposes to review the size and frequency of meetings of various advisory committees. An examination of the imbalance in the cost of various advisory committees is long overdue. In relation to its membership the cost of meetings in the financial sector is disproportionately heavy. This has long been a source of grievance among active members in other sectors of the union.

The NEC proposes also to review the properties of the union. The present commitments of the union have been a source of strong criticism. In the inner London area, MSF has major offices in Wandsworth and near London Bridge. It also has offices near King's Cross. Many months ago the union purchased a substantial property in north London which has still not been occupied. It is under repair. MSF also possesses a training college in Essex.

The background to this complex property portfolio is the amalgamation of ASTMS and TASS to form the present union. The ASTMS head office was in Camden, which was subsequently sold, and the former TASS head office, in current use by MSF, was in Wandsworth. The offices near London Bridge were associated with the Health Visitors' Association, now part of MSF.

Critics argue that, given the financial state of the union, there was no justification for the purchase of another large property in north London. It appears that the intention is, or was, to maintain the existing office complexes in Wandsworth and near London Bridge, together with the new office accommodation in north London.

MSF like many other unions, has suffered membership losses because of the decline in manufacturing industry, cuts in public services, widespread unemployment and changes in check-off arrangements. These problems would have been faced even with a different style of leadership.

But the present leadership has not properly addressed these problems and has encouraged a false sense of optimism. They have also, it has been suggested, refused to acknowledge the real extent of the loss in membership. The result has been inflated membership and affiliation figures.

One of the most serious aspects of the developing problem is that the union's NEC has announced its intention to suspend the annual pay negotiations for MSF employees. More is likely to be heard of this decision. It is also proposing subscription increases considerably higher than the current rate of inflation. This proposal will be put to the annual conference in May. The increase would come into effect from next January.

Critics are likely to press for other changes, such as a reduction in the property portfolio, economies in the communications department, realistic membership and affiliation figures, the dropping of proposals which are seen to undermine the legal department to the advantage of private solicitors, and an end to the imbalance of expenditure on advisory committees which heavily favours the finance sector.

It is also widely accepted that the union cannot continue to pay the lavish costs of the General Secretary's chauffeur and his two personal staff assistants.

The danger is that the present leadership may seek to make economies at the expense of the democratic structure of the union, including the annual conference, the NEC, the regional councils and the branches. This is likely to be resisted.

● Our own correspondent writes: A group on the NEC has now made a number of proposals designed to cut back on the union's democratic structures under the guise of reducing costs: replacing monthly regional council meetings with bi-monthly meetings and reducing the functions of the councils, shortening the annual conference, etc.

The overall effect will be to centralise power. The left must produce counter-proposals which will safeguard and increase democracy at the base of the union and reduce the over-spending at the top. ❑

Bright's not right

Hilda Kean makes war on the argument that animal rights are not important to Marxists.

THAT *Labour Briefing* has acknowledged the importance of issues of animal rights to socialists is to be applauded. That Eric Bright should write such drivel on this topic in the last issue, (*LB* March 1995) however, shows how much work progressive socialists need to do on such purist, arid-thinking "comrades".

The views of Bright are nothing new. His scathing incomprehension of the views of those who give importance to non-human animals reminds one of the remarks of HH Hyndman, the founder of the Social Democratic Federation. Hyndman, over a hundred years ago, dismissed "humanitarians, vegetarians, anti-vivisectionists, and arty-craftys" declaring that "we are scientific socialists and have no room for sentimentalists".

Fortunately, independently minded socialists like Isabella Ford and Tom Mann ignored him and continued to support animal rights and the anti-vivisection cause. However, the Hyndman school of determinist Marxism is clearly alive and kicking in the form of Bright. It should be rejected today in the same way as it was last century by progressive activists. For Bright, the reiteration of some intellectual canon, rather than argument of issues, suffices.

