JULY 1995 £1.00

BRIEFING

the voice of Labour's independent, unrepentant left

Low pay No way!

Inside:

- Minimum wage
- Bradford erupts
- Lord Sterling's scam
- Rail pay battle



LABOUR - TAKE THE POWER!

Press Stop

Boost for Lawrence campaign

THE CAMPAIGN by the family of murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence to bring his racist killers to justice has received a £1,000 boost.

Nigel Tompkins, who recently won £10,000 damages from the Metropolitan Police for false imprisonment and malicious prosecution after an anti-fascist march, made the contribution to the fund set up by the Lawrences to mount a private prosecution against their son's killers.

The donation was matched by £1,000 from the TUC, most of it collected at the recent TUC Black Workers Conference. Total costs for the case would reach over £10,000. Contributions can be made by phoning 0181 317 0960.

Shoreham shipments

Richard Hanford reports: The shipment of calves from Shoreham has ceased but the vile veal traders' operation continues at Dover.

Over the six months at Shoreham, the £4 million policing resulted in nearly 400 arrests, with 200 protesters banned from the port. Many new to demos were shocked to see police pushing pensioners about. "We love the calves but hate the pigs," said one saddened, mild-mannered man.

All demonstrators were filmed and the photos and video tapes will be kept at police HQ for "at least six years". Metropolitan Police officers laughed, "We are off to Sussex to throw a few pinkos in the sea." This was cited as an example of their "macho view that all demonstrators are the enemy" by DCI John Woods in a revealing *Police Review* article. He also claimed candidly that the police were receiving "clear directions from the Government" on dealing with the demos.

Many valiant protesters from Shoreham are determined to join the demos at Dover.

The local impact of the issue has inspired some Sussex CLPs to submit strong animal rights resolutions to Labour Party Conference.

● For more information on demos nationwide contact Animal Protesters Bulletin on 0171 223 3829.

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PC: challenge the lies



IT IS HARD to say which was more outrageous: the acquittal of the police in the Joy Gardner case or the media's reaction to it. ITN and BBC now refer constantly to "the illegal immigrant Joy Gardner", despite the fact that both she and her lawyers had challenged that status before her death. *The Guardian* coverage would have us believe that this "big strong black woman" so intimidated the poor little white police officers (armed with shackles, belts, and 13 feet of tape) that they ended up accidentally killing her. With the aid of the media, Joy Gardner's rights and dignity as a human being are being posthumously undermined, and the violent police assault on her justified.

Following the failure to prosecute the murderers of Stephen Lawrence, the acquittals in the Joy Gardner case confirm that in this country it is now possible to kill black people with impunity.

Labour's response to the Gardner case and to other violations of migrants' and refugees' human rights has been muted by its desire to strike a populist 'tough posture' on immigration. The usual Europhilia of the front bench has been tempered by a nationalist enthusiasm for border policing and immigration checks.

As *Briefing* readers will know, Labour has shied away from the struggle for equality since at least 1986-87 (when the storm over "loony left councils" first broke). Even lip service is paid less and less often these days. Terrified of appearing "politically correct", Labour leaders have refused to make the arguments for equality or to challenge the lies of the media. In so doing, they have made life easy for the Tories and the far right. They have failed, as ever, to learn the lessons from the USA, where Bill Clinton allowed the Republican right to turn the anti-PC campaign into a national McCarthyite hysteria - and paid the price in the November elections.

One of the great media myths is that PC has taken hold of our major social institutions, notably local government and education, and placed them under the control of ruthless ideological commissars. Of course, anyone with the slightest familiarity with these institutions knows that this is nonsense. But in the war against PC, the facts are always dispensable.

This was clear in the reaction to the Islington child care scandal. As our article in this issue explains, children in Islington's care were abused and exploited not because of PC but because of under-funding, poor management and political indifference. Never mind that there was no evidence linking the Council's equal opportunities policies to the failures of its child care service; how much easier it was for all concerned to blame the victims of popular prejudice - black people and gays - than to address the real problems involved.

The logic employed by those who trade in anti-PC rhetoric is insidious. To label people or ideas "PC" is to categorise them as humourless, dogmatic, out of touch with reality. By implication, it counter-poses to PC an appeal to the "common sense" of ancient prejudices. Most dangerously, it suggests that the evils of racism, sexism and homophobia are either imaginary or exaggerated.

