LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

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inside...

- Martin McGuiness interview
- Asylum rights attacked
- Labour's workfare scheme
- Ogoni people speak out
- Sex at 14?

time to split?

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Towards disaster?

PRIOR TO THIS year's Labour Party Conference, Gordon Brown announced his welcome plan for a windfall tax on privatised utility profits. He vowed that the revenue would be used to fight unemployment.

With Conference safely behind him, Brown revealed just how he intends to pursue this fight - by using the windfall tax to finance a workfare scheme that will penalise young unemployed people who do not accept 'training' places.

Of course, training is a good thing, but compulsory training that leads back only to the dole queue will merely exacerbate the crisis. Mass unemployment is not due to inadequacies in the workforce but to the 'rigours of the market' economy. Brown's proposal will do nothing to advance us towards full employment. It will not create a single new job. It will not strengthen workers' bargaining position in the labour market. It will not even encourage capitalists to invest in their labour forces.

On top of that, Jack Straw proposes to give the police powers over truants. Between them, Brown and Straw seem determined to alienate as many young people as possible.



Tony Blair's speech to the CBI confirmed that the Labour leadership has no intention of changing the current balance between capital and labour. As we warned in these pages, the Social Chapter was never the magna carta of workers' rights some made it out to be. Now Blair has conceded that it will not be allowed to interfere with what's best for business. If carried out, his CBI pledges on taxes and the minimum wage (to keep both as low as he can) will make it impossible for a Labour government to tackle the growth of poverty in and out of employment. To make matters worse, as we go to press, Party sources are hinting that the leader plans an overhaul of Labour's commitments on rights at work. It takes little imagination to guess where that will lead.

Would any of the proposals described above have been approved by Labour Party Conference? Do they enjoy the support of CLPs or trade unions? The spin doctors will claim that they are fully backed by the Party and only "oppositionalists" will grumble. If so, why were they not advanced and debated and agreed through the Party's democratic structures? There is no doubt that the Blair gang are working flat out to achieve a qualitative change in the nature of the Labour Party. They want to use state funding to break the trade union link; they want to jettison the Party's class base.

But they have not yet succeeded in doing this. And socialists ought to be doing everything they can to prevent them from reaching their goal.

Setting up a "Socialist Labour Party" would only be conceding the battle to Blair. It would allow him to walk off with all the Party's historical and political assets - assets which have been accrued through generations of working class industrial and political struggle.

If Blair persists in his current direction, and the bulk of the Labour Party continues to support him, the next Labour government will be a disaster. Within the framework of implementing Maastricht, it will impose severe cutbacks in benefits and services and do nothing to arrest either industrial decline or mounting social insecurity. The consequences, not least the return of an extreme right wing Tory government, would be horrific. Blair's recent comments on asylum and immigration - the suggestion of a standing committee to make the bill a 'genuine consensual exercise' - strongly indicate that he will make concessions to the Tories' anti-immigrant state racism.

What forces can prevent such a disaster? In the end, it is only the labour movement that can bring to heel Blair's neo-Thatcherite drive. Clearly, socialist critics outside the Party cannot expect to wield influence over the debate within the Party.

Socialists within the Party must continue to voice their criticism of the Blair leadership. Across left, centre and even the traditional right of the Party, there is broad support for progressive taxation, investment in public services, and an egalitarian, non-authoritarian social policy. Unfortunately, in the run-up to the general election few are willing to speak out for fear of being accused of "rocking the boat".

But if Brown backing workfare or Blair falling at the feet of the CBI isn't "rocking the boat", then what is? The leadership has used the prospect of a long awaited general election victory to gag the movement, and trade union leaders as well as MPs have been all too willing to sport the gag as some kind of badge of honour. It is in fact a badge of gross irresponsibility.

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Immigration control: tightening the screw

Matthew Davies, an immigration lawyer, looks at the Tories' latest attacks on refugees.

JUST TWO years after the Tories brought in their Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act they are set to introduce another bill to further tighten the screw on asylum seekers and others seeking to enter or stay in this country. It is no coincidence that a general election is on the horizon and it is no surprise that the Tories have been accused of playing the race card.

I spend my working life advising and assisting the victims of Britain's immigration laws, which become more draconian with each Act that is passed.

At the time of writing, the details of the new bill are not known, but it is likely that it will contain proposals to make it more difficult for asylum seekers to obtain refuge in the United Kingdom and that it will enlist employers, civil servants and local authority employees to act as immigration officials. It is feared that members of the black and ethnic minority communities will be at the end of insensitive and discriminatory questioning which could lead to refusals of benefits, services or jobs to which they are entitled.

The argument that we need tighter immigration control can only be made by those who have no knowledge of the current laws or who are politically motivated.

There has been no primary immigration into the United Kingdom for decades. The Immigration Rules permit people to enter the United Kingdom for temporary purposes such as to visit or to study. The circumstances in which you can settle permanently in the United Kingdom are extremely limited. The spouses of British citizens can apply to stay in the United Kingdom, but they often fall foul of the Primary Purpose Rule by which they have to satisfy an immigration officer that the primary purpose of the marriage was not to enter the United Kingdom. This rule is frequently relied on to refuse spouses from the Indian subcontinent and Africa. While there is a provision in the Immigration Rules for British citizens to bring their spouses to the United Kingdom, there is no such provision for same-sex partners of British citizens. The racist nature of the immigration rules is well known but the discrimination against lesbians and gay men has been less well publicised.

People who have lived in this country for many years with their families can also face deportation. Abdul Onibiyo was one such individual. A Nigerian who first came to the United Kingdom in 1964, he lived here for most of the time until 1978. Two of his five children were born here and are British citizens. He was away from the United Kingdom until 1984, not knowing that by being away from the country for more than two years, he lost his rights as a resident. He has been fighting to regain his status ever since 1984. He was treated as an illegal entrant and detained for months; this year he was removed from the country and prohibited from returning. There are many others.

Mumtaz Begum was a 50-year-old woman living with her family in Swindon. She has been here for the past nine years and has heart disease and diabetes. Her elderly relatives in Pakistan are unable to look after her. Yet she has been told she must leave.

Sunday Ogunwobi has lived in the United Kingdom for over fourteen years. He and his family, which includes three British-born children, have been forced to go into sanctuary in a Hackney church, where they have remained for over a year in order to avoid deportation.

Pablo, whose British partner Simon is dying of Aids, has been told by the Home Office that he has no right to remain in the United Kingdom with his dying partner since the Immigration Rules do not recognise same-sex relationships.

The current Immigration Rules are tight enough. The immigration officers have powers to detain, remove and deport people far in excess of the powers that are given to the police. The police cannot imprison a suspect without first bringing that suspect before a magistrate, who determines whether or not he/she should be granted bail. An immigration officer can detain anyone he declares to be an illegal entrant or anyone he decides to refuse entry to indefinitely without bringing him before a court. The Home Office justifies this on the grounds that the detainee is always free to leave detention - so

Campaigns

- The National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns was launched in May 1995 for different campaigns to share information and support each other. It is holding a rally on 13th January 1996 at Bloomsbury Baptist Church, Holborn, London WC2. Contact the Coalition at 101 Villa Road, Birmingham, B19 1NH.
- The Campaign Against the Immigration and Asylum Bill is planning a lobby of Parliament on 19th December and a demonstration for 24th February 1996. Contact it c/o 18 Club Road, London E2 7EY.
- The Stonewall Immigration Group campaigns against anti gay discrimination in the Immigration Rules. Contact it at 19 Clerkenwell Close, London WC1.

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long as he leaves the United Kingdom at the same time.

Perhaps the most vindictive of the new proposals being brought forward by the Government are those relating to the provision of social security to asylum seekers. Social Security Secretary, Peter Lilley, has announced that all asylum seekers appealing against initial decisions and all asylum seekers who apply for asylum from within the United Kingdom rather than at sea or at an airport will be denied any welfare benefits whatsoever. The new regulations are effective from January 1996. Over 10,000 people will be affected immediately. Many will be forced to live on the streets and beg or take extremely low-paid employment if it is offered to them. The Refugee Council estimates that as many as 40,000 asylum seekers will be affected every year and that those on the streets without a home or money will include children, pregnant women, the elderly, those disabled by torture and war and other vulnerable people.

The decision to allow those who apply for asylum at the port access to welfare benefits but to deny it to people who apply in the country is a totally arbitrary decision. It is also wrong to deny benefits to those people who have been initially refused but are waiting for their appeals to be heard. In my experience it can take up to twelve months before you are even given a date for your appeal to be heard. Many asylum seekers do win their appeals. By denying them access to welfare benefits the Home Office is trying to deny them access to their right to appeal by starving them out of the country.

It is vital that we campaign against the changes and that we support those who are facing deportation. We should also ensure that the Labour Party thoroughly overhauls the current Immigration Rules and begins framing a more humane immigration policy.

The positive contribution of the immigration and refugee communities should be recognised. Basic human rights to a family life free of the threat of deportation should be enshrined in law. The Immigration Service and the Home Office should be made more accountable for their actions and the victims of the Tories' immigration policy should be given protection from the abuse of immigration officers' power. ❑

"Asylum seekers will be effectively starved out of the procedures which have been put into place to protect them from persecution." - **David Bull, Director of Amnesty International UK.**

"The moral state of a nation is judged by its treatment of its most vulnerable people. Asylum seekers deserve more than a cardboard box and an empty stomach." - **Nick Hardwick, Chief Executive, the Refugee Council.**

"The Government uses asylum statistics to suggest that, since only one in 25 asylum claims succeeds, the other 24 are "bogus". Lilley said that refugees were entitled to appeal, but not at the tax-payers' expense...Refugees are forced to appeal because of the appalling quality of Home Office decisions." - **Campaign Against Racism and Fascism.**

"It is patently ridiculous to suggest that asylum seekers from countries with human rights violations such as these cannot have genuine claims that need to be individually assessed. The Government proclaims its commitment to the 1951 UN Convention on Refugees but what we are seeing is a complete abdication of its responsibilities under international law...The Government is scapegoating refugees in order to hide the failings and the inefficiencies of its own Home Office." - **Amnesty International.**

Disability + action = justice

Kate Adams, London Incapacity Action, reports on how direct action has put the issue in the public eye.

DISABLED PEOPLE, alongside trade unionists, unemployed people and some MPs, are fighting for an end to Incapacity Benefit and its humiliating 'all work test' which plans to push half a million people off benefit over three years.

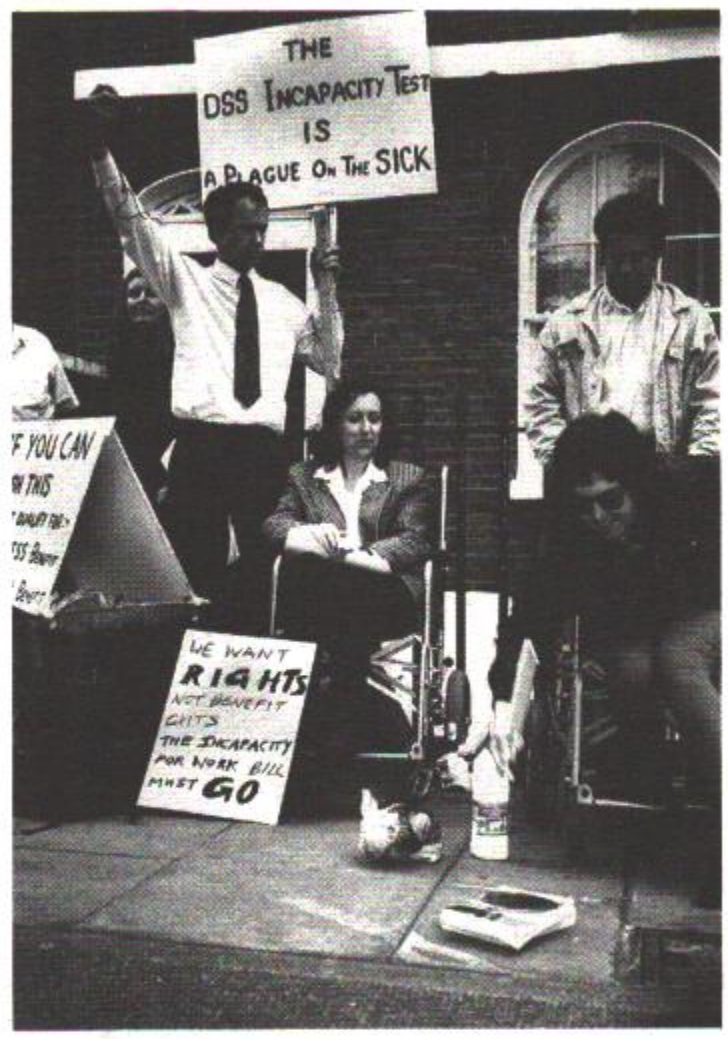
Behind the propaganda about claimant fraud are vicious cuts and the back door privatisation of our state national insurance system. We disrupted a seminar on Incapacity Benefit given by a Benefits Agency doctor and door-stepped Peter Lilley, complete with BBC cameras, on a tour of Balham DSS. Both were public relations exercises to promote Incapacity Benefit.

Radio 4's *Does He Take Sugar* programme on disability covered the Balham Demo, linking it with legal action taken against leading private health insurance company UNUM which is notorious for its refusal to pay out on claims. UNUM's director John le Cassio advised Peter Lilley on the 'all work test'. UNUM uses similar punitive action in turning down claims and thus profits by encouraging people to sign up for their private health insurance scheme.

Forty Coventry claimants who failed the 'all work test' were refused signing-on rights, ending up on emergency rate income support or no benefit at all. By September 1995, 17,743 people had been cut off benefit through the 'all work test' and 1,927 disqualified for not completing the forms in time - but this is well short of the £1.6 billion target for March '96.

The human suffering and disarray caused by Incapacity Benefit cut-off targets provide Labour's front bench with ample evidence on which to campaign for the return of a Labour government committed to full enforceable civil rights, including a real income, for disabled people.

However, when Incapacity Action met with MP Donald Dewar in 1994 he advised us the issue was not 'sexy' enough to capture the press and public's imagination and of course resources were limited. We are now seeking a meeting with shadow Social Security Minister Chris Smith and will continue to press for the repeal of the Incapacity Act.



● Contact London Incapacity Action on 0181 520 4582 or write to 65 Casimir Road, London E5 9NU. For Derbyshire Incapacity Action contact John Burrows on 01773 746101.

Sex at 14!

Peter Tatchell argues that the age of consent should be lowered to 14 for everyone, gay and straight.

A SURVEY BY the British Youth Council found that 80% of 16-25 year olds want the age of consent to be the same for both heterosexuals and homosexuals, and believe this age should be 16 or lower.

In the Netherlands, Spain, Portugal and Malta the age of consent for everyone is effectively 12. It is 14 in Slovenia, Iceland, Montenegro, Serbia, Italy, San Marino, Albania and in certain circumstances, Germany. The introduction of these comparatively low ages of consent has not led to any increase in the sexual abuse of young people. Teenagers have adequate protection through the laws against rape and indecent assault, while at the same time having the legal right to make their own decisions about sexual relationships without the interference of the law.

In the Netherlands, freer and franker attitudes towards teenage sex have, in fact, led to greater sexual responsibility and wisdom. The Dutch rate of pregnancy and abortion in girls under 16 is less than one seventh of the British rate. And there are proportionally fewer sexually transmitted diseases too.

All the evidence suggests that Britain's high age of consent is one of the factors that inhibit the provision of early, effective sex education, contraceptive advice and safer sex messages. Instead of colluding with an unjust age of consent of 16, campaigning for consent at 14 might be more realistic and fair, given that so many young people - both gay and straight - have sex from that age onwards (nearly half have their first sexual experience before their 16th birthday, mostly after the age of 14). Empowering these teenagers to make their own free choices about sex is, together with more factual information, the best way to ensure they have happy, healthy sexual relations without unwanted pregnancies or HIV infection.

Introducing a degree of flexibility into the age of consent would also be a worthwhile reform, which would end the way the current law criminalizes a person just over the age of consent who has sex with someone just under that age, even if there are only a few weeks difference in their ages. This flexibility could be achieved by a policy of not prosecuting consensual sex involving people under 14, providing there is no more than three years difference in the partners' ages (similar to the Swiss and Israeli legislation).

These measures would remove the threat of legal sanctions from hundreds of thousands of teenagers engaged in victimless under age sex and benefit both straights and gays. That, paradoxically, is what the new queer agenda is all about: sexual emancipation for everyone.

● Peter Tatchell is a member of the lesbian and gay direct action group OutRage! His recent book, *Safer Sexy: The Guide To Gay Sex Safely*, is published by Freedom Editions (£14.99).

Liz - latest

LIZ DAVIES HAS issued libel writs against Islington councillors Phil Kelly and Tal Michael and former Islington councillor James Purnell.

The three alleged in their statements to the NEC, subsequently widely publicised in the national media, that Davies had "incited" a crowd to disrupt an Islington Education Committee meeting in November 1994. Davies alleges that the allegations are defamatory, damaging and completely untrue.

Widespread outrage has greeted the revelation that the Labour Party has given initial legal advice and financial assistance to the three and is considering funding their defence.

Given that the three made their allegations in their personal capacities, that the NEC Disputes Committee failed to uphold their allegations and that Islington North Constituency Labour Party has repudiated them, there seems no basis for the Party funding their defence.

There is certainly no precedent for the move. When John McDonnell was sued by Tory MP Terry Dicks for statements he had made in his official capacity as a Labour Parliamentary candidate, he received not a penny from the Labour Party and had to appeal (successfully) for voluntary help from rank and file members.

Asked why money was being given to the three defendants, Labour Party press officers explained that they "were asked to submit the statements" by the General Secretary.

Strange that no one else in either Islington or Leeds was asked to submit statements about the Liz Davies case.

The press officers' admission is further evidence that Blair's office authorised a dirty tricks campaign to smear Liz Davies, thus providing a cloak for her removal as Leeds North East's democratically selected PPC.

A number of Party members have threatened legal action over what one described as "a blatant misuse of Party funds".

In a bizarre twist to the Davies saga, Cllr Phil Kelly admitted in November's full council meeting that he had "got it wrong" over last year's cuts to adventure playgrounds.