Thus we are instructed that, "Marxists have always emphasised this difference between human beings and the natural world". This implies that we have no need to discuss or think about it: we have been given the tablets of stone. Moreover, because Singer's ideas - which actually have been challenged within the animal rights movement for their utilitarianism, not least by Tom Reagan - have been attacked by PT Leahy and Luc Ferry (without elaboration or explanation of what they say) this apparently means we do not need to think about the question further.

In addition, just in case any *Labour Briefing* reader had been thinking of saying, "But isn't it cruel what happens to animals?", she is put firmly in her place with the rebuke, "It's important to avoid the emotionalism of the debate." Interestingly, Bright then goes on to evoke the genocide in Rwanda and acts of nobility (sic) this aroused without apparently any trace of irony! No doubt emotionalism is fine, but only for the issues meeting Bright's imprimateur.

So what are some of the issues socialists should consider about animal rights? First, while it is true that Bentham's utilitarian views have been used to advocate animal rights, this does not mean that all actions which flow from this have a utilitarian perspective. As a corollary, we surely do not argue that because most trade unionists have a social democratic perspective, rather than a revolutionary socialist one, that we do not support trade unionists on strike because of their implicit politics?

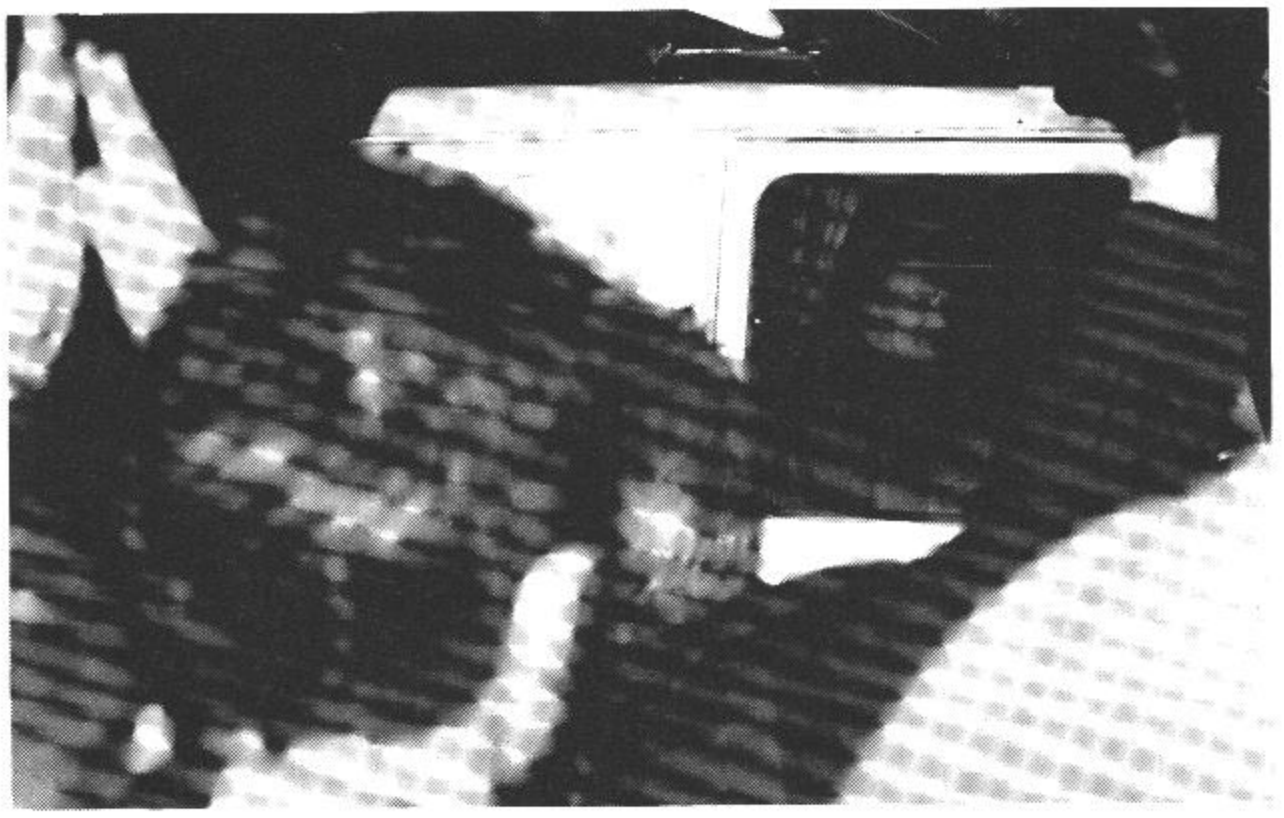
Secondly, because Marxists in the past, like Hyndman, may have held particular views does this mean we should adhere to them without question? Clearly not, or second-wave feminism in this country would never have got off the ground! (And the likes of Bright would have gone unchallenged, heaven forbid.)