It is not only the crude chauvinists of the tabloids who have taken up the cudgels against PC and its alleged iniquities. In recent years, the liberal intelligentsia has developed its own sophisticated variants on the anti-PC crusade. Some argue that equality has been largely achieved (this is the post-feminist claim). Others that the only way to achieve it is through consensus, not confrontation. In both cases, collective struggles for equality are derided, dismissed or caricatured.

For socialists, there can be no retreat from any of the battles for equality. The big myths of the anti-PC lobby have to be challenged at every turn, no matter how inconvenient that may be. At the same time, the struggle for equality has to be disentangled from the corrupt "politics of identity" which has been so easily exploited by careerists.

It is wise also to remember that much ground has already been won in these battles. Recent surveys show that young women overwhelmingly endorse what used to be known as the feminist agenda. Over the last twenty years racist and homophobic prejudice have been driven on to the defensive; to some extent, the anti-PC campaign is a backlash against this, an attempt at a counter-offensive. The anti-PC hacks are the ones who are out of touch with the underlying realities of our times. That is why their lies grow bolder and more menacing by the day.

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

***Labour Briefing* is the monthly voice of Labour's independent left. It is managed by an elected National Editorial Board whose meetings are open to all supporters. The next EB will meet on June 25th. We are happy to offer a right to reply on the usual basis to all members of the labour movement.**

All articles published in *Labour Briefing* reflect the opinions of the authors alone unless otherwise indicated. *Briefing* welcomes criticisms and contributions.

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Abuse and accountability

From the media accounts, you would think the Islington child care scandal was simply a case of political correctness gone mad. Islington councillor Liz Davies sets the record straight.

THE HIGHLY publicised investigation into Islington's child care service by Ian White and Kate Hart (both senior social services managers in Oxfordshire) makes damning and disturbing reading.

There is no doubt that children in some of Islington's homes were treated appallingly. A number suffered sexual abuse, either from members of staff or other children. Many more lived in filthy children's homes urgently needing repairs. Islington Council has parental responsibility for these children, both legally and morally. Unforgivably, we failed to protect them from abuse and exploitation.



Margaret Hodge. Don't blame me, I was only the leader.

Not only the tabloid press, but also liberal commentators as Melanie Phillips and Ed Pearce, were quick to blame the tragedy on the Council's equal opportunities policies. However, these form only a small part of the indictment of the Council delivered by White and Hart, and the weakest one at that.

White and Hart lose much credibility by conflating paedophilia and homosexuality. They even criticise child care staff for referring troubled adolescents to reputable gay advice services.

Their most damaging claim is that there is a political climate within the Council which discourages management from taking disciplinary action against members of staff who are gay or black. But the only evidence for this actually cited in the report is a single comment by an anonymous manager. I sat on the Council's disciplinary panel for several years, and this was not at all my experience. Far from being a soft touch Labour Councillors seemed to harden themselves against members of staff, especially anyone claiming discrimination, and when there was any doubt they always preferred the word of management over staff. In fact, statistical evidence indicates that black officers were disproportionately subject to disciplinary action.

Despite its faults, the report makes clear that the primary causes of the child care scandal are to be found elsewhere.

Decentralisation of social services in the mid-1980s created a lack of professional management for social workers, who reported to non-social services managers. Difficult decisions about whether or not children should be taken into care were made at a low level, with no senior supervision. There was no borough-wide strategy for dealing with child protection work, few common guidelines and little training.

Crucially, there were no specialist child protection social workers. All social workers were 'generic', dealing one day with children in need and the next with mental illness or the elderly. This inevitably led to lack of expertise in decision-making.

This was a direct result of the political culture among Islington's Labour Councillors in the 1980s, which was contemptuous of social work as a profession. Margaret Hodge was herself deeply hostile to social workers' professional concerns. Year in, year out their anxieties were dismissed as merely the products of their own self-interest. In fact, it was Margaret Hodge and her inner circle, not the trade unions, who were pursuing a special political agenda at the expense of children in Islington's care.

Islington has made cuts in its budget every year since 1985. As the White and Hart report emphasises, lack of resources directly contributed to the deterioration of the child care service. There was no administrative back-up for social workers. Vital information was never filed. The physical condition of children's homes grew worse and worse. In 1992 one home was described as having rain coming into bedrooms through the roof, torn sheets for curtains, no carpets, mattresses on the floor and insufficient chairs.