Liz Davies' refusal to support those cuts was frequently cited (not least by Kelly himself) as the primary evidence of her unsuitability to stand as a Labour candidate.

With Liz Davies' full support, Leeds North East CLP has voted to commence a new selection procedure. The GC passed motions condemning the NEC decision, expressing support for Davies and vowing to mount a campaign to defend the rights of Constituency Labour Parties to select candidates of their choice in accord with Party rules.

Labour left gets sorted

SOCIALIST Campaign Group NETWORK

Dorothy Macedo, Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network reports: Over 150 grass roots Labour left activists attended the hastily arranged fourth annual general meeting of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network on November 18th.

The discussion that captivated everyone's imagination was the suggestion that it is now time to leave the Labour Party and form a new Socialist Labour Party. It was agreed to write to Arthur Scargill thanking him for his work to defend Clause IV but to put to him that socialists should remain within the Labour Party and fight for socialist policies.

A motion was carried for the Network to campaign for implementation of Labour Party policy in support of all-party talks in Northern Ireland and for the uniting of the 26 and 6 county states.

The Tories' asylum proposals were condemned and support was given to the Campaign Against The Immigration and Asylum Bill.

It was agreed to support both the lobbies of Parliament against the Tories' budget. However the AGM called for greater unity between the Campaign to Defend the Welfare State and the Welfare State Network and requested that they immediately commence discussions on areas of joint activity.

The conference voted in favour of the Leeds Campaign Group's proposals to campaign for Labour Party rule changes to counter any more deselections *a la* Liz Davies and the stitch up on Clause IV.

In the coming year, the Network needs to strengthen its organisation and its propaganda for socialist policies. The Network has won much credibility with the constituency left through its activities, especially the launch of Defend Clause IV - Defend Socialism.

There's lots to do. If you believe in fighting for socialism in the Labour Party, then join and help us build the Network.

Join the campaign for socialist policies

Join the Network

Send £5 (£2 unwaged) to SCGN, 3 Blades House, Kennington, London, SE11 5TW. Cheques to "SCGN".

The Network now has nearly 50 local groups affiliated. Make sure your Labour left caucus is plugged in to the Network by sending £10 to the address above.

Future strategy for the left

We reproduce below extracts from a discussion paper by Arthur Scargill.

"FOR YEARS, the left inside the Labour Party has generally accepted that while the Party might from time to time adopt right-wing policies, it has always been possible to fight to reverse those policies - because the Party's constitution has been committed to the eradication of capitalism, the establishment of socialism and common ownership.

The significance of last month's constitutional changes, including the ditching of Clause IV, has not been fully appreciated by many left comrades. They believe it is still possible to reverse the setbacks.

Labour is now almost indistinguishable from the Democratic Party in the United States, Germany's Social Democrat Party or, nearer home, the Liberal Democrats. Do we meekly accept New Labour? If so, why were we all opposed to the policies of the Gang of Four and the now defunct SDP? - because those are the policies which New Labour has adopted.

Or, do we leave and start to build a Socialist Labour Party (SLP). There are those who insist we should stay inside the Party and fight, but such an attitude fails or refuses to recognise that the Party's constitution now effectively prevents this.

Today, socialists in the Labour Party face the same dilemma as did our forebears who broke with the Liberals. I believe the case for a SLP is now overwhelming, but if such a party is to be born it must be on the basis of class commitment and socialist policies.

If an SLP is to be established, it must be done on the following basis:

1) Convening a special discussion conference to which all those committed to founding such a party should be invited.

2) An inaugural conference to be held ideally on 1st May 1996.

3) The new party and its constitution would have to ensure that its members and affiliated organisations control the party.

4) If an SLP is established it should commit itself to fight every Parliamentary seat.

Today, radical opposition in Britain is symbolised not by the Labour and trade union movement but by the groupings such as those which defeated the Poll Tax, the anti-motorway and animal rights bodies, Greenpeace and other anti-nuclear campaigners, and those fighting against opencast mining.

Only through direct - including industrial - action in defiance of unjust laws can we achieve real advance.

An SLP would be able to galvanise mass opposition and build the fight for a socialist Britain. "



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Scargill in solidarity with rail workers

Ken Livingstone MP replies

AFTER ARTHUR SCARGILL'S Clause IV defeat at Labour Party Conference, his judgement appears to have been knocked to one side. He met with people from Militant, the Socialist Workers Party and the SNP left wing but not a single Labour MP, council or trade union leader.

My guess is that if Arthur had been serious and had pushed on with this project, the Tory Party would have given him a million pounds to get it off the ground because it could take just enough votes from Labour to give the Tories a chance. I'll bet Stella Rimmington went to work on it immediately!

Arthur supports PR (so do I) and if this was Germany, then Arthur's project might work. You might get that 5% as the reformed Communist Party is quite likely to do in the next German election and as they did in the last one. But in a first past the post system you have to fight inside the labour movement.

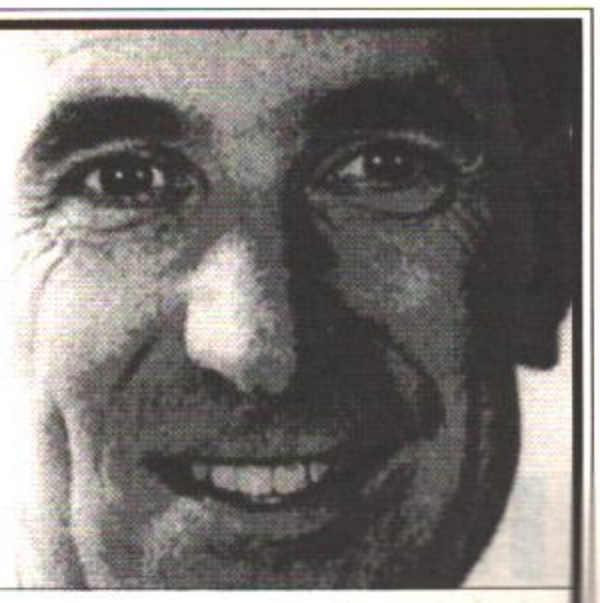
Arthur took a more pessimistic view of the Party Conference and the trade unions than the rest of the left. The fact that a majority of Party members voted for Dennis Skinner; the Campaign Group got a third of the votes for the NEC, and that Bickerstaffe, Morris and Edmonds are there as a solid bloc of union leaders promoting full employment and the welfare state, is positive.

Tony Blair could only muster a third of the PLP to vote for his preferred candidates for the Shadow Cabinet - and the modernisers were really pushing hard for them.

This suggests to me that even inside the PLP, the right and centre are withholding a lot of their support from the modernisers. I am optimistic - and think there's a better chance of the next Labour government being relatively successful than there was of the last two. ❑

Scargill on thin ice

by Alan Simpson MP



YOU CAN'T BLAME Arthur Scargill for being miffed about the Labour Party Conference. He was treated in a derisory manner by a party which has never properly faced up to how it sold the miners short in '84. Now Labour finds both Arthur and that whole period an embarrassment it would rather forget. You can understand his reaction, but that doesn't make it right.

Many members, and not just the left, have been making the same criticisms of the direction the Party is being dragged in. But to conclude that 'it's time to go' is to misread both the time and the challenge facing the left. This is no 'defining moment in history'. The only acclaim for a new party comes from Militant Labour desperately seeking somewhere to go.

For the rest of the left, without any illusions, there seems to be a recognition that two other issues are far more important. Defeating the Tories at the next election and developing an analysis around which to campaign once Labour takes office.

The only reason that the establishment wants Labour in office is to make the cuts in the welfare state that the Tories probably couldn't get away with. Some parts of the Party think we understand this, but that the leadership has a cunning plan - a real Baldrick of an idea which will still bring the giants of capital crashing to their knees. Others think we have no plan at all, but would rather confront this from the Government benches than the opposition ones.

The left should not ignore (or deride) the Party's desire to win. To talk of a new party at this time (or worse, to pursue it) would not be understood or forgiven by a public desperate to see the back of the Tories.

In office we can change the rules to put the Tories in the wilderness for a generation. In opposition they have systematically done the same to us. The arguments about whether (or how) we do so are only fruitful if we are in a position to do so.

None of this means swallowing the 'New Labour' pill. It simply means understanding, in the way Liz Davies does, where the battles have to be fought. It would have been easy (even reasonable) for Liz to have walked away from Labour. She hasn't. Her decision does not mean staying 'til the tide turns' but helping to change the tide.

There is nothing new in this. It is an ongoing process in both the Labour Party and the labour movement. How many times do we see disputes fall apart in a stitched-up compromise by national negotiators? How often do you hear those at the forefront of struggles talk of betrayal? But only fools talk of stomping off to form another union. United we stand, divided we fall. Agree or disagree, we should stay within the one union and have our own arguments internally, while fighting the bigger battle (together) externally. It's what we said to the UDM in the mid '80s, and what we must say to ourselves now. There is, though, one part of Arthur's challenge that the left should have picked up long ago. We need to open up a fresh analysis of capital and class.

The last 20 years have seen a prodigious concentration in the ownership of capital on a transnational basis. Its impact can be seen globally and locally - in collapsing environments, disintegrating rights in the workplace, exchequers robbed by creative accounting and tax havens, economies riven by speculative short termism. The left has been conscientious about defending every area that the Tories attacked, but has become less confident about explaining these attacks in the context of new social forces.

Even more elusive have been the efforts made to offer a clear coherent left alternative - explaining how we should engage with the present and reshape the future. This is not just a challenge to the imagination or the intellect, but to develop practical ways of shifting power from capital to labour, from the global to the local, from the exploitative to the sustainable. Meeting this challenge does not require a new party. It needs the left to shake itself into being proactive. We need to be setting the political agenda, not following it.

When Labour gets into government the Party needs to understand that there are clear choices open to us. In the debate about these choices it may, then, be appropriate to talk of 'defining moments', but let us do so around well defined alternatives, rebuilt within the Party, rather than in tattered fragments which flap about outside it. ❑

The May Day Appeal for common ownership

Launched by Ken Coates, 14 other Euro MPs and ten MPs "The May Day Appeal for Common Ownership" has been followed up by a series of pamphlets. Ten titles are planned under the general title *Socialist Renewal. A critique of Labour's new aims and values*. A response to Will Hutton's book and a study of pensions policy have already been published. Subscriptions for the set are available from Spokesman Books. Another recent Spokesman title is Ken Coates and Stuart Holland's *Full Employment for Europe*, the companion volume to Coates' *The Right to Work*, reviewed recently in *Briefing*.

Mark Seddon editor of Tribune

"I do not think that the formation of a Socialist Labour Party is a very good idea. Traditionally it has been the Labour right which has been disloyal to the Party and broken from it. Socialists should stay and fight their corner. The 'modernisers' must be called to account by the Party membership. The 'modernisers' positively want left wingers to leave the Party and it would be a mistake to leave the collateral of the Party in their hands."

Put Blair to the test

Liz Davies says this time Arthur Scargill has got it wrong.



IT'S NOT surprising that socialists are increasingly fed up with the behaviour of the Labour Party leadership. Hardly a week goes by without another outrageous policy statement, whether it's Gordon Brown's workfare by another name, or Blair's commitment to the CBI not to implement the Social Chapter or the minimum wage without consulting business first. These policies have never been discussed in the Party's structures and were not put to Labour Party Conference - they might have been rejected even by that docile body.

Despite the discontent in the Party, Arthur Scargill's call for a new 'Socialist Labour Party' (SLP) has not been well received by the Labour left. Since Conference, I have attended numerous meetings around the country. While the SLP proposal has been discussed at all these meetings, it has usually been backed only by socialists already outside the Labour Party. I have not yet met a single Labour left activist who supports it.

We now have a real prospect, after 16 years, of Labour winning the next general election. The spin doctors credit this to Tony Blair. The reality is that the electorate has seen through the Tories. Their policies on education, the health service, employment and privatisation are profoundly unpopular because of their damaging consequences.

The working class is now looking to Labour to redress the Tories' ravages. To abandon Labour at this juncture would be to abandon that aspiration and jeopardise our chances of defeating the Tories. Electorally, a new SLP would either fizzle quietly away or split the vote in key seats, and possibly allow the Tories to sneak back in.

Has there been a fundamental change in the Labour Party?

There is nothing new about Labour adopting right-wing policies or Labour leaders making right-wing statements. The question is whether the abandonment of common ownership, the attempts to break the trade union link, the increasingly authoritarian style of the leadership, the reactionary ideology epitomised by Jack Straw's attack on the homeless, and the proposals for state funding of political parties all constitute a fundamental break with Labour's social constituency and with the broader labour movement. My answer is that in time all these developments may well add up to such a break but that it is too early to say that they already have. It is always difficult to analyse events while living through them.

Should the left abandon the Labour Party now? For all my disagreement with our leadership, I would rather be on the inside of a party about to form a government, with the possibility of some accountability to the labour movement and the working class, than outside. Blair offers a minimal programme: possibly taking back railways into public ownership, a minimum wage (at some unspecified figure), reform of the House of Lords (abolition would be preferable) and the (gradual) release of local authority capital receipts to build houses. More importantly, the prospect of a Labour victory offers hope to the electorate, who will vote for us because they want an end to the long nightmare of Tory rule.

Once a Labour government is elected, the working class will be looking to Labour to move towards full employment and to establish a minimum wage at a meaningful figure. They will also expect to see a properly funded health and education service, with money raised through progressive taxation. There will be calls for the abolition of VAT on fuel, the restoration of democratic trade union rights and taking the privatised utilities into public control.

Whether there has been a fundamental shift in the Labour Party will be shown by the Party's reaction to such calls. Certainly, Blair will resist them. The question is whether, after the general election, Labour Party and trade union members will be able to press these demands and to hold Blair and New Labour to account through the structures of the movement.

None of the demands I describe are particularly radical or revolutionary. They command broad support across the Party and indeed the electorate. All of them could be implemented easily by a Labour government. Indeed, they are essential if the Labour government wants to start to repair the wounds left by the Tories. And if the Labour government fails in that task, it will be followed rapidly by an extreme right, xenophobic Tory administration.

If we are to avoid that tragedy, we have to stay in the Party and build a broad coalition in favour of a few basic socialist policies. If we leave the Labour Party and let the Tories in, the working class will never forgive us. If we stay in the Labour Party, but fail to make the most of our opportunities, we will have abdicated our responsibilities as socialists. Our task is to put Tony Blair to the test, before and after the general election. ❑

LLB page 10

Not work and not fair

Jim Denham repudiates Gordon Brown's cheap labour plan.

"IT IS NOT workfare because they will not be working for their benefit. Young people will be paid a wage of benefit plus a fixed sum for six months - and there will be an emphasis on training and education." Even by the Orwellian standards of New Labour gobbledegook Gordon Brown's claim that his "New Deal for Britain's under 25s" is not a form of workfare was sophistry of a high order.

The plain fact is that under the Brown plan young unemployed people will be required to join work and training schemes or lose 40% of their benefit. A single 18 to 24 year old receiving £36.80 income support would lose £14.72. The schemes themselves would not pay wages but "benefit-plus", the same principle that applies to existing Government schemes like training for work.

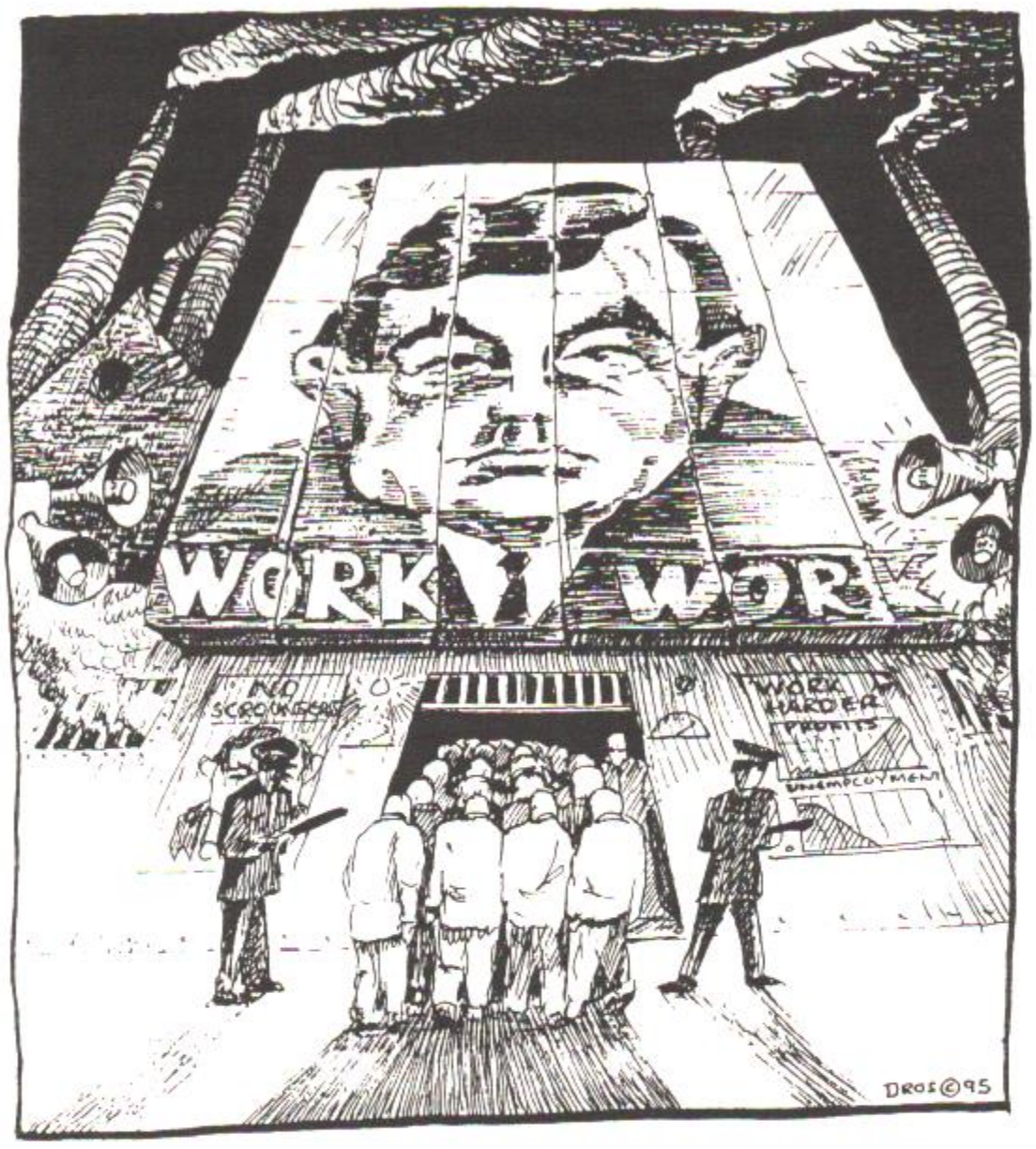
If this doesn't add up to workfare then I don't know what does. Brown's protestation that "there will be an emphasis on training and education" doesn't help him beat the workfare rap either - virtually all existing workfare schemes include some sort of training or education. It doesn't stop them being workfare.