Thirdly, should we not judge activists by what they do rather than what they say? Thus, the fact that thousands of people, particularly young people, have been radicalised and mobilised in progressive mass action of an anti-statist character should surely be supported. Hunt saboteurs, demonstrators against the live export of animals, environmental activists in Earth First are all challenging the ideologies of this class-based society -and should be supported in this. That activists become emotional should be welcomed as a sign of commitment and engagement - or is this also anathema to Bright?

The debate about whether non-human animals are the same as people or different is surely not the point. In his writings on animal rights, Henry Salt, the founder of the Humanitarian League, argued both that animals had rights "of commonality", as an extension of the rights advocated by Tom Paine and Mary Woolstonecroft, and that "difference" between people and animals was a source of evil.

Some animal rights activists, for example, have argued that precisely because people are different to other animals they have a duty to respect them in a moral way.

Surely if we want a humane world we need to start campaigning for it from where we are. For some that is through engagement with, and defence of, animals; for others it seems to be through tired polemics and intellectual snobbery. If I have to choose between Bright's approach and activism give me the vegan crusty with a dog on a rope on a demo any day! ❑



A partial victory for protesters as a lorry is turned back at Brightlingsea. PHOTO: Martyn Fryer.

Your letters are welcome, but please keep them short

Write to:

BRIEFING
PO BOX 2378
LONDON E5 9QU

Sorry, I can't really afford more, comrades! I'm retired. I wouldn't be without *Labour Briefing*. It keeps me from going mad!

But as a Labour Party socialist, I am desperately demoralised by the capitalist antics of phoney Blah! He is taking our loyalty for granted and I for one have had enough.

If Clause IV goes, I fear I shall go too. Darlington CLP has been taken over by ex-Lib/Dems!

Yours for socialism,
John Stanley,
Darlington.

Generally I think people should refrain from personalised abuse in the debate about Clause IV.

There is one exception. Not least because he is responsible - personally - for most of this abuse.

This is Mandelson and he is an arsehole. I have just heard him say that the T&G vote is not valid (because it supports Clause IV), as it did not consult all members. Really?

Could this have anything to do with the (Mandelson-inspired) Special Conference being held as early as April 29th in order to avoid full consultation of trade union conferences and their members?

Or to do with the lack of a question "do you support Clause IV as it stands" in the *LP News* survey?

And has the same Mandelson insulted the trade union leaders (muddled and confused GMB, USDAW etc) for not consulting their members when delivering their unions up to Blair?

Yours,
John Nicholson,
Manchester.

Dave Hammond's article "Football's fascist connection" in last month's *Briefing* was a classic example of an analysis written in haste and repented at leisure.