Cuts in staffing levels led to a high turnover of permanent staff and therefore a high number of vacancies which were (expensively) filled by agency staff, who come in for particular criticism in the report. Agency staff are less accountable to the Council and receive fewer checks than permanent staff, therefore making it easier for child abusers to go undetected.

For years, the problems in Islington's Social Services were never discussed in either the Labour Group or in the local Labour Party. This was a symptom of the 'closed government' which Margaret Hodge and her cronies ran in Islington. Any criticism of the Council's policies was seen as politically hostile and dismissed out of hand.

However, in summer 1994, a Social Services Inspectorate report jolted Labour councillors into action. It was the first time since 1989 that the criticisms of Islington's social services had been brought to all councillors' attention. As a result, there are now specialist child protection social workers and a specialist line management structure. Common guidelines and training are being worked on.

Following the recent brouhaha, the Council at last issued an apology for its failures, though Margaret Hodge is still bent on blaming officers for her own irresponsibility. While there seems to be no inclination on the part of Islington's Labour councillors to retreat on equal opportunties, there is still an unwillingness to accept responsibility for this tragedy and engage in the self-crticism necessary to ensure nothing like it happens again. After reading the report and reviewing the past, I have concluded that the bottom line is that children in care suffered because they had no political power or voice. They just didn't count enough in anyone's political calculations. ❑

New Tory sleaze: ripping off the disabled

IT'S NOT often that *Briefing* is beaten to the punch by the *Daily Telegraph* and *Accountancy Age*, but credit where it is due. Both these champions of free enterprise recently ran articles questioning the legality and ethics of Motability, which organises vehicles for disabled people. Chief among the possible culprits is the well-connected Lord Sterling of Plaistow (otherwise known as the Tory-funding, union-busting, safety-last boss of P&O).

On 14th July, in a ceremony at the annual Mobility Roadshow, the Queen will symbolically hand over the keys of the 500,000th car provided through Motability, the charity whose aim is "to facilitate the relief and assistance of disabled persons ... in connection with the provision of personal or other transportation".

Disabled people, most of whom have little money as a result of employment discrimination, use Motability to convert their weekly Disability Living Allowance benefit into leases on cars, some of which have additional hand controls and other adaptations. It is headed by Lord Sterling and one Gerald Archer, a senior partner in the finance house KPMG, which has been paid large amounts in audit fees by Motability Finance Ltd, according to an independent lawyer's report.

While Motability, a charity which since 1988 has been a corporate body with its own Royal Charter, is the 'front office' for disabled people wanting a car, the actual financial deal for leases is run by Motability Finance Ltd (MFL). This in turn is essentially owned by six major clearing banks, via partnership agreements involving two intermediate companies, MCL and MHP. To add further confusion, the clearing banks have a borrowing arrangement with the Bank of England.

While you're grappling with this you might as well know that there are other related outfits: Motability Enterprises Ltd. (about which little is known), the Motability Tenth Anniversary Trust (a charity and a company), and the Mobility Equipment Fund. The whole complex of interlinking organisations is almost totally funded by the £317 million a year it gets from people's disability benefits and savings, plus a little direct help from the DSS. No one has yet disputed researchers' findings that this complicated set of companies and banks is showing a profit of about £140 million.

A gradual and painstaking accumulation of information by a few dedicated disability campaigners has started to reveal that the Motability scheme is not merely the charitable enterprise it appears to be.

First, the campaigners question whether it is right in principle to make profits out of disabled people's benefit income.

Second, they criticise the existence of a financial monopoly which forces most disabled people to use the scheme - it is the only one where the Government allows purchase of vehicles without paying VAT.

Third, there are a variety of interlocking personal relationships which blur the boundaries between charities and profit-making firms. For instance, according to a legal report the chairman of MFL is not only a governor of the Motability charity, but also a director of Lombard Finance (a wholly owned subsidiary of NatWest, one of the six banks) and a person with financial interests in several leasing companies.

And finally, neither MCL nor MHP are accountable to anyone other than the Inland Revenue.

Basically, the financial organisations buy vehicles at a large discount and without paying VAT (Motability is the single biggest fleet purchaser in the country). Motability then charges its 230,000 disabled customers £32.65 a week for a three year lease, and in most cases demands an additional front-end payment (in some cases thousands of pounds). As it comes out of benefits, this income is almost totally guaranteed. At the end of the three-year period it sells these well-kept and often low-mileage vehicles onto its car trade contacts at a good price. That's the where the profit comes in.