Brown told the *Guardian* that "there will be a huge welcome from young people for the prospect of jobs and education once again on offer". But this begs the question: if the Brown proposals are going to be so attractive and popular, then why make them compulsory?

Training providers and others with professional expertise in the field have long argued against compulsion for the simple reasons that it negates the requirement for training to be of a high quality in order to attract clients; and unwilling conscripts are likely to disrupt schemes and undermine the efforts of motivated trainees.

Gordon Brown undoubtedly knows the arguments against compulsion, and whatever else he may or may not be, he isn't stupid. So what lies behind his "New Deal"?

Like so much else in New Labour's agenda, it seems to be designed to appeal to the prejudice of middle England by utilising the currently trendy communication rhetoric of rights and responsibilities. It is intended to reassure the middle classes that a Labour Government would respond to their anxieties about the development of an underclass of the long-term unemployed. At the same time Brown wants to show that Labour would be better than the Tories at dealing with the fast-rising social security budget. Frank Field, once considered a right-wing maverick but now an influential member of the Blair clique, has long advocated workfare and is now banging the drum for the abolition of means-tested benefits and their replacement by compulsory private insurance. Chris Smith, the new shadow Social Security Secretary, has been told by Blair to "think the unthinkable" as he prepares a welfare policy between now and the next Conference. In Blairite circles, the Social Justice Commission report (which, remember, proposed taxing child benefit and instituting compulsory private pensions) is now seen as too cautious!



According to the *Guardian*'s Patrick Wintour, Brown's proposals have provoked "a fierce dispute ... within the Labour leadership". A senior shadow cabinet member is quoted, saying "many senior people have been taken totally by surprise by these proposals. We have been taken aback because it runs counter to what we have been saying about the Government's coercive approach. There was no discussion over this and the proposals should not be presented as Party policy because they are not Party policy." Whether this kind of opposition comes to anything or remains at the level of unattributable bleating to the press remains to be seen. But the rank and file of the Labour Party and the unions have been warned: workfare is very much part of New Labour's agenda. It will not only victimise the unemployed but also undermine the jobs and wages of those in employment. Brown's "benefit-plus" proposal makes a mockery of Labour's already nebulous commitment to a minimum wage, and Brown doesn't appear to have even considered the substantial empirical evidence that job subsidies generally result in considerable substitution - trainees being used as cheap labour while properly employed workers are sacked.

This time Brown's gone too far and even the shadow cabinet think so. ❑

LLB page 11

Redefining socialism (Blair-style)

David Stack, Queen Mary and Westfield College, kicks communitarianism into touch.

THE LABOUR leadership is engaged in a subtle redefinition of socialism. Key figures, particularly Blair, Straw and Blunkett, are committed to an ideology which they describe as socialist, but which most socialists do not recognise. Whilst defining Labour as a democratic socialist party, the rewritten Clause IV eschews common ownership and embraces the free market. Positions which are anathema to socialists are compatible with the socialism of New Labour.

For the leadership, to be a socialist means only to believe that men and women are social. It is an acceptance of the commonplace that human beings can achieve more socially than individually. People's natural tendency towards social interaction leads to the formation of communities. Membership of the community confers rights and benefits, but also imposes obligations and duties. This system of reciprocal rights and duties keeps society stable and ensures a consensus of common interest. There is nothing else to their definition. It is a social-ism. Socialism becomes no more than sociability.

This social-ism is not the invention of Blair or Straw. Intellectually, it is rooted in the work of American communitarians and the British writer David Selbourne. Politically, it is the product of our collective failure to combat Thatcherism. It has triumphed so easily within the Labour Party because it offers a powerful and coherent critique of the unfettered individualism of the 1980s. Against the Thatcherite denial of society, it stresses the social nature of man and the primacy of society - ideas which are at the heart of any definition of socialism.

"Multinational companies and the City do not recognise a national interest. Capital does not identify with the nation-state."

The problem is that the recognition of a natural propensity to co-operate is the sole defining feature of social-ism. It finds no need to advocate the common ownership of the means of production. It is a socialism denuded of critical content and denied the conceptual space to analyse economic structures and property relations as questions of class. These weaknesses are inherent to the premises on which social-ism is built.

The leadership's favourite academics and intellectuals depend upon models derived from the biological sciences. Herein lies both the central strength and central weakness of their analysis. Society is conceived as an organism. That is, society is seen as analogous to a living body. Men and women are conceived as mutually dependent parts of the larger organism of society. This is a powerful corrective to neo-liberal notions of isolated and atomistic individuals. The weakness is that it makes it impossible to accept the reality of conflict.

If we are all part of the social organism, and for this read the nation-state, there cannot be any irreconcilable conflicts between us. In an organism, an identity of interests must exist between the diverse parts. If capitalist societies are organisms, there is no room for class conflict. Class conflicts, along with those of gender and race, are subsumed in the notion of consensual community. All of us, from bankers to bin men, are said to share a common interest in this community.

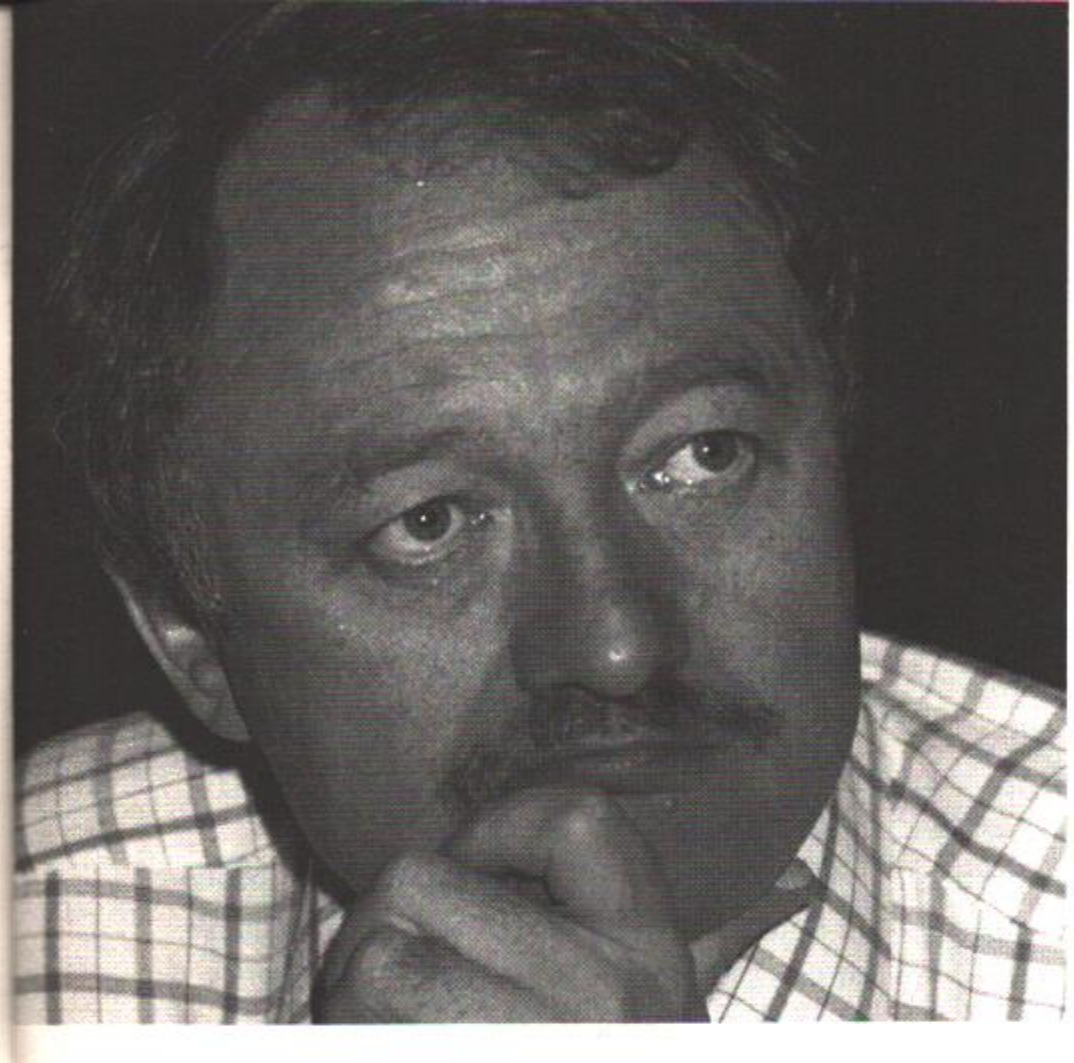
This is what *LLB* has described as the "Big Lie" of "one nation": an idea implicit in John Monk's quest for "social partnership". Workers and bosses co-operate with each other and with the state, to their mutual advantage. This project is set out in Robert Taylor's TUC-commissioned *The Future of the Trade Unions* (1994), which seeks to replace the trade unionism of class conflict with the politics of compromise.

For a Labour government it would mean a rerun of the corporatist failure of 1974-79. Concessions will be made to capital and demanded from the trade unions. They will be leant upon, in the name of the national interest, and ultimately alienated. When this happens they can expect the same scapegoating as the squeegee merchants, and any minority groups that are seen as disruptive of the harmonious community.

Multinational companies and the City do not recognise a national interest. Capital does not identify with the nation-state. In countries where "social partnership" agreements have achieved a limited success, they have been built on the strength of the trade union movement. Capital has been frightened into an accommodation with labour. After seventeen years of an untrammelled "managers' right to manage", the conditions for corporatism do not exist in Britain. It cannot be erected on the weakness of the labour movement. It requires strong trade unions, supported by full employment, and a government prepared to challenge the dominance of capital. The balance of class forces must be tipped in our favour. To admit this involves an admission of the conflicting nature of capitalist society.

According to Roman legend, the general Menenius Agrippa was able to quell a plebeian revolt by demonstrating the mutual dependency of the classes with a fable about a revolt of different parts of a body against each other. Blair will need similarly persuasive powers to paper over the class divisions in Britain. His project will fail because the supposed harmony of the community is illusory. There is not one nation but two. One which sells its labour power, and one which controls wealth and power. This fundamental fact cannot be buried in platitudes. ❑

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Keep the Party Labour

Alistair Ward from *LLB* questioned Ken Livingstone about Labour's new links with big business.

Q: What exactly is Labour's Industry Forum?

A: It was set up by Jack Cunningham and aims to bring corporate Britain together, to start meeting with Labour. A company can join it for £500. If an individual Labour Party member wants to join, it costs £500 too, so it really excludes ordinary members - and MPs. As much as I love Jack Cunningham, I'm not going to shell out £500 to hear his pearls of wisdom. Labour's Trade & Industry chief has been having secret and unminuted meetings with corporate Britain, discussing what our tax policies should be or what environmental regulatory changes they want. These corporate clients can bring their lawyers, accountants and their lobbyists. So we are doing in a formal Labour Party way what corporate Britain does with the Tory Ministers behind closed doors, arranged by the lobbying industry. But there has been no report of the proceedings of this to Party Conference, to the PLP, even to the Shadow Cabinet and I think the Party needs to know what indications are being given to these people.

Gerald Frankel, Chair of the Forum, says our complaints about short-termism are "prejudicing dialogue between Labour and the City". Clearly the City financial institutions are gearing up through the Industry Forum to try to ensure there are no major reforms to City practices under a Labour government. If Labour does that we're going to be a one-term government. Whether the next Labour government succeeds or fails depends on what happens in this policy area. This may change now that Margaret Beckett is in this policy area - we've got to build support for her, so she can say "no" to these characters. In a very disturbing interview in the *Financial Times*, Alastair Darling leant towards saying "no need for change". The real struggles are going to be around what Labour is going to do about capital.

Q : What exactly is wrong with a social partnership between labour and capital?

A : The basic reason the British economy fails is that capital subordinates the needs of the whole of the rest of the economy and the state. It has no sense of a particular loyalty to Britain; it is international. When the GLC reviewed industry policy for London, we came to the conclusion that the impact of having the City in London was bad because it prevented industry from developing. There can't be a compromise. You can try to have a dialogue with industrial capital. You will argue about wages and conditions but there is a split in capitalism that has always been there. It was there in America - eg Henry Ford had a very different agenda to the banks in New York. This split exists in each capitalist nation. One also has to say that there is a consistent pattern of the industrial sector of capitalism being the one that cosied up to fascism and the corporate state, so one type is not inherently more progressive than the other. As Labour wants to see a rebuilding of our industrial base, there is a natural affinity of interest here. If Darling and the new Trade and Industry team start giving the City virtually a nod and a wink that they're not going to have to change under Labour, then they're effectively consigning us to failure in government.

As the Labour left has started to win the argument about the need to increase investment and shift power from the City, companies such as the Hanson Trust (Hanson was the largest funder of the Tory Party) have joined the Forum. So technically the Hanson Trust is affiliated to the Labour Party on the basis of this £500. They are doing so because they want to stop Labour taking any action against the City.

Q : But aren't these the "other groups" mentioned in the new Clause IV?

A : If they meant Lord Hanson, they should've told us it meant Lord Hanson, and they might not have got it through.

● Industry Forum members include: Anglian Water Services, AT&T (UK), BAA , British Retail Consortium, British Phonographic Industry, Burton Group, Cargill, Hambros Bank, ICL, Lancashire Enterprises, Merck Sharp & Dohme, Nissan, Nynex Cable Communications, Thorn EMI, Tesco Stores, Videotron Corporation.
Note: "all members and subscribers are consulted as to whether or not they wish to be included in our published membership list and confidentiality is always respected."

● "Mr Darling is adamant that any change will be done with the full co-operation of the Bank of England and the City." - *Financial Times*.

● "No economic and industrial policy is going to be successful unless it has the confidence and the trust of the wealth creators in our economy and one of the keys to success in establishing that broad basis of understanding is the Industry Forum." - Jack Cunningham reveals his grasp of who actually creates the wealth in this country.

John Lloyd PPC: guilty or not guilty?

Steve Reicher, Exeter CLP, argues that things are more complicated.

THOSE WHO have attacked John Lloyd (Labour's parliamentary candidate for Exeter) because of his South African past have been wide of the mark.

John joined the African Resistance Movement (a grouping made up of predominantly white radicals which engaged in sabotage against the apartheid regime) as a student in the early 1960s. He was arrested along with most of the other members when the state cracked down on the movement. Lloyd's notoriety derives from the fact that he not only revealed names under interrogation but also bought his immunity by turning state witness. His evidence helped send fellow member John Harris to the gallows and others to prison with lengthy sentences.

Lloyd does not need reminding that his decision was a tragic error. He has openly admitted as much in Exeter. It is not surprising that those who spent years in apartheid jails because of Lloyd should question his current rise to political prominence. However, it is hard to argue that the events of 30 years ago should, in themselves, disqualify John Lloyd from being Exeter's next MP.

The majority of MPs can't stand a few minutes in the hands of the whips, so if resistance in the face of terror were a criterion for being in Parliament, the House of Commons - Labour as well as Tory benches - would be a very empty place indeed. Moreover, it is one-sided to concentrate solely on what Lloyd did in jail and ignore what he did beforehand. Joining the ARM and thereby placing himself in considerable danger required a considerable dedication to justice and equality. It was a step very few were prepared to take. Of how many Labour Party MPs - left as well as right - could it be said that they not only have principles, but have been prepared to put their lives in peril for those principles?

John Lloyd's sense of justice has been equally evident in his time in Exeter. He is an excellent local councillor who goes out of his way to support weak and vulnerable constituents. Such work has earned him the respect that was translated into one of the largest swings to Labour at the last general election, turning Exeter into a highly winnable marginal. It also explains why most people in Exeter and in the local Party have supported Lloyd during the recent controversy.

But although Lloyd has translated his sympathies into action when helping individuals, the same cannot always be said when it comes to controversial policy issues. When squatting became an issue in the city, Lloyd expressed his support for those who occupied the empty properties. However he later went along with the Labour Council, which sought increased powers to evict squatters. When the Poll Tax was introduced, Lloyd stood up at a rally and promised that those who could not pay would not be pursued by the Council. The promise was subsequently ignored in Council decisions. Again and again John Lloyd makes fine commitments but lacks the force to go through with them when it comes to the crunch, leaving many people with a sense of betrayal.

This would explain not only what happened in South Africa but also his present account of those events. In Exeter Lloyd had always been candid about his past, but once the Labour Party spin doctors got to him he became notably less convincing: wanting to minimise his role in the ARM while claiming to be a freedom fighter akin to Nelson Mandela and even, bizarrely, Winston Churchill (who once blew up a Boer train); fudging the distinction between giving names under torture and turning state witness; calling those ex-political prisoners who now criticise him "foreigners who have no right to question a British candidate, people who do not fit into the new South Africa."