First of all, the article focuses heavily, if not exclusively, on the role of far-right groups in the recent Dublin riot. While such groups were undoubtedly present, as indeed they have been at most England away matches during the past twenty years, to blame them alone for what occurred is to ignore the jingoism and anti-Irish vitriol which is regularly spouted from the Government and large sections of the media. The tabloid papers clearly had an interest in deflecting attention from their own responsibility for the riot. It was disappointing to see *Briefing* echoing their coverage.

However, the statement in the article that "there was virtually no fascist-led violence in football last season" cannot be allowed to pass unchallenged. Any fan who visited Millwall last season will testify to the regular abuse, baiting and intimidation of visiting black players that took place at the New Den, which culminated in physical assaults on several Derby County players in the play-off match at the end of that season.

Dave Hammond may cite the participation of Millwall's chairman in the Cable Street anti-fascist protests of the 1930s but the reality is that sixty years on the attitude of the club has all too often appeared ambivalent towards racism among its supporters. Incidentally, in view of the assistance given by two Labour councils towards the construction of the New Den, shouldn't those authorities be taking more interest in the activities of a significant section of the stadium's users?

Furthermore, Hammond completely ignores the existence of several explicitly anti-racist football supporters groups, many of whom, as at Leeds United, Celtic and my own club Leicester City have had considerable success in challenging racist attitudes within and around football grounds. The publication of anti-racist fanzines such as *Marching Altogether* (Leeds) and *Red Attitude* (Manchester United) has also been an important factor in challenging the myth that "all football supporters are racist yobs", an image which unfortunately Hammond's article did little to dispel.

Yours in comradeship,
Colin Hall,
Leicester.

What distinguishes Eric Bright from those who support animal rights is simply that they sympathise with animals who suffer for human convenience and he doesn't. "Priorities" are irrelevant since no one has to limit the things he or she thinks are wrong.

Eric says, "Human beings' relationship with animals is an ethical question [only] when unnecessary suffering leads to a brutalisation of humanity." To those who sympathise with animals, this is like saying "exploitation of humans is an ethical question only if it brutalises the exploiters".

To me (obviously not to Eric) exploitation of humans and exploitation of animals are close concepts. I hope other Labour Party supporters agree and that the Party will oppose both.

Yours fraternally,
Alan Leadbetter,
Stoke-on-Trent.

Fire Brigades Union (London Region)

Defend Clause IV
Defend socialism

Mick Shaw
Chair

Chris Price
Secretary

On the brink

***Mike Phipps** reviews*
Brazil: Carnival of the Oppressed,
by Sue Branford & Bernardo Kacinski, Latin American Bureau, £5.99.

"TWO TEENAGERS were sitting in their cars eating cheeseburgers at a McDonald's drive-in in Brasilia. To amuse themselves, they were casually tossing potato chips out of the window, as if feeding dogs. Instead it was street children who were scrabbling on the ground after the food. Other customers watched, laughing."

The phrase "social apartheid" has been coined to describe the unbridgeable divide between Brazil's rich and poor. This is a country where half the population lives in poverty and child labour is the norm. Only Botswana has bigger disparities in income distribution. Even taxation is designed to hit the poor hardest: one-third of the price of basic foodstuffs goes to the government in tax, while tax on unearned income is just 8 per cent.

This is the context in which the Workers Party (PT) was born in 1980, out of the militant new trade unionism that saw a strike of 80,000 metalworkers in 1978 when the country was still under a military dictatorship. Today, the PT has 600,000 members, organised into small nuclei, similar in structure to the Christian base committees which developed in Brazil in the 1970s when liberation theology was pioneered. The PT has an open structure - Marxist groups were admitted from the outset - and MPs, who give one-third of their salary to the party, must abide by its resolutions.

There are some interesting insights here into novel methods of organisation. PT leader Lula, when metalworkers' union president, used to organise football championships between the union leadership and factory teams to generate more involvement in the union. Before the game he would address the teams and afterwards they would cook a barbecue: the effect was to draw workers closer into activity. Lula used his unique organising and oratorical skills to build the PT through the 1980s, narrowly losing the presidential election in 1989 in which he won 31 million votes. He resigned his seat in Congress and instead spent the next years travelling 40,000 kilometres, campaigning in the dirt-poor, drought-hit area of northeast Brazil.