This secretive and lucrative set-up started to be examined last year by the then Director of Motability, Simon Willis, a civil servant seconded from the DSS. He was summarily despatched back to the DSS earlier this year. Disability campaigners believe he was given the shove because of his unwillingness to allow business to continue as usual.

Nevertheless, enough information had got out to prod the National Audit Office into a lengthy investigation of the scheme earlier this year, the first in its 18-year life. In the past, the Charity Commission had given Motability and the other trusts only the most cursory of examinations (unlike their treatment of Oxfam). Attempts by the campaigners to get MPs to take an interest have not been spectacularly successful so far. Donald Dewar's office is known to have expressed no interest.



Photo: Paul Mattsson. February 1995, disabled protest outside Parliament - disabled people are now taking action against the motability scam.

So the unlikely champion of disabled people, who want to know why someone's made a £140 million profit out of their meagre benefits, is the National Audit Office! It's to be hoped that the Office keeps its nerve. When *Accountancy Age* was due to run a story in May based on the independent lawyer's report, Sterling threatened them with an injunction. He's also thought to have had a hand in the removal of Willis. His reaction to the news that campaigners wanted to know more about the operation was: "I'm not being dictated to by little men in wheelchairs". ❑



Far right fall out

Larry O'Hara surveys the state of the extreme right.

NOW THE dust has settled on the May council election results, it is clear that the far right is in severe crisis. The highest vote the NF achieved was 8.2% (South Staffordshire), average 3.47%, and for the BNP 10.1% (Epping Forest), average 4.6%.

Bearing in mind the BNP's current membership is roughly 800 and the NF's probably little more than 200, it is significant that the NF mustered 14 candidates and the BNP only 10. This highlights a BNP difficulty in finding enough candidates to stand, related to a haemorrhaging of members to inactivity (mostly) and the Combat 18 umbrella group the National Socialist Alliance (NSA).

In Hertfordshire, a candidate standing for Third Way (probably 60 members), a successor to the Official National Front, obtained 20% of the vote, due to sustained local work little rivalled elsewhere. Some ex-NF members did well, for instance Mark Cotterill in Torquay (12%), and one New Britain candidate got as high as 11%.

In the short term prospects for the far right look poor, indeed so bad for the NF that the NF leadership has finally decided that the name NF is such a hindrance that it should be dropped. Thus at a Directorate meeting on 20th May, there was a vote 8:3 in favour of changing their name to 'National Democratic Party', something that is (they hope) to be ratified at an Extraordinary General Meeting in the Midlands on 1st July.

This move will meet stiff opposition. The June Birmingham NF bulletin sees changing the name as "defeatist". This faction will most likely lose, taking 25% of the membership with them, and is already rumoured to have an implicit alliance with the BNP worked out in areas of strength. It may well be that the new NDP might in the short term do better electorally than they have as the NF.

But more fundamentally there is not the pool of active Tory support for them to fish in as in the early 1970s. The decline of the Tories as a mass membership organisation means even Tory fringe groups have difficulty mobilising members whereas in the 1970s joint activities were held with the NF on occasion. The Revolutionary Conservative Caucus (sic) seems to have failed in an attempt to take over even the virtually moribund Monday Club, and the 'Patriotic Forums' which sprang up in various parts of the south of England quietly died off last year.

Finally activists in the Green movement should be alerted to the latest activity of ex-Green Party Speaker and sometime 'Son of God' David Icke, who in a book published last August endorsed the notorious anti-semitic tsarist forgery 'The Protocols of the Elders of Zion'. Along with others from the Green Party and Left-Green Milieu, I was able to help ensure Icke was excluded from the Green Party Conference last October. However, there was virtual media silence about Icke's anti-semitism until May of this year. All this, when Icke has been getting audiences of 400 in contrast to David Irving's usual 40.

Another worrying development is the nationally distributed magazine *Perspectives*, which is being used as a vehicle for highly-sophisticated racists. The key to the politics of *Perspectives* is "rooted collective identities" other than class. And it is around this banner that ex-NF members involved have been able to draw in diverse ex-leftists such as the remnants of Commonwealth and the ex-Green Anarchist, Richard Hunt (thrown out for his misogynism and support for the Gulf War) who has his own magazine *Alternative Green* and supports "deportation...in order to reduce the British population". *Perspectives* present themselves on occasion as leftist in orientation and have recently debated with socialist currents in public. Clearly there is no room for complacency.

Jackson takes up deportation case

US CIVIL RIGHTS campaigner Jesse Jackson is taking up the case of a Nigerian family of five facing deportation.