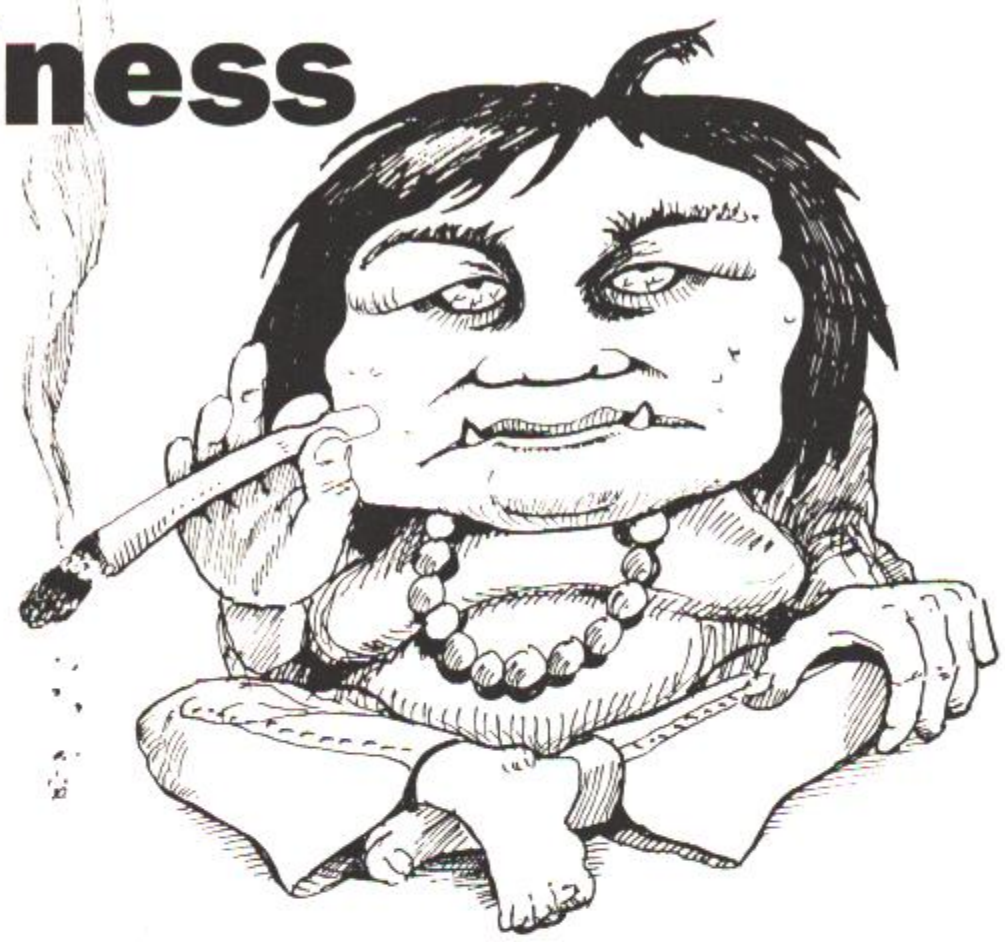
The real story of John Lloyd is not that of a bad man on the make, but rather of a good man in the New Labour Party. He consistently expresses radical sympathies but ultimately goes along with reactionary policies. For example, on the very day the South African story broke, Lloyd, who consistently opposed local tendering, was in the local paper defending Exeter City Council for sending a delegation to one of its East European twin towns in order to advise them on privatisation of services. It is noteworthy that the Labour leadership that dumped Liz Davies has stood by John Lloyd despite the media attacks. For them, he will be the ideal MP. Whatever he has or hasn't done, thinks or doesn't think, John Lloyd will be safe lobby fodder. ❑

"My only mitigation is that I had been in solitary confinement for about three months, I saw the world through my captors' eyes, I even enquired about joining the police force." - John Lloyd.

"He was surrounded by friends. He had his mother around him and lots of other people. My husband was on death row and all of his optimism hinged on the possibility that Lloyd would retract his evidence from England." - Jill Chisholm.

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Reefer madness



A pot-smoker writes: Of course Clare Short was absolutely right to argue on television that the legalisation of cannabis should be considered. And of course she completely disgraced herself by retracting her argument the following day - on the direct order of clean-living, pink-lunged Tony Blair.

Every informed and rational person in the country knows that Britain's current cannabis laws are mad. Yet politicians treat this debate as a no-go area. Short was right to say "we shouldn't be cowards about this"; her 24-hour flip-flop was tantamount to an admission that "yes, we should be cowards about this".

Decades of research have failed to produce any evidence that cannabis is any more injurious to users' psychological or physical well-being than a thousand other legally available products. It is certainly much less injurious than either alcohol or tobacco. It has been shown that for some cancer, MS and leukaemia sufferers it can provide vital relief from pain and discomfort. Yet it is not even legally available for them (unlike heroin). In the Netherlands, where cannabis is legally available, the use of heroin and cocaine is proportionately lower than in Britain.

Cannabis use in this country has been growing steadily for thirty years. Since 1990, this growth appears to have accelerated rapidly, especially among white working class youth. This is no longer an "inner city phenomenon". Walk through almost any small town centre on a summer night and if you pass a gang of bored teenagers, you're likely to catch a whiff of spliff. Even the most conservative estimates now assume 1.5 million "regular users".

The cannabis question is an excellent example of the widening gap between social reality and the version of it constructed by the politicians and the media. In this context, the refusal of the Labour leadership to countenance a debate on cannabis is grotesquely irresponsible. People like Blair and Straw know full well that when it comes to cannabis the law is an ass. Criminalisation of cannabis use wastes public resources, encourages people to move into hard drugs and obstructs humane medical treatment, but this knowledge is subordinated to their fear of a negative headline in the *Daily Mail*. Worse yet, they join in the conspiracy to prevent rational public discussion of the issue by smearing Littleborough and Saddleworth Lib Dem Chris Davies and by roasting Clare Short on every front page in the country.

Of course, having behaved with such flagrant and abject hypocrisy, Short deserved everything she got.

Bring back the GLC

Steve Cowan, Ealing Southall CLP, argues that Labour's policy needs to go further to recreate a strategic authority for the capital.

I AM SURE Tony Blair was delighted with the reception Conference delegates gave to his remarks concerning a strategic authority for London. Unfortunately he didn't set out exactly what he proposed but delegates continued the discussion outside the hall.

There was a great measure of agreement on the issue of a London authority. Regardless of where delegates came from, they considered it a national disgrace that our capital did not have its own elected, representative council. Most wanted to see reform of local government extended to the rest of the country.

Delegates from places like Harrow, Bromley, Ealing, Surbiton and Havering felt strongly that any London authority should cover the whole of Greater London. Poor services, limited employment, structurally unsound housing and little recreation for youth are features of life in Harrow and Orpington as much as they are in Islington and Putney.

A further point concerned the need for a Labour government to effect a fundamental shift in power to the regions. There is a radical mood within the Labour membership and there would be strong backing for reforms which should have been put into place by the 1945-51 Government. We might point out that one consequence of devolution of power from the centre to the regions would be a cut in the cost of government.

So what should the new strategic authority for London have a say in ? How about these for starters: police, river & water, fire, accident and emergency services, Greater London Training and Enterprise Board, economic planning and development, local authority and public services supplies, transport planning and services, health services, arts & sports, environmental planning and conservation, adult and higher education.

Experiences have shown that most of these services are best delivered by directly elected and accountable bodies. And as Labour Party democratic socialists we have a natural inclination towards representative and elective forms of government and rightly distrust any other forms.

None of the areas listed above can be dealt with adequately by an authority whose scope is less than the whole of the city. And given the city-wide nature of things like environmental planning and conservation, we cannot expect borough councils to take a strategic view rather than the more focused parochial one to which they are accustomed.

The list is by no means definitive as there are many other aspects of life which should come under the care of a London authority. At Brighton Kevin Keegan outlined what Newcastle was doing for Euro 96. Due to a lack of a strategic authority, little is being done in London for what should be a celebration of football and also of the city. ❑

TRADE UNION

PICKET

NOTEBOOK

A strategy to save council services

Jennifer Davies and Kenny Bell (Newcastle Unison) argue for a robust resistance to Tory spending limits.

ALTHOUGH WE are writing before the Budget, the outcome for council jobs and services can be predicted with confidence. The financial settlements for local authorities will devastate services.Years of financial battering by the Tories have wiped out Council reserves and exhausted all the 'painless' options. Proposals are now being seriously considered which would have been unthinkable only two or three years ago. In Newcastle these include closing up to ten branch libraries; ending direct provision of residential care for the elderly and automatic allocation of all children on the 'at risk' register to social workers; and privatising all sports centres and swimming pools. Up to 1,500 jobs are at risk. This devastation will be repeated throughout the country.



Newcastle City Council workers on strike. Photo: Martin Pinder

Inevitably the outcry from service users and local authority workers will be greater than before. How can Labour councils mount an effective defence of local services? The Tories' tactic is clear and consistent - to pass responsibility for cuts to local authorities. This isolates opposition by confining it to local authority areas and very neatly 'passes the buck'. Labour Councils can be portrayed as profligate, incompetent, mean and heartless while the Tories distance themselves from all blame.

A strategy for fighting local government cuts must recognise this tactic and counter it. This requires a clear national focus to maintain pressure on the Tories by making their responsibility clear and providing a rallying point for campaigning. This focus can be provided if Labour councils set 'no cuts' budgets which at least reflect current spending. This will trigger the process of 'redetermination', where budgets are reassessed by the Secretary of State and ultimately by Parliament.

Redetermination would be a focus from which to build united action by trade unions, communities and Labour councils. This would be a small but significant step from that taken by Newcastle and eight other authorities this year, which set budgets above the Tories' capping limits. These budgets were based on technical arguments, which by and large failed to convince the Tories although small increases in spending were granted to some councils.

The failure of this technical approach demonstrates that opposition to Government funding policies, which are rooted in ideology, must similarly be on a political level. The setting of 'standstill' budgets would be a political act and ensure that the public debate with the Government takes place on a political level. It would provide a focus for public opposition and campaigning, placing Labour clearly on the side of local services.

The joint campaign in Newcastle this year demonstrated how public opposition can be harnessed. If a significant number of Labour councils were involved there is a real possibility that united opposition in the period up to redetermination could shift the Tories. A strategy for Labour councils must also recognise the timing of the next General Election. This will be no later than April 1997 and possibly during 1996. This way Labour councils could be implementing the most savage cuts ever, including widespread compulsory redundancies, in the twelve months prior to a general election. It would be political suicide for Labour nationally to be perceived as the party that cuts local services and sacks local workers.

Labour councils should use all the resources available to shore up services throughout this period, by using up reserves and contingencies. Another Tory government will sound the death knell for local services and even a Labour government will not be able to save services that are already dead and buried. We believe that the strategy outlined here represents the best chance for Labour councils. Unison's Northern Region and NEC Policy Committee have both adopted it.

The battle for local services will be waged by workers and service users. What side will Labour councils be on in that battle ? Councils who vote to devastate services without a fight will find themselves in an increasingly bitter, bloody and destructive confrontation with their employees. There is a flavour of this already in recent disputes in Coventry, Liverpool, Sheffield and elsewhere. There is a real possibility of spearheading a successful campaign to save local services. The alternative is cuts, local confrontation and unpopularity. Is there really a choice? ❑

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Fireworks in Liverpool

Adam Ward writes: £750,000 WAS AVAILABLE to the fire authority at the start of this dispute. In the ten-day period leading up to the first strike on 17th August, £74,000 was spent setting up a woefully inadequate alternative system of fire cover. For each week that the fire authority fails to reach a settlement with the trade union, it costs them a further £50,000. Total expenditure on this dispute amounted to £141,000; the current balance stood at £593,000.

This dispute is about the decision of the New Labour fire authority to use the firefighters' pension contributions to finance the fire brigade.

Since his arrival in June 1989, Chief Fire Officer Best has not relented in his attacks on all members' conditions while at the same time improving his own. Approximately forty jobs in total would be lost under the package of cuts. This would involve the loss of one shift of annual leave for each worker which in turn would entail a further loss of ten jobs. In addition the removal of the voluntary rota on public holidays would mean the loss of eight jobs (over 1000 shifts) or four jobs (for 500 shifts).

Other authorities have breached the cap or appealed to the Government for an increased spending limit. Former chair of the authority Maurice Lee received a letter in February of this year from the Home Secretary Michael Howard. In it Howard states, "In the last resort it is open to you to seek reconsideration of your cap should you take the view that it is necessary to set a budget above the capping limit."

The fire authority did not take the view that it was necessary to set a budget above the capping limit. It would appear that the authority had already decided on its course of action and that the workforce would be expected to bear the brunt of their financial incompetence. ❑



Ken Cameron describes the actions of the Merseyside fire authority as the economics of the mad house. Photo: Paul Barker

Victory for real trade unionism

Mick Shaw, FBU London Regional Chair, reports on the FBU's success in being recognised as sole negotiators for Fire Brigade workers.

JANUARY 1996 should see a historic victory for independent trade unionism in the Fire Service - and a historic defeat for company unionism.

At the October 1995 meeting of the National Joint Council for Local Authority Fire Brigades, the employers tabled a constitutional amendment that would make the Fire Brigades Union (FBU) the only recognised negotiating body for all ranks in the Fire Service. This follows an independent audit, which showed that 81.03% of all officers (the management grades) were FBU members. The other recognised body - the National Association of Fire Officers (NAFO) - were unable to provide figures for their membership.

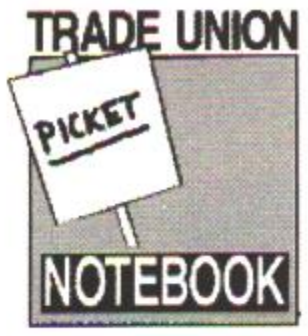
The struggle between the FBU and NAFO to represent Fire Officers dates back to the last war. When the National Fire Service was created by the wartime coalition Government, the Labour Home Secretary Herbert Morrison did not want to deal with an independent trade union (particularly one heavily influenced by the Communist Party). A Fire Service Federation, along the lines of the Police Federation, was proposed. The FBU were successful in resisting this, but Morrison established NAFO to represent Fire Officers, with the Chief of Fire Staff Sir Aylmer Firebrace as their first president.

Although a minority of officers always remained loyal to the FBU, NAFO had majority membership amongst officers up until the 1980s. The big turning point was the 1977/78 Fire Service strike. NAFO members scabbed on the strike and trained the troops that were sent in. They did, however, accept the pay rises and shorter working week that resulted from the strike. The bitterness felt towards NAFO was tremendous. NAFO became a four-letter swear word in fire stations throughout the country.

The firefighters promoted to officers during the 1980s saw NAFO for the scabs that they were and largely stayed in the FBU. This meant that the FBU began to overtake NAFO in terms of membership and moved to a position of having majority negotiating rights. NAFO's membership became too small to sustain an independent organisation and was taken over by the electricians' union, the EETPU, who were outside of the TUC and attempting to gain a foothold in a number of industries.

However, NAFO were never able to provide much to their new partners in terms of membership or finance and when their General Secretary retired, instead of allowing them to choose a replacement, the EETPU (now part of the AEEU) imposed one of their own officials. NAFO then ballotted their membership on breaking away from the AEEU. However, the AEEU established that they were the only ones allowed to use the name NAFO and the breakaway had to call themselves the Fire Officers Association (FOA). However, FOA had no negotiating rights and very few members. NAFO had negotiating rights but probably even fewer members.

It might have taken half a century, but it looks as if company unionism will finally be buried in the Fire Service. Long live independent trade unionism! ❑



Tube strike: win, lose or draw?

Martin Donoghue, RMT, assesses the result of the Tube strike and RMT's recruitment of 1,200 new members.

AFTER THREE ballots, injunctions and numerous delays, the London Underground Ltd (LUL) dispute is over. RMT has settled, although many questions remain unanswered.

So what is the deal? On the 'make or buy' privatisation review, anyone transferred and then facing redundancy will go on a register and will be considered for vacancies alongside redeployed staff. Redundancy payments will be made up to the BR level. Train maintainers on lines other than the Northern, Central or Jubilee have had 'make or buy' postponed for two years - a real result.

A 3% pay rise has been accepted. Pay was not central to the dispute; the cut in hours was the biggest issue. Management have agreed that any cut in hours for station staff will be "banked up" to make extra days off. LUL refused to agree this for train staff as it would contradict the agreement with ASLEF. However, with both train and station staff the detail is still to be negotiated and productivity is high on management's agenda.

So what's the balance sheet for the dispute? Management have shown they "want to let it lie" - they want continual increases in productivity and continual cuts in jobs. There will be no peace on LUL, just a lull in the fighting.

Any gains are due to the RMT membership and those from the unions who voted with their feet to support the dispute.

The white-collar Transport Salaried Staff Association played their usual ostrich role and justly suffered a large loss of members. The ASLEF leadership, after an initial but short-lived display of unity with RMT, did everything possible to delay, prevent and undermine any action. They continually lied to their members and appeared prepared to agree to anything management proposed. The shameless way they did this led to a large loss of members. The RMT gained over 1,200 members because it was fighting back.

But what are the losses for the RMT? We had three ballots during the course of the dispute. The first two had 3-1 majorities for action, the third only a 2-1 vote. However, this last result was after a break in action of over a month. As momentum is the key to any dispute the question should be: "The result isn't as good as the previous ballot, how do we overcome that?" But for some the question seemed to be: "The result isn't as good as the previous ballot, so what do we settle for?" And downhill goes the dispute. This is linked to an attitude that "if we get 4-1 for action then we're in business, but until then, well....". At earlier stages, the attitude of "forget ASLEF, they're nothing" became "we've been stabbed in the back by ASLEF, we've got to settle" and the recruitment of 1,200 new members was seen as the end in itself of the dispute rather than the means to the successful ending of the dispute.

A special mention in the gallery of shame should go to Wilf Proudfoot, the clownish Assistant General Secretary of RMT, who undermined the dispute every time a TV camera was pointed at him.

Over the past few years nothing has discredited the RMT more in the eyes of the membership than the practice of winning ballot results, then calling off action. It makes people cynical about ballots and it has the most demoralizing effect on the best members because they put the most into the ballot. I'd hoped this year's dispute had put paid to this - it's a shame it hasn't. ❑

Workers' victory in Liverpool

Glen Jones, a residential social worker in Leicester, explains how residential workers in Liverpool won their strike.

RESIDENTIAL SOCIAL Workers in Liverpool have returned to work after winning the bulk of their demands in a three-month strike. Over 300 workers came out indefinitely after Liverpool's Labour Council had attempted to withdraw nationally agreed terms on sick leave, maternity leave and training course payments, and to cut payments for sleeping-in.

Liverpool Council tried all kinds of dirty tricks - taking the workers to court under the anti-union laws and bringing in scab labour. But the strike remained solid, and received support from other Unison branches, as well as other unions, all over the country.

The dispute was won after the issue went to the local government Provincial Council (PC) for arbitration. The PC ruled in favour of the workers, instructing the Council to negotiate even before the strike was called off!