The PT got a taste of power in local government. By 1988, 15 per cent of Brazilians came under local PT rule, including 10 million in the city of Sao Paulo. Here, using divisive tactics to improve council efficiency, which readers will find sadly all too familiar, the mayor, Luiza Erundina, turned on the city workforce and sacked 3,000 busworkers. She alienated voters in the process and lost office. Elsewhere, the PT had more success. In Santos, the mayor, Telma de Souza, expropriated the private bus company, cleared up the sewage pollution in the river and the beaches and improved health facilities. But the very success of the project prompted a new influx of the poor, drawn by the availability of better social provision than elsewhere. The PT's achievement in Porto Alegre, a larger city of 3 million, was also impressive.

The uneven record of its performance in local government might explain the PT's relatively disappointing presidential election result last year when Lula polled 17 million votes. Sadly, the book's analysis of this is rather thin, focusing a lot on the individual personality of Lula, the dirty tricks of the media and the decline of liberation theology and rise of right-wing Protestant evangelism.

But there are deeper problems, leading many to wonder whether the party has peaked. During the election the press made much of the fact that Lula's campaign was wrong-footed by the sudden success of the government's anti-inflation plan. In fact, there were greater flaws in the PT's economic strategy. Having pulled back from demanding cancellation of the foreign debt, an enormous drain on resources, Lula claimed it could be paid by going for domestic growth. But this approach lacked coherence too, a fact underlined by Lula's strange but repeated campaign declaration: "I would rather pay a dollar and a half for a Brazilian T-shirt than a dollar for one imported from Taiwan." Naturally, this had only limited appeal to the poor and hardly made for an inspiring vision of socialism.

Today, a major discussion is taking place in the Latin American left over whether its prospects are better or worse following the collapse of the Soviet bloc. Yet the real question facing the PT's future is not just how it differentiates itself from the disaster of Stalinism, but what alternative it offers to the ravages of neo-liberalism which have wrought such misery in the continent.

Phoolan's Story

***David Pope** reviews*
Bandit Queen
on release now.

BANDIT QUEEN is a powerful and riveting story of the oppression of women in rural India. The central character, Phoolan Devi, fights back in the only way available to her - breaking the law.

Phoolan's story starts with her sold as a child bride by her parents. Beaten by her husband, she escapes and returns to her village. Ostracised by some for breaking with tradition, she is regarded as fair game by the local upper caste youths. She is beaten and raped by them after rejecting the advances of their leader. They accuse her of leading them on and few villagers believe her story because she is from a lower caste and has committed the taboo of leaving her husband. She is as much a victim of society as Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles.

Phoolan's descent into hell follows. She is raped by the police, kidnapped by a bandit gang and raped by their leader. He is killed by his right-hand man, who becomes his successor and her lover. She joins the gang and is virtually joint leader. A raid on the merchants of a nearby town depicts her as a modern-day Robin Hood but this is followed by the revenge massacre of the villagers who watched her initial rape. Her lover is killed by a rival gang, who subject her to a mass rape and force her to draw water from a well, naked, before the eyes of an entire village.

She becomes leader of another gang, which is eventually hunted down and wiped out by the police. After eluding capture in the wilderness, she surrenders at a public ceremony where her name is chanted by thousands of villagers who revere her.

Bandit Queen vividly depicts a woman who turns to banditry to seek retribution, escape exploitation and gain self-respect. Unfortunately the film has been condemned by Phoolan Devi, who was released on bail last year. It has been banned in India due to her legal action and the court cases pending against her. She is suing its makers for contempt of court, breach of privacy and contract, and defamation. She claims that many events in the film have been fabricated; for example, she was not sold by her father, was returned by her husband instead of leaving him, and, two of the rapes depicted did not occur.