The Ogunwobi family have taken refuge in just two small rooms at Hackney Downs Baptist Church since March 1994 as part of their campaign to stay in Britain. Jackson, who met the family on a recent trip here, called on the British Government to observe human rights.

He argues it is wrong to uproot the family from jobs and schools to deport it to a military dictatorship.

Jackson is to raise the Ogunwobi case at the United Nations.

Enough is enough!

Not for the first time, Bradford youth have rebelled against racist policing. Rory Hegarty reports from West Yorkshire.

HEAVY-HANDED tactics and police racism have been blamed for the largest outbreak of inner-city violence in Britain since the Poll Tax riots. The two nights of rioting in the West Yorkshire city were described by local people as "an event waiting to happen". While press report concentrated on the arrest of two youths involved in a "rowdy" game of football, residents in the predominantly Asian area of Manningham, where the violence flared up, accused the police of a persistent pattern of intimidatory behaviour. The arrests, they asserted, were simply the spark that lit the flame.

"The police treat us differently because we're Asian," said one youth. "We were born and brought up here, but we are singled out for intimidation because of the colour of our skin."

Police have been accused of excessive use of "stop and search" powers against members of the Asian community and of maintaining an unnecessarily high presence in the Manningham area.

Younger members of the Asian community are unequivocal in their allegations of police racism. Even the more cautious 'community leaders' and elders are damning in their descriptions of local police as "aggressive" and "totally unsympathetic". While some are less prepared than others to condone the actions of the rioters, there is unanimity in blaming the police for starting the trouble.

There are different accounts of the arrest of the two Asian youths playing football in the street. Police say that they acted on a complaint from a neighbour. They claim that one of the youths, 19 year old Shazad Majid, kicked their squad car as it arrived on the scene. Eyewitnesses, however, say the car ran over Majid's foot. In the fracas that followed, as police tried to arrest Majid and another youth, several witnesses say that Majid's female cousin was struck by a police officer.

A crowd gathered and more police cars arrived on the scene. A local freelance photographer Tim Smith, described the police's behaviour as "extremely aggressive" as they hit out indiscriminately with batons. Scuffles outside Manningham police station led to more arrests including that of respected local teacher Mahommed Taz, a member of the Police Liaison Committee set up to deal with prostitution in Manningham.

As local councillors arrived to mediate with police, the growing crowd outside the police station repeatedly demanded, and were promised, that the ten people arrested would be freed. When the ten were not released, and were instead charged with violent disorder, angry scenes erupted into full scale rioting.

Manningham Police Station resembled a fortress as police in armour wielded new-issue 'long' truncheons against the rioters. One eyewitness described the scenes as like "a medieval battlefield". The second night's rioting is largely blamed on the provocative appearance of the police patrolling the area in riot gear, attempting to clear the streets.

With unemployment among Bradford Asians higher than among any ethnic group in the city, community leaders say their young people are growing up without any hope. Symptoms of alienation such as crime and drug abuse are growing. As the riots demonstrated, so are anger and impatience. As one youth explained: "We will not put up with the discrimination our parents suffered. We are not second class citizens or 'Pakis'. We are human beings."

Home Office racism

A NEW REPORT by the Medical Foundation, a charity offering treatment and counselling to survivors of torture, has slammed Home Office treatment of Zairean refugees.

In a survey of 92 prisoners examined and interviewed, the Foundation found that 91 had suffered torture, including sexual torture and mock execution.

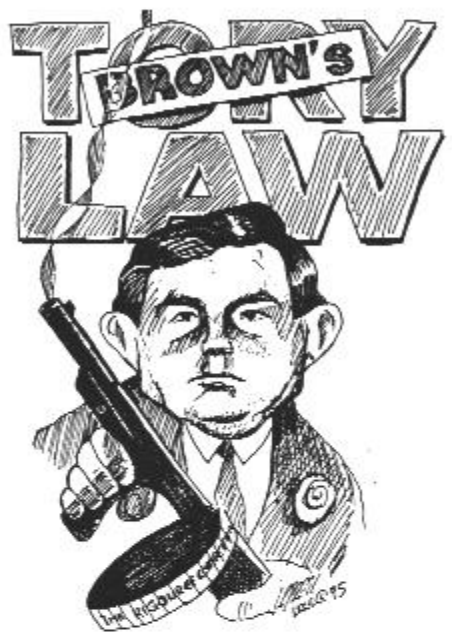
Yet only eight were granted refugee status, the rest being labelled as 'economic migrants' by the Home Office and then deported.