Unison nationally gave financial backing to the strike, but towards the end was pushing for the workers to settle. It is arguable that Liverpool Council could have been pushed into conceding even more had Unison nationally been more vigorous. As it is, Liverpool's residential workers have their pay and conditions intact, and the promise of discussions around an in-house supply pool to cover leave. They have also been given the confidence to defend and extend these successes. Liverpool City Council must now be pressed to keep their end of the bargain over supply cover. ❑

Campaign to Defend the Welfare State

National Conference

The choices for Labour

10.30am - 4.30pm, Sat 2nd December

School of Oriental and African Studies, Thornhaugh Street, London WC1

Speakers include: John Edmonds GMB, Diane Abbott MP, Roger Berry MP, Ken Livingstone MP, Prof Peter Townsend, Mark Seddon - *Tribune*, Mary Rosser - *Morning Star*, Larry Elliot - *Guardian*.

Floor discussion and contributions welcomed.

Reinstate the Manchester 6

STRIKE BALLOT PAPERS have now gone out to Manchester train crews at Piccadilly station and staff at Longsight depot. The full support of the RMT for strike action was shown at the Union's special conference on 14th November and at a rally with Jimmy Knapp on 22nd November.

The campaign to reinstate six militants has moved centre stage in the fight against British Rail's attempts to break the RMT. Winning back the six jobs will further strengthen the Union in the coming privatisation battles. Chris Jones, a long-standing activist at Longsight Depot, Manchester, was sacked for not crossing an ASLEF picket line. Last month Tom Ritchie, the membership secretary of Manchester South RMT, was sacked for putting a branch notice on a notice board.

● The campaign can be contacted via Department 61, 1 Newton Street, Manchester, M1.



The paper they grin and Blair

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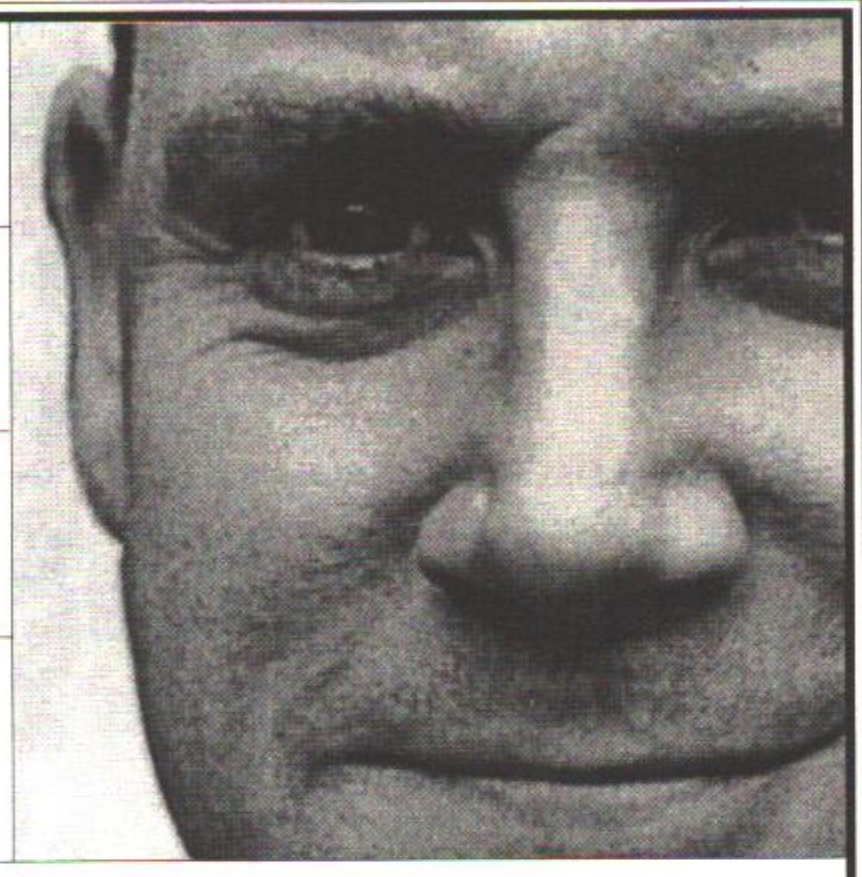
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Leading with the left

A lefty look at life by Geoff Martin (chair, London Unison Affiliated Political Fund).



Time to quit toy town

THE IDEA BEHIND this column is that I take a knockabout look at a bunch of current issues in a hit-and-miss effort to disprove the theory that the left don't like a laugh.

One event has put the humour on hold for this month: the result of the Unison General election in which a reactionary Tory candidate secured nearly a third of the votes cast.

When I pointed out in *LLB* the dangers of Labour Party members supporting the running of an ultra-left candidate against Bickerstaffe, I was met with a storm of protest. Perhaps those same people will now take a long hard look at what might have happened if Bannister had eaten deeper into Bicks's vote and if the anti-abortion Hunter had run a stronger campaign.

Members of the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison should stare into that abyss before they put pen to paper. We came a damn sight closer than anyone would have thought possible to having a Tory elected General Secretary of the country's biggest trade union. If that doesn't assist some of the toy-town revolutionaries in focusing on the real issues then I don't know what will.

Some in the CFDU have told me privately that they never expected Bannister to win and that they were running him simply to "raise the left's agenda with the rank and file". Bloody marvellous - so if that sort of playground posturing lets the reactionary right in through the middle it's a price worth paying, is it?

Bick himself would ignore at his peril the fact that the combined votes of the anti-Labour Party candidates was over 50% of the total. I don't think he will, and the noises he was making after the election about pay, the prospect of industrial action and a refusal to bend the knee to the Labour leadership, were all important.

The result did prove that there is widespread membership dissatisfaction with the development of Unison since the merger.

The fightback against Blairite Labour councils in London is one important area, defence of key Unison policies like the minimum wage, public ownership and an end to all forms of CCT is another. With the membership battered and bruised by 16 years of Tory government, Unison must raise its profile at the grass roots; too often the organisation appears remote, bureaucratic and heavily centralised.

The crunch for Unison, and other public sector unions, will come after the general election. Blair's thinly veiled threat that he may be forced to say "no" on public sector pay is a blatant admission that we're going to get an all-singing, all-dancing public sector incomes policy. If the minimum wage policy is sabotaged and the commitments on abolishing markets and competition are ripped up at the same time the situation on the ground will be explosive.

That's when the union voice in the Labour Party will be crucial: the position in the constituencies will shift at the same time and if we can hang on to our 50% voting strength we'll be back in business big time. I don't doubt for a moment that the Blairites are well aware of this scenario and will be working like mad to ditch the link straight after the election. The stark message for Militant and their cohorts in the CFDU is "if you ain't in it, you can't win it".

Hopefully this column will be back to normal next month, unless something else really pisses me off in the meantime. Mind you, I'm starting to get increasingly hacked off at the prospect of Ken Bates beating Matthew Harding in the battle for control of Chelsea...

Who were the POUM?

Bryn Griffiths discusses insights found in *The Spanish Civil War: The View from the Left*.

IN KEN LOACH'S tremendous film *Land and Freedom* the unemployed hero joined the POUM militia to fight against Franco. Those wanting to know more about the politics of the POUM would do well to read *The Spanish Civil War: The View from the Left*, a collection by Revolutionary History, who have brought together the views of a range of dissident Marxist participants in the Spanish revolution. The differing views of Trotskyists are well represented, but more interestingly the POUM militia is given a voice.



'Workers in the saddle' - Loach's *Land and Freedom*.

The Partido Obrero de Unification Marxista (POUM) was not a Trotskyist organisation. An independent Marxist organisation, they participated not in Trotsky's Fourth International but in the London Bureau, which included Britain's Independent Labour Party. This same ILP link led Orwell to the POUM militia, which he wrote about in *Homage to Catalonia*, his seminal work.

In the Spanish Civil War another ILP member, Don Bateman, gives a moving eyewitness account of how the Communists called the POUM Franco's Fifth Column. Bateman describes how Georges Kopp, his courageous POUM militia commandant (who also commanded Orwell) was arrested and jailed by the Spanish Stalinists for eighteen months, only managing to escape to France when the Soviet Union wound down its commitment to Spain to prepare for the Hitler/Stalin Pact.

The defining political question of this bloody division in the anti-fascist ranks was the differing attitudes of socialists to the Republican Government.

The official Communist Popular Front line characterised the Spanish Civil War as a battle between democracy and fascism. In this battle the Socialists had no independent role and were expected to subordinate their politics and class interests to those of the petty-bourgeois republicans. Those who opposed the Communist line faced persecution, imprisonment and death.

The POUM argued that socialism and democracy were inseparable. Andres Nin, a prominent POUM member, denounced the Stalinists and stated it was "a crime and a betrayal" to demand that the working class should denounce its maximum aspirations - the destruction of the bourgeois state and the conquest of power - in the name of "consolidating the Republic".

Whilst the Communists denounced the POUM as Trotskyist, Trotsky himself was also very hostile to the POUM. He was incensed that, while opposed to the Popular Front line, the POUM still signed the Left Electoral Pact, which brought the Popular Front to office.

It is difficult to see how the POUM could have failed to sign the Left Electoral Pact; they signed under tremendous working-class pressure for unity against the right. They pointed to the "material existence of an electoral law" that obliged them to make aprovisional agreement with the republicans to avoid the victory of the bourgeoisie. Even the anarcho-syndicalists wanted to see the election of the Republican Government to secure freedom for thousands of political prisoners.

Republican Spain was left isolated by the non-intervention policy of the European governments. To defeat Spanish fascism the anti-fascists had to harness the enthusiasm of the Spanish workers and their peasant allies. The policies of the official Communists demoralised and persecuted the people it needed to galvanise most.

Although they signed the Left Electoral Pact, the POUM did not temper its criticisms of the anti-socialist policies of Popular Frontism. The defeat of the POUM, the Spanish revolution and the Republican Government was the responsibility of Stalin, and thus Franco's victory was also the result of Stalin's strategy.

Read Orwell, study Revolutionary History's book and watch Loach and you will understand one thing - the collapse of Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe cannot be seen to equal the end of socialism. Stalinism in Spain and beyond was the implacable opponent of socialism.

● *The Spanish Civil War: The View from the Left*, Revolutionary History, 402 pages, Socialist Platform Ltd.

The spirit of revolutionary Spain

"The seizure of power by the working class will entail the realisation of the democratic revolution that the bourgeoisie will not make - the liberation of land and of the nationalities, the destruction of the church, the economic emancipation of women, the improvement of the material and moral situation of workers - and at the same time will initiate the socialist revolution nationalising the land, transport, mines, heavy industry and the banks."

Joaquim Maurin, the POUM.

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Abacha, Shell - murderers!

Lazrus Tamana, President of the Ogoni Community Association.

THE NIGERIAN government defied world opinion by executing Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni in Nigeria. In spite of pleas for clemency, General Sani Abacha's military dictatorship had the men hanged in Port Harcourt.

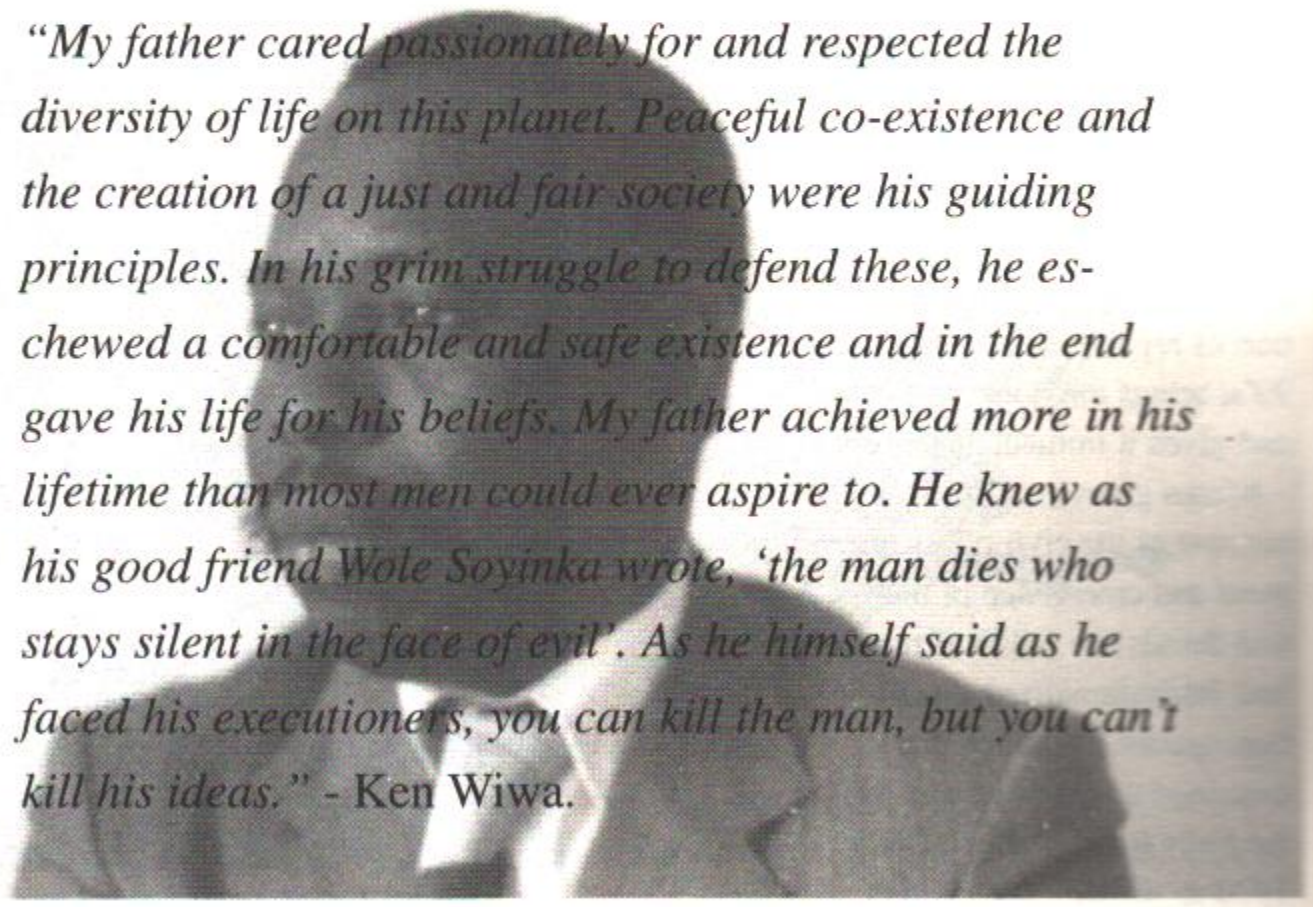
The move followed an assessment by the military in Port Harcourt that executing the popular Ogoni leader would lead to wide-spread rioting throughout the Rivers State, Nigeria's oil-producing area. The original secret date for the execution had been set for 4th November, but the announcement of the death sentence unleashed a tidal wave of international protests from politicians, environmentalists and human rights activists.

News arrives of further arrests and a massive army presence - Ogoni leaders have gone into hiding. It is understood that the 22 Ogonis recently arrested face the same tribunals which led to the judicial murders.

Nigeria has proven itself to be the most callous and evil place in the world today. How can we talk and trade with people who hang innocent men? The dictator has had his day. The memory of these men of peace lives on in all Ogoni. We will struggle for justice until we have won our rights and our share of the resources under our land. The world's nations should impose oil sanctions on Nigeria. I'm sure it would be the message Ken would have wanted us to deliver. The global public outcry has been enormous. We want to see action against the murderers of Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Meanwhile, Shell has denied that it is dropping plans for a massive liquified natural gas project, which goes through Ogoni land. *The Observer* has exposed Shell's role with the revelation that it offered to persuade the regime to stop the executions if Ogoni leaders called off protest against the company. Global action must be taken against the Abacha regime and the oil companies which have sustained it.

● To help, please contact: the Ogoni Community Association UK, Suite 5, 3-4 Albion Place, Calena Road, Hammersmith, W6 0LT.



"My father cared passionately for and respected the diversity of life on this planet. Peaceful co-existence and the creation of a just and fair society were his guiding principles. In his grim struggle to defend these, he eschewed a comfortable and safe existence and in the end gave his life for his beliefs. My father achieved more in his lifetime than most men could ever aspire to. He knew as his good friend Wole Soyinka wrote, 'the man dies who stays silent in the face of evil'. As he himself said as he faced his executioners, you can kill the man, but you can't kill his ideas." - Ken Wiwa.

An appreciation of Genora Johnson Dollinger, 1913-1995, Pioneer US Automobile Union leader by Mildred Gordon MP

THE LAST TIME I saw Genora was during the making of the BBC documentary *The Great Sit-down Strike*. In 1979 she was featured in the documentary *Babies and Banners*, which was nominated for an Academy Award. These films described her work as a 23 year old, organising women to support industrial struggles in the USA.

On Christmas Eve 1936, 2,000 workers occupied the Fisher Body Division plant in Flint, Michigan. The sit-in lasted for 44 days resulting in union recognition. The strike crippled General Motors and was a turning point for industrial unions.

Genora organised the Woman's Emergency Brigade, and she and other women stood off the Flint Police, Pinkerton Guards and industrial bosses at the gates of the plant where Chevrolet engines were made. Her women's auxiliaries went house to house to gather support, cash and food. They wielded clubs, marching up and down in front of the iron main gates and barricades, putting their bodies between Pinkerton agents and their menfolk. They wore red berets and armbands, carried American flags and sang "Solidarity Forever".

Genora was black-listed in Flint and moved to Detroit where she continued as a union organiser. She was the victim of a lead-pipe attack during a wave of anti-union violence that included the shootings of Walter and Victor Reuther, veterans of the 1937 strike at GM.

In the 1960s Genora Dollinger was development director of the Michigan American Civil Liberties Union. She was an early president of Women for Peace.

She rebelled against her background - her uncle was a vice president of General Motors - and married Kermit Johnson, a labourer who was one of the sit-in strikers. Her early life was marred by tragedy: her two small sons died in a traffic accident. When her marriage to Johnson ended she married fellow socialist Sol Dollinger in 1944. She is survived by him, their son Ronald and two grandchildren.