It is not surprising that a film about an exploited woman in turn exploits her story. Regardless of that, I urge you to see it. *Bandit Queen* is harsh and stark, is not gratuitous and certainly does not trivialise its subject. It is a powerful reminder that the exploitation of women and the poor exists the world over.

Mandel's fog of history

***Mike Phipps** reviews*
Trotsky as Alternative,
by Ernest Mandel,
Verso Books, £13.95

IT'S HARD to see the purpose of this book. Trotsky's writings have already been extensively published and are highly readable. Mandel's tortuous prose does nothing to make them more accessible and his selection of lengthy quotations followed by the comment, "History has completely confirmed Trotsky's prediction", get a little irritating after a while.

A closer reading, however, reveals why Mandel cannot let Trotsky speak for himself. Mandel has "reinterpreted" Trotsky to make him fit his own opinions. Thus, the main obstacle to a seizure of power in the imperialist countries is not only the conservatism of the leadership of the organised labour movement (or as Trotsky put it, the crisis of working class leadership) but "ideological weaknesses in the working class itself". Equally, Trotsky's opposition to the idea of building socialism in a single country is modified by Mandel's comment that he merely meant that this could never be "fully" achieved. And so on.

Mandel's assessment that Trotsky will "go down in history as the most important strategist of the socialist movement" seems over-optimistic, if not unreal. "And even more so, when the clearly recognised bankruptcy of Stalinism and social democracy put the debate about socialism once again on the historical agenda." But whose agenda? To millions around the world this bankruptcy is perceived as that of socialism itself. Hence the rise of dead-end nationalism and fundamentalism.

Of all his contributions to the revolutionary movement, Trotsky himself believed that it was his activity after 1933 - his critique of, and opposition to, Stalinism - that was the most important. "In other words," says Mandel, "the founding of the Fourth International," adding, "In time to come this statement of Trotsky's will be confirmed by history." Nearly 60 years on from that event, one can only say don't hold your breath!

Too expensive

Young people with **disabilities** or with so-called special needs (eg those leaving local authority care) are being treated shabbily by the **TECs** - the Government's privatised training service. New research by Barnados and Youthaid shows that they're doing even worse in getting jobs than most 16-17 year olds, where there's already an official unemployment rate of nearly 25%.

The study again confirms that young people who may need additional assistance, for instance because of a physical or learning disability, are regarded by most TECs as 'too expensive'; the unholy alliance between the Employment Department and TECs means that narrow cashflow considerations are more important than people.

to defray the extra costs of disability, like higher fuel bills, is often ignored by councils who are more willing to hit disabled people in their pockets than to stand up to the Government.

The Treasury rules, introduced by stealth in 1992, have created much hand-wringing amongst senior council officers (though relatively few councillors seem to have a clue about the subject), but little effective protest. This has been led by disabled people's organisations.

Non-payment campaigns are becoming common - 'we'd love to see the Council dragging dozens of disabled people through the courts, maybe it would help to wake them up - they should be fighting the Government, not us,' said one activist. His comments about the Labour Party's inaction were unprintable, even for *Briefing*.



Harris tolls

Wearing his Association of Metropolitan Authorities hat, Haringey Council Leader **Toby Harris** has condemned Treasury rules which assume that local authority social services departments recoup 9% of the cost of services to ill or disabled adults. At the same time his own authority is about to impose charges for home care assistants and day centre services in order to raise some £600,000 a year.

Harris is in good company. Most councils outside Scotland are doing the same, and the majority are using means-tests which take into account disabled people's savings and the 'income' which they get from disability benefits. The fact that these benefits often help

Takes one to know one

Matthew Parris, former Tory MP turned *Times*' Westminster correspondent, has been keeping an eye on **Tony Blair**.