The survey also found that two-thirds of those examined were professionals, with academic, management or skilled backgrounds - thus nailing the Government's myth about refugees being unskilled, work-seeking 'economic migrants'.

Last year only 15 out of a total of 680 asylum applicants from Zaire were admitted as refugees.



Photo: Bryn Griffiths.



Brown's Law - clear as crystal

Kenny Ball of Newcastle Unison take issue with the fiscal conservatism recently embraced by Labour's leaders.

ON ONE issue, at least, Tony Blair is not Tony Blur. He and Gordon Brown have made it as clear as words will permit that they have no intention of reversing the Tory cuts in the health service, pensions and benefits, education, social housing and other local government services.

According to Blair in his Mais lecture, "the boundaries for changes in [taxation and spending] are much reduced." Speaking to the *Financial Times* the day before he was even clearer: "I have no intention whatsoever of having the Party backed into spending commitments ... We have no expenditure commitments." He told the *FT* that "the most important task of Mr Gordon Brown, the Shadow Chancellor, is to rein back the spending ambitions of other members of the Shadow Cabinet. 'The Shadow Chancellor has a completely free hand. In politics the real test is not how often you say 'yes' to people, but whether you are prepared to say 'no' to them."

When Gordon Brown made a speech to an invited City audience, the gloss provided by his spin-doctors to the *FT* was equally explicit. "Mr Brown is telling all Shadow Spokesmen that no public spending is sacrosanct ... Party policy makers said they would be Labour's toughest ever constraints on public spending. 'We have to ditch Labour's old image of tax, spend, borrow, devalue,' said a Party official."

Tony Blair explained the strategic thinking "by referring to the difficulties experienced by the French socialist government in the early 1980s. Attempts to implement a traditional leftist programme, including nationalisation and higher taxes, forced up interest rates and increased unemployment. 'That was the last experiment on the left of centre of trying to run such a policy and I don't think it would encourage anyone to try it again,' he says."

The blur is in Tony Blair's suggestion that he has "an economic strategy that puts investment and economic growth at the centre of the agenda" and that this growth will allow room for social improvement. "Getting the overall framework for fiscal and monetary policy right is the biggest single thing that will encourage business to invest. This will enable a Labour Government to attack the country's economic and social problems."

For Blair then, the first necessity in economic policy is a framework of interest-rate and budget policy which allows "the control of inflation", which "is even more important than the Tories have said". That framework is to be set by 'Brown's Laws': government borrowing not to exceed public investment, public sector debt to be kept low relative to national income, and "all public spending and investment should only be made if it is demonstrably cost-effective". Just how 'cost-effective' does he consider pensions or health-care for the elderly?

It is true that a traditional Keynesian policy (government spending exceeding government revenues, low interest rates) would probably trigger inflation, if the movements of money and credit were still determined by unregulated international markets and not placed under any public control. Yet Brown's framework is far from certain to control inflation. Any choice by money dealers, for any reason, to move wealth from pounds into dollars, marks or yen, will still pile on the inflationary pressures.

Brown's Laws are even less certain to help economic growth. Blair told the *Financial Times* that "a stable non-inflationary macroeconomic environment" would be "the key to making supply-side measures work", but named only four "supply-side measures" - "boosting investment, increasing industrial capacity, developing small businesses, promoting infrastructure". These four "measures" overlap to a large extent - why invest if not to increase capacity, build infrastructure, or develop some small business? Unless they are proposals for government investment and spending, they are not "measures" at all, but only hopes that the bosses and bankers will play ball.

The Blair "strategy" leaves much to be desired from a working class point of view, even if the wealthy classes do choose to invest. Investment has boomed at times under the Tories. The gross capital stock in manufacturing rose from £350 billion in the mid-80s to £393 billion in 1992 (at 1990 prices), while manufacturing employment dropped from 5.2 million to 4.5 million. Increased capitalist investment may very well go together with a squeeze on wages, speed-up, longer working hours, job cuts, increased unemployment, reduced social 'overheads' (welfare services and benefits) and, of course, increased profits.

For trade unionists, especially in the public services, all this means one thing: the fight continues, even after we get a Labour Government. Above all, we must organise for action across the labour movement to stop the current Tory cuts and continue to demand that a future Labour Government reverses them.