Last year she was inducted into the Hall of Fame of the Michigan Women's Historical Centre in Lansing. She has been called a foremother of the women's liberation movement. She was a heroine who understood and organised the power of women in the class struggle.

Towards a

Paul Field reviews
Free Ireland: Towards a lasting peace *by Gerry Adams,*
Published by Brandon - £7.95.

FREE IRELAND is an updated version of *The politics of Irish Freedom*, Adams' personal statement of the meaning of Irish republicanism published in 1986. The addition of two concluding chapters dealing with the evolution of republican strategy in the 90's, brings the book up to date and gives it immediate currency.

Adams gives an historical account of the civil rights movement and emergence of the I.R.A. and details the political repression and institutionalised discrimination against Catholics that sustained 25 years of war. He cites the Falls Road curfew of July 1970 in which 3,000 British troops invaded and occupied the Falls for 2 days as a key event that transformed the I.R.A. from a disorganised network unable to defend areas under attack in 1969 to an organisation capable of carrying out as many as 125 bombings between June and July 1971, Adams notes that after the violence of that operation in which 1600 canisters of CS gas were fired, 300 people arrested and 5 people killed in a 48 hour period, "recruitment to the I.R.A. was massive".

Following the upsurge in Sinn Fein's electoral support after the huge strikes of 1981, British strategy shifted to that of institutionalizing an anti-republican axis based on marrying sections of 'pragmatic' unionists and the SDLP with some Dublin involvement in an arrangement to govern a 'reformed' six county state. This was at the core of the 1985 Hillsborough Treaty. The Irish peace initiative of John Hume and Adams himself has shattered this axis and produced a political realignment that has "put unprecedented focus on the Anglo Irish conflict and the core issues involved."

Adams states that in their effort to construct an Irish national consensus the involvement of the Unionists has always been considered crucial. Despite hostility from the Unionist political elite and violence from loyalist death squads, a successful dialogue was established with a range of grassroots Unionist opinion in the early nineties including working class representatives and two former moderators of the Presbyterian church. Adams maintains there is a gulf between ordinary Protestants who increasingly question traditional positions and accept that change is inevitable and their misleaders who still look to Britain for an internal settlement that will restore Unionist domination.

This is a favourite theme of Derry Councillor and Sinn Fein Chair Mitchel McLaughlin who has attempted to appeal over the heads of Unionists politicians to the wider Protestant community with assurances of the constitutional and democratic guarantees they would enjoy within a united Ireland.

Recent experience appears to demonstrate Adams' point that the more the British procrastinate over peace talks, the greater confidence there is among Unionist hardliners, as witnessed by David Trimble's victory over the summer.

Adams' book is required reading for anyone who wishes to fully understand the political dynamics behind the republicans' decision to pursue peace. It reinforces the conviction that the role of socialists in Britain must be to exert maximum pressure on the Labour leadership to end its bipartisan consensus over Ireland at this key moment.



Photo: Bryn Griffiths.

Sri Lanka massacres

AN EYE WITNESS in Sri Lanka reports:
A Month in Sri Lanka is an important pamphlet by a human-rights activist who visited one of the war zones and heard eye-witness accounts of Government massacres. Deirdre McConnell reports on the routine round-ups and disappearances of Tamil traders, the brutality of Government troops, especially against women, and the pressure put on families to deter them from reporting the atrocities.

Unable to visit the north of the island, she went to the war-torn eastern town of Batticaloa. On arrival she learned how residents had spent whole nights sheltering on the floors of their houses - the police pumped 25,000 bullets into the town in one night alone. Within ten miles of the town, there have been four documented massacres involving scores of people. With the war escalating in recent weeks and many of the conflict areas closed to outsiders, this pamphlet is an important record of the Sri Lanka state's war against the Tamil people.

● *A Month in Sri Lanka* is available from the Campaign Against State Repression in Sri Lanka, c/o Church of the Ascension, Royce Road, Hulme, Manchester 15.

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lasting peace?

Alistair Ward from *LLB* spoke to Martin McGuiness (Sinn Fein Vice-President) during his recent visit.



Q: Could you tell *LLB* readers something about Sinn Fein's perception of the Northern Ireland peace process?

A: Along with Gerry Adams and many others, we have put an awful lot into the peace process. We have taken risks. We have worked very hard for success, because we have to show the world that we can do in Ireland what was done in South Africa and in other areas of conflict: bring about a resolution through negotiations. If we do not resolve the conflict, then the potential for further conflict will always be there. But if you say that, your political opponents accuse you of making threats. I am not making threats - I am stating a political fact of history. I see my role and the role of Sinn Fein as one of removing the potential for further conflict. The difficulty is that at this moment many people have decided that we don't have a meaningful peace process. The British Government isn't interested in real negotiations, because the British government isn't interested in providing the people of Ireland with real change, real justice, real equality or real democracy.

Q: The development that British socialists have been interested in recently is Billy Hutchinson (a representative of the Progressive Unionist Party who is described as close to the thinking of the paramilitary Ulster Volunteer Force) claiming to be a socialist. What do you think of that?

A: People can use their own words to describe themselves and who am I to disagree with that? I certainly think that Billy Hutchinson does represent a constituency within the Shankhill Road which is working class, which has also, along with our community, suffered from the economic policies of successive British governments. If he chooses to use the word socialist then that's a personal matter; I'm not going to disagree with it.

Q: Billy Hutchinson said on reflection that Protestant working class people should have been on the civil rights demonstrations. How do you respond to that?

A: Some working class Protestants were on the civil-rights demonstrations, the difficulty was that there weren't enough of them. And certainly I think that if enough of them had been on the civil rights protests and had used their influence on the main Unionist parties in the north, the events of the last twenty-five years quite clearly would not have happened. We're now dealing with a situation that is taking place against the background of what has happened during the last twenty-five years, and our task is to try to bring all those involved in that conflict to the negotiating table. We have had tremendous expressions of goodwill from many people within the Protestant community who accept that something important is taking place on the island of Ireland and who feel that they want to be part of that and who quite clearly want to see a resolution of this conflict. Our difficulty again is that there aren't enough of them.

Q: Is it not timely for Sinn Fein not only to be promoting demands for a united Ireland, but also to be putting pressure on both the 26-county government and the British state around demands from working class people for jobs, housing, etc.

A: Absolutely.

Q: What kinds of demands will Sinn Fein be promoting that unite people around such issues?

A: Sinn Fein is very much involved in that type of work at constituency level. In the whole of the six counties, it is obvious that people have given us their vote not only on the basis of our commitment to the national question, but also on the basis of our involvement in the day-to-day lives of working people who are suffering joblessness, poor housing, deprivation, social and economic depression and poverty. Although there has been an attempt within the media to portray us as just a protest party, it is clear we are more than that. We have got important ideas as to how we should move forward.

For example, Gerry Adams was recently involved in a community initiative in West Belfast and the Falls Road which also included people from the Shankhill Road, an initiative which had been worked out by literary people, poets and artists, people who felt that if the proper investment was made they could employ 500 extra people in both the Shankill Road and the Falls Road. This work goes on all the time but it never makes national headlines.

BLOODY SUNDAY 1996 MARCH AND RALLY

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"Self Determination for the Irish people".

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Cheques payable to: "Bloody Sunday March Organising Committee" send to: P.O. Box 208, Leicester, LE4 5YU.

LLB page 23

Aid, the UN and philanthropic imperialism

Paul Field interviews Alex de Waal of "African Rights".

Q: Can you describe the background to the formation of "African Rights".

A: In 1992 I was Associate Director of Africa Watch and Raqir was the Director. We spent at least half of our time that year working on Somalia. When Bush proposed sending in troops we were extremely critical. There was no consultation with Somalis and there were no guarantees on human rights. The rationale for it wasn't to save Somalia, which required a political strategy, but to save international aid efforts.

It represented a shift in international law away from concern for victims of conflict to concern with intervening for international organisations. It's the same as UNPROFOR in Bosnia, which has nothing to do with protecting Bosnians. It's about protecting a bunch of western aid workers.

That sort of distortion was manifest in Somalia which is one reason why we opposed intervention. For that reason Raqir was fired and I quit. We set up "African Rights" three years ago.

Q: The media portrayed "Operation Restore Hope" as an attempt to relieve hunger and restore stability to a country in chaos. What was it really about?

A: "Operation Restore Hope" was a convergence of different views which suited institutional interests. A consensus emerged between the media, the UN, the Pentagon and the international non-governmental organisations (eg. charities and development organisations). They sought to represent Somalia as a land of chaos and anarchy where there was an overriding humanitarian imperative and these problems could be solved by a sort of philanthropic imperialism.

This failed to get to grips with the very real political dynamics that existed at the time. It has made it much harder to arrive at a political solution in Somalia.

Q: What practical alternatives to humanitarian intervention exist when faced with a crisis situation like genocide or ethnic cleansing?

A: All these countries are integrated into the international political and economic order in varying respects. They all have in common a crisis of state power. In Somalia you had a state that collapsed completely. Rwanda was controlled by a small coterie of very ruthless people, who in order to hold on to power used the state to commit genocide, which is very different to Somalia. However, in terms of international intervention and the way the press portray things, they get collated.

The media on the whole has a single fairy tale approach which is: here's an innocent victim; here's a villain and here's a saviour, who is usually a white aid worker stepping off a helicopter or appearing in a four-wheel drive. This reduces the most disparate problems to a single scenario which can be solved by a single type of intervention. That is a very serious misrepresentation.

All these situations arise in one form or another from a crisis in the use of state power, so intervention is not really the question. The whole way in which the discourse and debate are structured pushes you towards humanitarianism and military intervention as the two solutions. But then they only make matters worse.

What is required is a rather different approach to state craft. There has to be a way of reducing state power in a way that still meets people's basic aspirations for services and so on. That's a very tall order but a necessary one.

Q: Have western charities and NGOs ever shown a greater sensitivity to the long term needs of people in the south than donor governments?

A: Western aid has three main intellectual progenitors. One is the charity laws, which in this country date from Elizabethan times. The best method of social repression was charitable relief. The charitable laws we have today are a direct inheritor of that.

The role of charities in the wider political order is to keep the poor happy so they don't take up arms. Over time a lot of people who have got involved in it have seen this is not sufficient. Disabled and children's charities in Britain have been pushing the limits of charitable endeavour but come up against this very constricting legal framework.

The second intellectual ancestor is the use of foreign aid to reward loyalty, which is encapsulated in Kissinger's statement in 1976 that "emergency aid is part of our foreign policy". That is where aid essentially comes from. It was dressed up in liberal, developmental language because the Soviet bloc was also offering aid and with it a lot of ideological varnish. So western aid needed a comparable ideological varnish which was 'development' but essentially, as all pro-western governments knew, it was a reward; you got the aid if you voted with the west and allowed western bases.

The third progenitor is the search for humanity in warfare which is the 'Red Cross' project of the laws of war. That has become significantly distorted in the last five to six years by the UN Security Council. The beneficiaries of legal privileges are no longer the civilians but the aid givers or the UN troops. We saw both in Bosnia and Somalia the legal immunisation of UN troops with the idea that if captured they are not prisoners of war but hostages. Also, that UN troops are not bound by the Geneva convention but exempt as was the case in Somalia.

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We are experiencing a merging of these three traditions along with various religious practices and proselytization. There's an organisation called Christian Solidarity International in the Sudan buying up escaped slaves. Given that there is very little evidence of a trade in slaves, if money is offered for them there's a danger of starting off a slave trade because of the demand.

All these traditions lack any accountability to the people they are supposed to be helping. There's no way a famine victim in Ethiopia can sue the World Food Programme if he goes hungry or his children die. Over the years the impact of large scale aid has always been anti-democratic. Aid is always filtered through the power institutions of a society. In doing so it selectively empowers those with the power to control or influence it. So it's politically regressive, ie. when it comes dressed with humanitarian neutrality it is always an intrusion and comes as an external actor. Democracy, which is founded on social contract, is essentially a bilateral, transparent, open relationship. The moment you get an aid actor appearing on the scene it destroys the transparency and bilateral nature of the arrangement.

Which is not to say that aid can never support democracy, but that when aid is sent it must be to support a particular democratic force.

Q: Does population growth in Africa pose a threat to the environment or development?

A: There's actually no evidence of a famine anywhere in the world being caused by overpopulation. It simply hasn't happened. The things that destroy the environment are not directly related to population. They tend to be related to commercial logging, mining and farming, the issues organisations like Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth have been talking about for years. Yet somehow, maybe because of the very powerful population based institutions at the UN, the debate always manages to get shifted back to blaming the victims.

Q: Did you see the recent BBC documentary in which Bhutros Bhutros Ghali was shown visiting and praising Jonas Savimbi of Unita and Mobuto in Zaire?

A: This is Michael Ignatieff's film. I thought it was remarkable the way Bhutros Ghali harangued the victims of genocide in Rwanda but cosied up to Savimbi and Mobuto. Which of course is exactly what he used to do as Egyptian foreign minister. He's playing pretty much the same role.

Q: With Siad Barre ?

A: Absolutely. UN policy in Africa is seamless with Egyptian foreign policy. There's no difference at all. No one really notices because the Egyptians manage to do this remarkable job of getting both the French and the Americans, the two big players in Africa, on their side. It all works very smoothly. Bhutros Ghali was the man to do it and he's pulled it off.

Q: What do you think it says about the future of the UN?

A: It's very tempting to say the UN has no future and should be abolished. It seems incapable of acting properly, its professional standards are so low, the corruption is so deep, the institutional malaise has rotted the centre. I think it would be rather dangerous to get rid of the UN, not so much because it does great things, but because by its very existence it symbolises important standards in international law. The UN Convention on Refugees and those Conventions on torture and genocide are very important documents. If the UN High Commission on Refugees were to be abolished it would be a free for all for the Michael Howards of this world.

To abolish the UN would send a clear sign to the fascists and genocidal maniacs of this world that the idea of universal standards of moral behaviour, of a community of nations, didn't matter anymore.



The UN needs political reform. It needs to be opened up so that professional standards can be applied in the specialised agencies so the workings of the agencies of the secretariat can be open to scrutiny.

At the moment secrecy is the rule and openness the exception. It needs to be the other way around. There needs to be a freedom of information charter for the UN and a standing commission of inquiry into its emergency operations. Then one could begin to make an objective evaluation of its institutions.

● *Humanitarianism Unbound* can be purchased from "African Rights", 11 Marshalsea Road, London, SE1 1EP for £5-95p.



Who was the real Yitzhak Rabin?

Ghada Karmi argues that Yitzhak Rabin's death accomplished what Israel desperately wanted.

THE EXTRAORDINARY eulogies to Israel's assassinated Prime Minister Rabin call for comment from those of us who do not share them. No less than fifty heads of state attended Rabin's state funeral in Jerusalem. 4,000 mourners and 10,000 security staff were present. The President of the US headed a delegation of over 100 people from his administration. Britain was represented by its Prime Minister, Prince Charles, the Foreign Secretary, and the Labour and Liberal Democrat leaders. Major representatives from Arab countries with and without diplomatic ties with Israel also went. The Secretary-General of the UN, Bhutros Bhutros Ghali, attended while the UN General Assembly observed a one-minute silence. In the House of Commons, Speaker Betty Boothroyd openly wept as MPs saluted the Israeli Prime Minister.

Rabin's killing is a human tragedy to be regretted and condemned - not least because it achieves nothing. But at the heart of the exaggerated reactions, we have been witnessing the creation of a myth in which Rabin, the tough soldier who helped to dispossess the Palestinians of their land, who fought and killed many Arabs, who destroyed Arab Jerusalem, making it a Jewish city, and who entered the peace process only three years ago for calculated political reasons, has been forgotten. His deliberate replacement by an ideal has no basis in reality; a peace-loving angel, a leader of world stature, a hero in war and peace, a loving father to his people and a true friend of the Arabs. Indeed, who would not weep for the passing of such a man, had he in fact ever existed?

Why have so many people colluded with this myth? One can understand the need for Israelis to glorify a leader who devoted his life to fortifying their state against its Arab enemies. But what of the rest? The explanation is that there is a political consensus on the need to save the peace process from collapse. Too much has been invested, east and west, to abandon it now. Clinton's electoral chances would significantly improve if he could produce a result for a process which he has tried to take the credit for since 1993. Clinton's aim was to inflate the achievements of the talks to ensure against their collapse. Arab leaders who had staked their futures on peace with Israel were keen to share in this deception. There was also the hope that the truth about Israel's divided, violent and unstable society which the assassination had uncovered would be glossed over by the funeral extravaganza.

Also, the Rabin myth has to do with Israel's need to be accepted into the family of nations. For nearly fifty years since Israel was founded, it has laboured to be seen as a legitimate country. Despite massive Zionist propaganda this legitimacy has always remained elusive. It could not be disguised that international law has been broken. Israel has been the subject of more UN condemnations than any state on earth, was rejected by its Arab neighbours, was refused relations with many of the world's countries, and its only real support came from the US - not through ties of friendship but because of unrelenting pressure on the US administration. It continued to hope that somehow it could occupy Arab territory, deny the Palestinians any but the most elementary concessions, grab Jerusalem for itself, retain its nuclear weapons and yet still gain Arab acceptance and even friendship. It is this which has been behind the Israeli insistence on normalisation of relations with the Arab world.

When the PLO signed its agreement with Israel in 1993, it also unconsciously started the process of Israeli rehabilitation, as seen by the recognition of Israel by other Arab states. But Israel still felt that Arab acceptance was grudgingly given. Rabin's assassination brought an unexpected opportunity to boost that process.



Student demo outside British embassy in Tel Aviv.

Suddenly, the imperative became to force on everyone the recognition that Israel had a respectable history and heroic leaders, and that it could at last take its rightful place amongst the nations of the world without shame or apology. The rest of the world responded and, as if by some deep unconscious urge, all those who participated in the funeral resonated to the Israeli hunger for acceptance and legitimacy. And so it is that Yitzhak Rabin's death in Tel Aviv completed what Yasser Arafat began in Oslo in 1993 and finally accomplished what had eluded the Israelis since 1948: Israel's acceptance as a legitimate state by the world community. ❑

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Land and rights in Guatemala

Jo Williams
Guatemalan Solidarity Network

SINCE GUATEMALA WAS conquered in 1524, indigenous peoples - 65% of the population - have struggled to regain their land and rights, systematically denied them by the ladino elite and multinational corporations. Today Guatemala has the most unequal land distribution in Latin America; 70% of the population live below subsistence levels.