"At Prime Minister's Questions, **Blair** has never backed any public sector pay demand, though many have dominated the news. He has never spoken up for any local authority. He has never raised local government at all. He has not supported the teachers: silence on that. He has steered clear of defence. Though he once asked Major if he believed in reducing inequality, the leader of the British Labour Party has never once complained about welfare benefits for the poor; about poverty; or about homelessness. He has never mentioned council housing. The only social security issue he has lighted upon is mortgage protection for owner-occupiers who lose their jobs. He has never raised education, or commented on Tory reforms in the area. His only excursion into NHS reforms has been to complain about an increase in bureaucrats' numbers. He has never directly criticised any past privatisation (but four times expressed worries about the railways). He has never touched the subject of labour relations or trade unions."

Parris reckons **Blair** has questioned Major ten times (nearly a third of all his opportunities) on directors' pay, six times on Tory splits over Europe, four times on Tory sleaze, twice on broken Tory tax promises.

Parris concludes: "A visitor from Mars could be forgiven for supposing that Mr **Blair** was a disappointed Tory, railing against the idiocies and blunders of his natural ideological bed-fellows."

Victory! But the battle goes on

SITA KAMARA, an 18-year-old an asylum seeker from the Ivory Coast, was released from detention on Saturday March 11th after seven months behind barbed wire at Campsfield House Detention Centre.

Sita is a student activist who was forced to leave the Ivory Coast because of her activities against the brutal dictatorship which controls the country. If she is deported by the Home Office she could face arrest, torture and even death for fighting for democracy.

On February 8th, Sita Kamara went on hunger strike with fellow refugee Anne Marie Sonan Brou in protest at their imprisonment. On March 2nd, 20 prison officers seized Sita and took her to Gatwick Airport for deportation, despite her weakness due to the hunger strike. Campaigners, solicitors, MPs and trade unionists organised to stop the deportation and an injunction was granted by a judge.

After a strong picket at the High Court in the Strand on March 10th, Sita was released. Pressure on the Home Office undoubtedly helped stop the deportation and gave valuable time to win a modicum of justice.

Sita was released on medical grounds. However the authorities may seize her again once she is well. On March 17th, Anne Marie is in court to fight for her right to asylum. We will step up our campaign to stop Sita, Anne Marie and ten other Ivorians from being deported. We have support from many Labour MPs and trade unionists, but to win the battle we need even more support!

Please send protest letters to: Michael Howard, Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London, SW1 8AT.

Further details: Ivorian Relief Action Group - Telephone 0181 265 3587. Fax: 0181 691 0515 or c/o Lewisham NUT office: 0181 461 5772.



George Silcott keeps up the fight during a march against the Criminal Justice Act in Tottenham.

Picture: Paul Mattsson

● Thousands are losing their right to benefits and homeless people are being forced back onto the streets because they have failed the Government's habitual residency test. Supposedly designed to put an end to so-called benefit tourism, the idea was first touted in Peter Lilley's jingoistic speech at the 1993 conference and the new rules put into effect last August.

The DSS now "test" all new claimants who have travelled abroad or arrived in Britain in the last five years and seemingly arbitrary decisions are taken based on issues such as an assessment of claimants' intentions, knowledge of English and prospects of finding a job. Between August and December last year 12,000 failed, including 2,000 British citizens. Claimants can wait six months for an appeal to be decided and they get nothing while they wait.

Two groups have been particularly hard hit The Bangladeshi community in Tower Hamlets is used to racism, both physical and institutional. Now families who may have saved for years to visit relatives are being refused benefits when they return home. Young homeless people have also been badly hit. Hostels under intense pressure to evict anyone who can't pay their rent are moving people on, and in London many of these have ended up in cold weather shelters which will close in April.

The Tories are predicting "savings" of over £30 million in social security payments. The cost in lost homes and wrecked lives could be incalculable. A campaign is being mounted by the Child Poverty Action Group - for information phone 0171 253 3406

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