Tory tax changes have made the top 10% some £9 billion a year better off. Their total income is now about £130 billion, some £50 billion more than it was (at today's prices) in 1979. Corporate profits totalled £160 billion in 1993, of which only about £15 billion went to taxes and £53 billion to investment, much of the rest going to dividend and interest pay-outs.

The resources are there. The necessary alternative to Blair's new economics is a fight for democratic social control of wealth and credit and democratic social provision for social need. ❑

Minimum wage: turning the tide against Blair

Labour Briefing

Geoff Martin, chair London Unison Affiliated Political Fund, calls for a united left effort to win Party Conference to £4.15 an hour.

THOUGH THE low-paid public sector workers of NUPE first put the minimum wage on the labour movement's agenda in the 1970s, it took years to win over the movement as a whole to the policy. Big industrial unions resisted because they said that a minimum wage would undermine collective bargaining. But by the last election both the TUC and the Labour Party backed a minimum wage set at one half median male earnings (equivalent to £4.15 per hour today).

Last month Unison reaffirmed its commitment to this formula, rising to two-thirds median male earnings (£6 per hour) within the life of a Labour Government. *Militant Labour* supporters have broken from this position. They argue that it should be £6 immediately - a major tactical error - as the main struggle now is to force Blair to commit himself to £4.15.

Blair has set himself on collision course with the trade unions. He wants a set-piece battle to beat the left, but he may have chosen the wrong issue. Low pay is now a major concern across the movement and support for the minimum wage is widespread.

In any case, Blair's policy is nonsense. To ask the CBI to be involved in setting the minimum wage is like the Tories asking Arthur Scargill to set bosses' salaries!

Failing to set a minimum wage figure would be a media disaster. It would also render the policy meaningless. It is a nonsense to say 'Vote Labour, we will set a minimum wage' and then refuse to answer the obvious question: just how much will the minimum be? If we highlight the inconsistencies and dangers of the Blair approach, we can win the day.

Blair told the Chambers of Commerce that they had nothing to fear from a Labour Government. This is exactly what we don't need. I want to see spiv employers who pay cheapskate wages *terrified* of a Labour Government. I certainly don't expect them to be invited in to discuss how to implement the minimum wage.

The bosses say a minimum wage would lead to job losses. But bosses pay low wages in order to maximise their profits. A minimum wage would eat into these profits. No wonder employers prefer the present set-up - where they are indirectly subsidised by welfare benefits paid to their low waged workers. Surely that subsidy would be better spent creating new jobs.

Blair says that he supports a minimum wage that is "flexibly and sensibly" introduced. This could mean doing a deal with the Lib Dems, who support regional minimums. This will be unacceptable. A regional minimum is a minimum set by local markets.

We must get properly organised to win the vote at Labour Party Conference. We need co-ordination across the unions and CLPs, through the Socialist Campaign Group Network and the SMTUC. We can win it if we put in the effort. This is an issue on which we can start turning the tide against Blair.

Unhealthy policy

As health workers prepare for a summer of struggle, Labour's policy makers look set to embrace the NHS 'internal market'. Geoff Martin reports.

LABOUR'S HEALTH 2000 Consultation document makes clear exactly what we are going to get in the way of health policy from the front bench in the run-up to the election.

The document offers only to water-down the purchaser-provider system in the health service. It would maintain the competition between hospitals for contracts, and with it the division between winners and losers in the health service. On the key question of funding, the reason why the health service has been in crisis since even before 1979, the document is silent.

Is this popular? *The Independent* recently ran an opinion poll which said that 80% of the general public would be prepared to pay an extra 2p in the pound in income tax in order to fund an adequate health service.

The document is also silent on the need for a democratic framework for accountability in the NHS. Everyone knows that the NHS is run by unelected and unaccountable quangos. If Labour called for elections and accountable local health authorities we would get massive support.

At the special Party Conference on Clause IV Tony Blair said that the one commitment he would give on renationalisation was that he would renationalise the health service. But it's a meaningless sound bite if the Party fails to deal seriously with the questions of funding and democracy.

The front bench seems to have fallen for the argument put forward by some health academics: "There is always going to be infinite health demand and finite resources, therefore waiting lists are part and parcel of the system and will always be there."

Why is it then that other countries don't have waiting lists? In Paris there are no hospital waiting lists.

We will not have an adequate level of health care when you've got a poorly paid, unmotivated staff struggling just to get through the days. Yet there has been absolute silence from the Labour front bench on the struggle of NHS staff for decent pay. Are we going to see the health workers sabotaged the way the signal workers were?