The growth in the insurgency movement in the late '70s, coupled with the increased activism of the popular movements and other sectors, resulted in one of the most violent counter-insurgency campaigns in modern Guatemalan history. Under the military regime of 1978-1982, 100,000 people were killed; 40,000 disappeared; villages were destroyed; 750,000 Guatemalans were internally displaced and 250,000 fled to Mexico; the majority of these people were non-combatant.

In the highlands today, the military still retains control over the indigenous Mayans through violence and intimidation. In October a military patrol fired on refugees celebrating the first anniversary of their return from Mexico, killing ten people. These soldiers belonged to a unit trained by troops in Britain, as Junior Defence Minister Nicholas Soames confirmed.

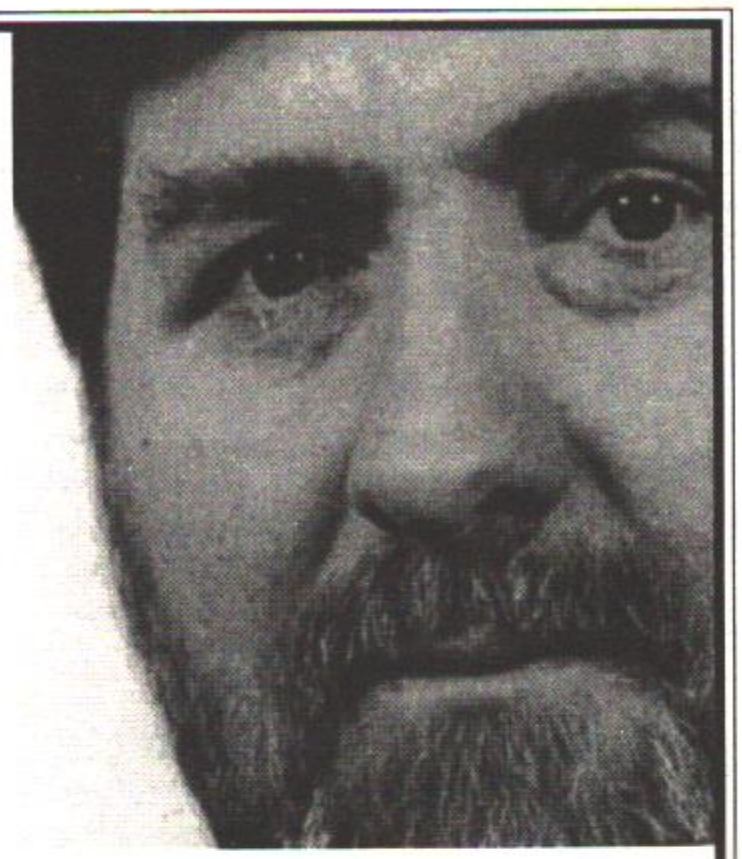
The Guatemalan Solidarity Network has brought two speakers to the UK - Jorge Rosal, from the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity Guerilla Forces (URNG) and US human rights lawyer, Jennifer Harbury. Jennifer Harbury is working on a campaign to expose Guatemalan army-CIA links and states that whilst the army and Government continue to act with impunity, there can be no peace.

Through her Guatemalan refugee work in Texas, Jennifer met and later married URNG leader Efrain Bamaca Velasquez (known as 'Everado'). The army denied it had killed Everado in 1992 but Jennifer, through a series of hunger strikes, gained White House confirmation that he had been captured on the orders of a Guatemalan military officer who was on the payroll of the CIA.

We now await the developments of peace talks currently taking place between the URNG, the Guatemalan army and the government.

● The Guatemalan Solidarity Network can be contacted: c/o 26 Upper Tollington Park, London N4 3EL; Tel: 0171 272 1206.

Drive to single currency status



Michael Hindley
MEP

THE EUROPEAN Union country which has felt most ill at ease in post-Cold War Europe is undoubtedly France. Since the end of World War II, France has successfully sublimated national aspirations into the grander concept of "Europe". Many commentators have observed that the EU is a construction by which the French ruling elite (and it is a more exclusive ruling elite than that of modern Britain) seek to gain control of the revived German economy; and in return, the Germans initially were rehabilitated and latterly gained a place on the international stage as "Europe".

The concept of a single currency has always been similarly appreciated by the Bonn/Paris axis. France would get monetary control of the German/EU economy by controlling the central bank which would be set up. In return for loosening monetary sovereignty, the German expansionists would get a foreign and security role they could not get simply as "Germany". This policy suits Kohl, even if it brings him into conflict with his own *Bundesbank*. In a nutshell, this is the basis of the Maastricht settlement. Not that the Labour Party supporters of a single currency admit this, nor do many of them seem to appreciate the implications, for contemporary European history is not widely read in Labour circles.

This thesis of Franco-German collusion has been given a twist recently by a pungent critique of the single currency by the Thatcherite economist Bernard Connolly in his book *The Rotten Heart of Europe*. This thesis also explains why the Germans failed to bail out the collapsing pound sterling on Black Wednesday, and why they similarly bailed out the franc a few months later when there was a run on the (still) overvalued French currency. The franc is overvalued for no other reason than that the French elite is playing a macho game, keeping parity with the Mark at all costs; and the costs are rising unemployment and social cuts to keep the French economy on a deflationary path to meet the criteria for a single currency by 1999.

This is the background to the strikes in the French public sector. As France moves to an austerity package, to squeeze inflation out of the economy *a la* Thatcher, the more the relative cohesion of the French state and the palpably ready identification with the state by broad sections of the French population will creak and eventually crack. This is also the main reason for Chirac, an arch-opportunist, to attempt to rally the nation behind his policy of testing the ultimate macho symbol, the bomb.

Something will crack and I believe it could be France's commitment to a single currency. The political elite, many of them well placed in Brussels, may believe that any price is worth paying to get their hands on the German economy, but the French economy may not stand the strain. And the economy is not something abstract; it is public sector workers, it is youngsters without jobs.

Personally I am optimistic: I think that the revived strength of the French working class, relieved of its misplaced loyalty to a socialist government, and Chirac's own survivor's instinct will mean that France breaks with the reckless move to a single currency.

The German SPD is now beginning to opportunistically question the policy of single currency they voted for in Strasbourg and Bonn. In recent years the Labour Party has dogged the SPD's footsteps with infatuated devotion on European issues, so a shift will come here too.

In a few years it will be hard to find a Labour member who was ever in favour. ❑

Science



Memories are made of this

Our science correspondent, Les Hearn reviews:
The Making of Memory *by Steven Rose.*

MANY PEOPLE see humans as fundamentally different from the rest of life, possessing a relatively enormous brain, having language and culture and almost incredible powers of memory. They say the physical and chemical behaviour of our brains cannot tell us anything valuable about the mind. Socialist Professor Steven Rose begs to differ in this prize-winning book.

Experiment shows people can identify at least 10,000 different photographs without showing any signs of flagging and we can remember things that happened 100 or more years ago. Ethics usually prevent experiments on human brains. However, in the 1950s, neurosurgeon Wilder Penfield explored aspects of memory storage by operating on epilepsy sufferers. Only local anaesthetic was needed and they therefore remained conscious. Stimulating the temporal lobes with an electrode, Penfield found they reported memory-like experiences.

Further insights came from studying those whose brains were damaged. One "HM" had significant portions of temporal lobe and deeper brain parts removed. While cured of epilepsy, he lost his long-term memory, remembering nothing since his operation. Each day was an isolated experience, to be forgotten as soon as sleep came. He was taught to play a mathematical game. Each time HM was shown the game, he denied having ever played it before. Curiously, he got steadily better at it. Clearly, there was more than one type of memory process going on. HM had lost his *declarative* (what something is) memory but retained his *procedural* (how to do something) memory.

Rose believes that to study memory further we need to experiment on animals, as he rejects the idea of 'animal rights'; but he thinks that we have duties "to behave kindly and with respect to other animals, with the minimum of violence and cruelty".

Rose describes his work on young chicks trying to identify the processes that allow them to avoid a certain colour of bead, having once experienced a bitter taste on pecking such a bead.

The chicks' memory of the bad-tasting bead goes through several stages: electrical, as nerve impulses travel through various nerves; growth, as new nerve connections are made in one part of the brain (short-term memory); and further growth in another part of the brain (long-term memory). Some opponents of research on animals argue that it tells us nothing about the gloriously complex human mind, but Rose points out that there is nothing in the human nervous system's structure not found in animals.

The chick research shows they initially register everything about the beads: shape, size, colour, etc, remembering each feature in a different part of the brain. Only if there is an adverse effect within a certain time, are memories kept - or at least those specific to the bad experience.

Rose gives us a valuable glimpse of the painstaking routine of experiment with the rigorous process of thought that guides it in the exploration of our internal frontier. ❑

Chris Knight (Senior Lecturer in Anthropoiogy, University of East London) reviews
Reason in Revolt: Marxist Philosophy and Modern Science,
by Alan Woods and Ted Grant,
London: Wellred Publications 1995 - £9.95.

WHEN PRACTICE IS difficult, turn to theory. Marx did this after 1848, Trotsky and Lenin did it after 1905. No doubt Alan Woods and Ted Grant, still optimistic following the collapse of the Soviet Union and their own local troubles, would appreciate the parallels. *Reason in Revolt* is not in itself science, and its contribution to future developments I would not want to predict. But this 440-page volume is in fact a well researched, scholarly account of the intellectual revolutions which have transformed scientific knowledge over the past few hundred years. Its basic message, beautifully and convincingly illustrated with case-studies, is that when scientists solve major problems, it is because they think dialectically despite not always realising it.

The most extended discussion, appropriately, is the most directly intriguing to socialists - the debate on human evolution and the origins of culture. Against gradualist thinking, the authors defend Engels in stressing that "the transition from ape to human" must have been dialectical - involving at some point a revolutionary leap. But curiously, they appear unaware of the controversies over precisely this issue which have been rocking palaeoanthropology over the past decade. The well publicised (if still controversial) "human revolution" theory - according to which modern homo sapiens emerged only recently in Africa and then fanned rapidly across the world - is not even mentioned.

From this book, no-one would know that most specialists now accept that culture was born in a social revolution of some kind, dating it to when we first find archaeological evidence for art and symbolism. I simply don't understand this. Why write a book about "revolutions in nature" and then ignore the most momentous of them all?

Alan Woods recruited me to Marxism, teaching me dialectics by making me read the whole of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*! He taught not that Marxism is infallible, but that genuine science is the most revolutionary known form of knowledge - adding that to pursue science for its own sake inevitably brings convergence with the findings of Marx and the other socialist founders. I still believe that. As a scientist, I will use *Reason in Revolt* to teach that the human revolution happened, that the dialectic still works - and that the future is ours. ❑



A complete plonker

Islington councillor, **James Winston**, who wrote to the NEC condemning **Liz Davies**' lack of "collective responsibility", is in hot water.

He took it upon himself to back an application for a late night licence for the Scala cinema that was opposed by Camden's Labour Council (the Scala is in Camden). The magistrate at the licensing hearing denounced Winston for behaving "like Stalin" and trying to impose his will on an unwilling majority. Camden Council have protested Winston's behaviour, which is said to have threatened the collaboration over a regeneration bid.

Winston's actions were part of his personal campaign to turn Islington into a "24-hour city" - he arranged for several acquaintances to write to the local paper claiming he was "a man of vision".

A number of Islington councillors have complained over Winston's ordering of an extra £1,100 worth of food for the members' room during the summer recess. How did this order get past **Stephen Twigg**, the chief whip?

'Man of vision' or 'complete plonker'?

Fake feminist of the decade

A young Party member was chit-chatting with **Clare Short** at a trade union sponsored booze-up.

They had a friendly conversation until the young member asked, "What about **Liz Davies**?"

"Fuck off!" Short replied, and left.

Short has been inundated with letters from across the country criticising her attack on Davies. She now replies to them with a letter explaining that she has nothing personal against Liz Davies (hard to square with her statement to fellow MPs that Liz was unacceptable because "she lives with **Mike Marqusee**") but that Labour cannot accept "those who adopt the postures of the Trotskyist movement".

Surely this is not a reference to the sexual predilections of the late **Gerry Healy**?

Bye Bye GLC

At last you have a chance to take your rightful place in **County Hall**, former home of the GLC. For just £99,000 (plus service charge) you can purchase a one bedroom flat opposite Parliament in this prime central London site. Indoor swimming pool, health club, and state of the art security are all thrown in. Suitable for local MP **Kate Hoey**?

The people's flag is...stolen

Another thing about that **James Winston**. What happened to the red flag which flew over the town hall during council meetings? It mysteriously went missing earlier this year. A Labour councillor was then quoted (anonymously) in the local paper assuring residents that it would never be flown again. Two council employees alleged that they saw a Labour councillor steal the flag. The flag has now been replaced. But why was the bill for £56 presented to Cllr. Winston?

Spirit of tolerance

Jo Gibbons, MSF press officer and **Blair** hatchet-woman, has been telling colleagues at work that all applicants to join the Labour Party should be given a simple test. They should be asked one question: "Are you in favour of Labour being a Broad Church?" If the answer is yes, says Gibbons, they should be turned down forthwith.

Sudden Death Party

So, two political commentators have written a book on the death of the SDP. They state that "the Social Democrats' short-term impact was remarkable." They should know - they're none other than **Ivor Greve** and **Anthony King**, the two TV pundits who did so much to boost the SDP. On one thing we can agree, however, "the Social Democrats had virtually no long term impact."

Beeb's bravery

Double standards at Broadcasting House?

In the run-up to the general election the BBC has appointed **Phil Harding**, a former editor of BBC Radio's *Today* programme, as head of its "anti-bias unit".

Harding has already banned one veteran pro-Labour BBC hack from publishing an article in the *New Statesman* on spin-doctoring. Admittedly the article in question did put forward the ludicrous argument that whereas **John Major**'s party conference speech was so vacuous that it needed heavy spin, **Tony Blair**'s was so brilliant it needed none.

But Harding then allowed BBC economics correspondent Evan Davies to pen this gem in the *Independent on Sunday*: "Mr Major has actually outlined a political creed that could be effective, unifying and distinctive."

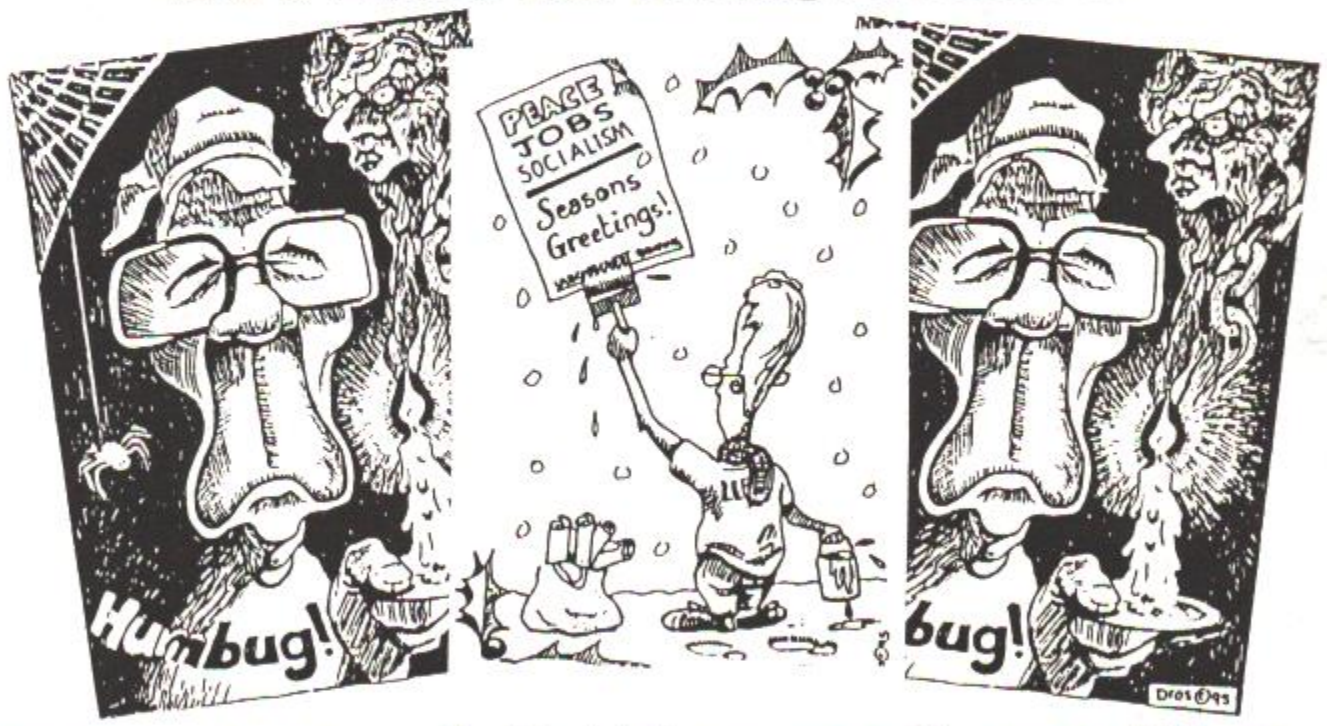
Wags inside Broadcasting House have rechristened Harding's outfit the "unit for brown-nosing the Government".

In a spin

Periscope couldn't resist picking up a copy of **Nicholas Jones**' *Soundbites and Spindoctors* to see how it analysed the work of our most beloved MP, **Peter Mandelson**. And where should the book go for the truth on Mandelson? To '*Briefing*'s' Class Traitor of the Month, where we pointed out that **Michael Meacher** had suffered as one of his "pet hates" and his "carrot and stick" attitude to the soft left, where if they did as they were told they would be "rewarded with a positive place in Labour's media profile."

Nick Jones writes that "Mandelson told me such reports were untrue and malicious. His job was to promote Labour's policies; he could not be held responsible for internal rivalries and jealousies." But Peter, surely you only promoted those policies that you supported!

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Prize Letter!

● We award a special prize to our "Letter of the Month". Winners are chosen on a completely arbitrary basis!

● **Prize Letter of the Month**: You have to have a sense of humour to stay in the Labour Party for thirty years. One of the jokes that has lasted is the one that they changed the LP colours from red to red and yellow: red was for the rank and file and yellow was for the officers. Another was that every ward should have a resident psychiatrist. For years a lot of us have leafletted and canvassed; we have been told by some to go back to Moscow. Now these very same people are respected members of the Labour Party. Should we be pleased or worried? Perhaps we should have an agony aunt in every ward.

A year ago all our mail began with "Dear Comrade", then it was "Dear Colleague", now it is "Dear Friend". I dread to think what it will be when we get elected.

We have, at our local trade union club, formed a football club. The lads are all good Labour Party members. But we are having terrible difficulty finding anyone who wants to play on the left wing. One of the lads was heard to say that his son was a natural left-footer. There has been talk of expulsion. Where will it all end?

Len Mason
Birmingham

Please find enclosed a £20 cheque, annual sub to *Briefing*. I would also like to place on record my utter disgust at the scandalous NEC decision to refuse endorsement for Liz Davies as Leeds NE PPC. Having known Liz's exemplary political record over a number of years, it is a tragedy that socialists of her quality are kept out of Parliament by Blair's craven pro-capitalist, anti-democratic NEC. The best support we can all show for Liz is to redouble our efforts in fighting for socialism and dumping the wretched Labour leadership we are currently saddled with.

Hyder Prodhan
Barrow-in-Furness

I come across a lot of Labour Party members, often councillors, in my line of business, which may tell us something about the class composition of the Labour Party that *Briefing* does not particularly want to hear. What may be of more interest is that everyone I talked to, bar one, thought that the treatment of Liz Davies was an outrage. The one exception, a senior BT manager, is too cynical about Blair to be outraged at anything he does.

However, the point is not to get mad but to get even. Blair's main impact has not been in victimising individual socialists - one of Kinnock's specialities - but in shifting the ideological debate to the right. What socialists need now is to be armed with the ideas to counter Blair's love of the market and all its works.

That aside, a monthly column detailing every bit of known information about Clare Short's drift, and now rush, to the right would indicate that *Briefing* still knows how to provide really useful knowledge.

Keith Flett
Secretary
London HQ Branch
Society of Telecom Executives

Once again *Briefing* is wide of the mark. Your *Periscope* column claims I said "next it's the union link", or something similar. I never said any such thing.

Far from wishing to distance the Party from the trade unions, I want to see a modernised Party/union link, to the mutual advantage of Party and union members.

This should include the recruitment of many more union members into the Party and the local decision-making processes, the end of block votes at Conference, the extension of one member-one vote selection of Parliamentary and council candidates and local Party officers, the abolition of the bureaucratic general committee structure, the end of the sponsorship of MPs by unions and instead the allocation of resources to local parties in marginal seats where the cash is most needed to fight the Tories.

The relationship should become more like that between the Democratic Party in the USA and the American trade unions. Don't forget that Bill Clinton appeared on a picket line during his presidential election in support of striking workers, something that no Labour Party leader has felt able to do for a very long time.

Trade unions have a vital place in a modern democracy. A Labour government should listen carefully to what the unions have to say, along with community leaders, pressure groups, businesses and the voluntary sector. I am a member of two unions myself. What I and many others including trade unionists want is a new constitutional settlement between Labour and the unions which works to the benefit of both.

Paul Richards
LCC Chair

I would like to draw attention to what I consider the biggest flaw in the New Labour "realism". Tony Blair has made it clear that a Labour Government led by him would be based on fairness, and no section of the community could expect any preferential treatment. That would mean that the present ever-widening gap between rich and poor would continue to grow. It would mean that workers would continue to be at the mercy of their employers with their trade union made impotent by the Tories' vicious anti-union legislation.

If the next Labour government is to succeed it must, in Tony Benn's words, "bring about an irrecoverable shift of wealth and power to working people and their families".

I believe Tony Benn's Commonwealth of Britain Bill represented the best chance of achieving this, and I urge all socialists to study this bill and then campaign to make it official Labour Party policy.

T.E. Hobday
Nottingham

The November 1995 *LLB* editorial on the Labour Party Conference was very good. But the otherwise sharp and accurate piece was marred by this sentence: "For working people in Britain, the consequences of a Labour government that collapses in failure are terrifying (see what has happened in France or the United States)." Neither France nor the US actually has a Labour Party comparable with ours, that is, a party based on the trade unions. In the US there is a movement to try and establish one - Labor Party Advocates - but they have a way to go. I think that the Australian experience gives us a better indication of what might be in store for us under a Blair government; the Australian Labour Party has played a very similar role to that of the British Tories over the last few years.

Chris Croome
Sheffield

In October, I dutifully attended the Labour Party education conference in Skegness. My expectations weren't high: Roy Hattersley and his ilk weren't on the guest list; David Blunkett, Margaret Hodge, assorted beautiful people from the unions and a vice-chancellor or two were very much in evidence.

Whilst a workshop debate on student funding was almost pluralist, free education as supported by the NUS was not on the cards. It was generally accepted, though, that the state's current role as a loanshark is unsatisfactory.

It would have been nice to hear Jim Murphy, NUS President, supporting union policy on free education and not continually hinting at maintenance income contingency loans. A serious Labour left challenge to careerist Murphy is required. Students must have a real choice in NUS elections; the choice between New Labour and Trot nobodies is not a real one.

Ex-*Briefing* contributor David Blunkett was reasonable, only mentioning New Labour once, and then only in passing. Quite rightly he identified education as a key policy area and committed himself to nursery education and reduction of class size. No mention was made of grant maintained schools. Perhaps the leaders were fearful of raising the issue of their support for the Tories' failed policy at a conference full of teachers.

However, what is desperately needed is a decent and honest debate within the Party on education policy, as opposed to the spin-doctored hatchet job seen at Conference this year. Above all the Labour Party must listen to teachers, parents and students, those directly affected by education policy, when making decisions both in and out of government.

Simon Hewitt
Brunel University Labour Club

David Blunkett has been quoted recently as saying that he wants to see children as young as five being made to do homework. He has thus demonstrated that his conversion to the right is complete, for evidently he has now joined the "I had a miserable childhood/had to go to St. Cakes' School/do three years in the army, so I don't see why you shouldn't" school of thought. If he was still a leftist (or a liberal) he would want to spare children the hard times he went through.

Children must be allowed to leave school behind them at 4 o'clock, if they are to have time to recuperate and develop into fully rounded human beings and not just mindless blindly obedient machines fit only for work and "knowing their place".

Blunkett praises the intensive education system of the "Asian Tiger" countries; does he know that in Japan, with the world's highest suicide rate, more than half of all deaths are of children unable to cope with the regime in their "hothouse" schools?

No other country in Europe sets its children compulsory homework; its existence here, together with boarding schools, corporal punishment and compulsory outdoor games in winter is taken as proof that "the English hate their children".

There are three words missing from Mr Blunkett's vocabulary of education: "play", "freedom" and "happiness". A childhood that lacks these is no childhood at all.

Keith Ackermann
Tilbury

The title of Duncan Green's book *The Silent Revolution: The Rise of Market Economics in Latin America* is significant. (*Briefing* November)

Silence has been achieved by the collusion of the media, academia, NGOs and trade union officials. Why else have we not heard of the thirty general strikes and street riots which Mike Phipps refers to? A threatened general strike in Bolivia in April this year resulted in mass imprisonments and a state of siege which is still in effect.

Leaders of the Bolivian teachers union face criminal charges. Trade unionists in this country can intervene by showing support. *The Teacher*, the NUT magazine, has refused to report on the Bolivian teachers' strike, thus adding to the silence.

We must break the silence.

Julie Boston
Bristol

November's correspondence illustrates the problems you get in when you "take sides" over Bosnia. John Strawson states, "NAT0 and the United States should not be seen as fixed evils forever." We should learn to live with them, on the model of the European Socialist Group's accommodation with the European Union.

I always thought that socialists were against imperialism, and its military arm NATO. The idea that the Rapid Reaction Corps is the potential instrument of socialist internationalism is as crazy as thinking that we are about to see socialist revolution led by Tony Blair.

Other correspondents seem to disagree with Strawson, except that they - like Workers' Aid for Bosnia - seem to back the Bosnian Government. This is the same body which takes Strawson's line: that NATO and the US are their only salvation. Supporters of Bosnia claim it is a blameless victim of Serbian aggression. Apart from ignoring the expressed wishes of the Bosnian Serbs over independence, this is the same government which once appointed Sarajevan gangster Ismet Bajramovic as head of Army Military Intelligence, and allows Afghan veterans to ethnically cleanse Serbs from newly-conquered territories.

Briefing did at one time have a good position on Bosnia-Hercegovina: not to take sides. While the crimes of the Pale Serbs are greater than those of the Bosnians, this hardly means the left should back a force avenging these acts in blood and fire. If *LLB* supporters see this as the basis of a multi-ethnic settlement, they are sorely mistaken.

Andrew Coates
Ipswich

A.O.B.

"I want a tax regime where, through their hard work, risk and success, people can become wealthy." - **Tony Blair** to the CBI.

"We were not even pals (Neil's definition of the proper relationship between leader and deputy). But we only grumbled about each other in private and went to extraordinary lengths to demonstrate mutual respect...Candid friends, normally called John Smith, constantly told me: 'You must stop him'...Although he consulted me on most crucial issues, he often did not even tell me about the decisions with which I was likely to disagree". - **Roy Hattersley**.

"Tony Blair has shown a recognition that policies should be designed to improve the lives of ordinary people...But knowing there is a problem is quite different from doing something about it, because it requires sacrifices from those who have done pretty well out of the past 16 years...Fiscal policy should redistribute money from the wealthy, and the battle between labour and capital should be evened up by giving power back to trade unions." - **Larry Eliott** of the *Guardian*.

"Mr Cook is without doubt the best debater in the Shadow cabinet, the precise opposite of Jack Straw. He is witty. He thinks on his feet." - **Simon Hoggart**.

"I had regular conversations with him, but I didn't tell a soul. I am proud to have played a role in what happened." - **Margaret Hodge** about Alan Howarth.

"Mr Meacher...exposed his political flank...on Thursday when he defended the right to strike." - Tony Blair's man at the *Observer*, **Andy McSmith**.

"The duty of radical journalists is to be tough on Blair and tough on the causes of Blair" - **Christopher Hitchens**.

Smash low pay!

Dave Palmer and Liz Knight report on the J.J. Fast Foods dispute over low pay.

ON 31st October, forty five of seventy five - mainly Kurdish and Turkish - drivers and loaders at JJ Fast Food Distribution Ltd. in Tottenham were sacked by their boss, Mustafa Kaamil, for joining the TGWU. Other workers have joined the dispute since and 50 are now locked out.

JJ Fast Food packs and distributes food to councils, schools, kebab shops and other fast food outlets. The firm owns the Jenny's Burgers franchise chain. Enfield, Harrow and Southwark schools and local authorities are major customers. Workers had secretly joined the TGWU over the previous ten weeks because they had had enough of their appalling conditions and pay but the boss sacked them and brought in scab labour.

The sacked workers gathered in front of the warehouse gates. Within minutes a group of hired thugs armed with knives and other weapons arrived and attacked them. Three workers were hospitalised. The police have taken no action. In contrast pickets and supporters have been aggressively policed by up to 200 officers.

JJ Fast Foods has expanded from nothing in 1989 to a large scale operation, making the owner a millionaire - all based on super-exploitation. The sacked workers demand: reinstatement, union recognition and proper contracts. The TGWU has submitted a claim to an industrial tribunal and agreed under pressure to pay £35 a week hardship money.

'Ali', one of the sacked drivers, spoke to *LLB*: "We are made to work 14-16 hours per day with no lunch or other breaks on a basic wage of £130-180 per week. There are no written contracts, sick, holiday, or overtime pay. Workers injured by fork-lifts get no compensation. Drivers who have an accident are made to pay £250 from their own pocket and must pay parking tickets. Warehouse workers spend long periods in freezers working at temperatures down to minus 30 degrees centigrade.

"Over two months we recruited 40 people to the TGWU and elected a shop steward. One man informed the boss. On 28th October the boss sacked our shop steward. We had a meeting with the union official. It was decided he meet the boss and ask for recognition and reinstatement of the steward.

Kaamil refused and told the official to leave. The boss then stopped all work. He made workers in the union go to one side and said he wouldn't recognise the union. We decided to stick with the union and he ordered us to leave the premises.

"When we started peacefully picketing he brought 10-15 thugs who attacked us. Six cars arrived, the thugs got out with all their weapons, jumped over the fence and attacked us with crowbars, knives and billiard balls in bags. We had already called the police but they refused to come. Three people were hospitalised by the attacks.

During the attack the boss himself actually ran out and punched the only office worker who came out - a young woman - in the face. The police came, but didn't even interview the boss or the men who carried out the attacks, even though they were still on the premises.

"The next morning ten people who came down earlier than the rest of us were again attacked in front of the police. They did nothing about this and arrested one of the workers. The next day we tried to stop the lorries coming out. Six of us were arrested and one person had his leg broken when the police rushed us to push us back.

"At the moment every single scab goes home with a bodyguard. Kaamil has at least 15 bodyguards on the premises at any one time. A lot of people have had threats at their homes. One person, who's been in the TGWU for six years, was pulled from his shop by these thugs, who wanted to do him over. Luckily three of our boys live right by and were able to save him. People have had telephone threats and messages stuck on their doors telling them they are going to be dead.

"The boss is not just JJ Fast Food. He also owns the Jenny's Burgers franchise. We'd like that to be boycotted. JJ Fast Foods delivers to a lot of schools in the Southwark, Enfield and Harrow areas. We'd like the schools and councils involved to stop taking his food. 70% of all Enfield schools are supplied by them and I know JJ Fast Foods supplies to the Enfield Civic Centre as I've delivered there myself. We'd like local councils and schools to stop taking JJ Fast Food deliveries.

"We're getting very little financial support from the TGWU and are desperate for help."

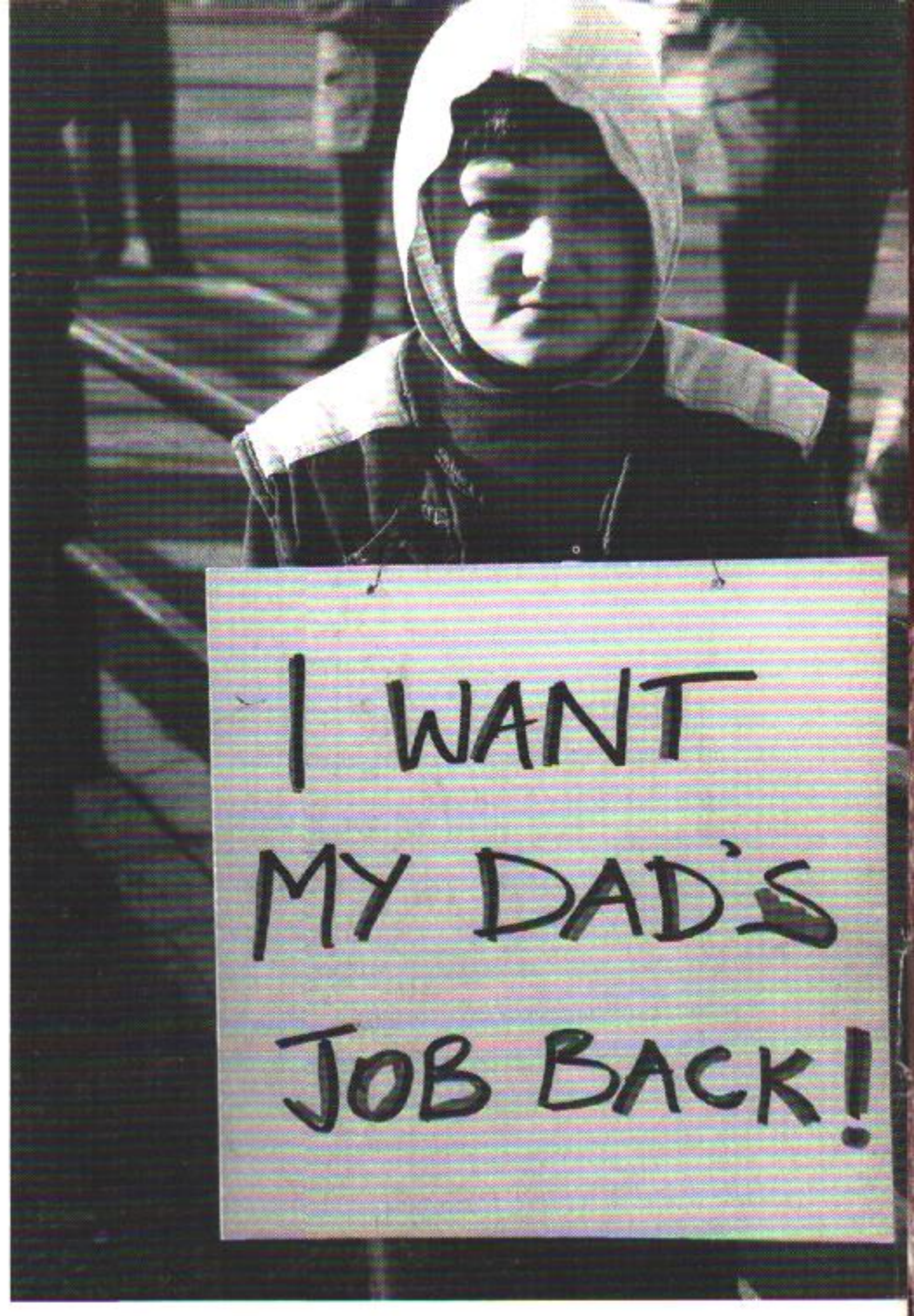


Photo: Colin Hayward.

How you can support the dispute:

- Join the protest at Mill Mead Lane (off Ferry Lane, right by Tottenham Hale tube station), Tottenham, N15 every morning at 6am (7.30am on Saturdays).
- Messages of support/donations to: JJ Fast Foods Workers c/o Unwaged Centre, 72 West Green Road, London, N15 5NS. Cheques payable to: 'JJ Fast Food Protest Committee'.
- Boycott Jenny's Burgers and lobby your local council to stop taking JJ Foods.

For more information ring: Tel: 0181-802 9804.

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