Briefing AGM

Mike Marqusee reports: "Expand or die" was the theme for this year's *Labour Briefing* AGM, which was attended by more than sixty labour movement activists. The first session was devoted to the question: "Is there a future for the Labour left?" While no one pretended that work in Blair's Labour Party would yield immediate rewards, nearly everyone agreed that it remained a necessary task for socialists.

The second session was devoted to the related question: "Is there a future for *Labour Briefing*?" In introducing the resolution that was eventually passed by the AGM (with only a handful of abstentions), I emphasised that: "If we continue to go on as we are we will go nowhere." *Briefing*'s readership was too small and its range of contributors too narrow to have the necessary impact on the labour movement. Graham Bash outlined the discussions that had been held with representatives of *New Left* and guidelines agreed for co-operation (including maintenance of the current format and strict limits on *New Left* representation on the editorial board).

Discussion of the future of the magazine was both frank and comradely. While everyone understood that *Briefing* had to expand its base if it was to achieve any of its goals, there was anxiety about *Briefing* retaining its pluralism, irreverence and independence. There was also much agonising over the question "Can Leninists work with human beings?" The provisional answer seems to be: we have to try.

The *Briefing* AGM was only the start of the delicate and necessarily incremental process of building a base broad enough to sustain the kind of high-quality, non-sectarian magazine the Labour left needs. To succeed, we will need the active support of many socialists involved in the labour movement who are currently indifferent to or suspicious of *Briefing*.

But the omens are hopeful. Ten years ago, had the same forces been assembled in a single room, there would have been blood on the floor. Maybe the left is capable of growing up.

The future of *Labour Briefing*

Resolution passed by *Labour Briefing* AGM

In order to expand and renew the socialist presence in the labour movement, the Labour left needs a publication superior to any now on offer, including Briefing *as it currently stands. We need to build on the best traditions of* Briefing *while radically expanding both our editorial base and our readership.*

The publication the Labour left needs must:

1. Belong to and reflect the concerns of the left as a whole. It cannot be the property of any single group or current or even of an aggregation of existing groups and currents.

2. Be rooted in struggle and activity, reporting and nurturing a wide variety of campaigns, especially the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network.

3. Give priority to reporting and analysing events and issues in the Labour Party and trade unions, but not to the exclusion of a wide variety of other political issues and activity.

4. Be able to reach far beyond our present ranks, addressing and winning over those to our right through astute tactics rather than political compromise.

5. Maintain the highest possible professional standards of journalism and presentation; be accessible, entertaining and stimulating.

This AGM charges the incoming EB to take all steps necessary to build such a magazine. Specifically, the EB should:

- *win the active editorial participation of leading left trade unionists, MPs, MEPs, journalists, the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network and a wide range of left-wing individuals and groups;*
- *secure the funds necessary to pay staff and print and other bills and to finance a high profile launch this autumn;*
- *work to expand the EB so that it truly reflects the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network and ultimately comes to embody the broad alliance which defended "common ownership" and Clause IV;*
- *consider any change of name that may be required to make the magazine a success. Such a name change would only be agreed after proper notice of the proposals and chance to object to them has been given to all EB members and supporters of the magazine.*

New Left: why we're joining the *Briefing* EB

Maria Exall
New Left

MANY OF the divisions on the left are not necessary. For example, there is no good reason why the broad Labour and trade union left, including the socialists grouped around the journals *Labour Briefing*, *Socialist Outlook*, *Campaign Group News* and *Tribune*, should not combine to produce one paper. There is no reason, other than the senseless spirit of intolerance and fanaticism about secondary issues, why the political differences that divide us should not be discussed and resolved democratically, with all sides retaining the right to express their views.

Such unity would produce dialogue, discussion, and maybe progress, where now we often have small chapels of socialists singing solos and intoning monologues.

The advantages of creating a common journal of the labour movement's hard and unrepentant left would be great indeed. There is tremendous scope now for popularising the socialist critique of capitalism as well as for organising the fight back against the Tory demolition of the welfare state and for the restoration of trade union rights. A single powerful publication of the left would do this work far better than any single publication is doing it now. Slender single fingers bunched into a fist become a formidable weapon. Many of those mobilised around the Clause IV campaign would be encouraged by the creation of such a paper where now they find the proliferation of journals, groups and cliques bewildering and demoralising.

That is why those of us who have produced *New Left* will from now on be pooling our resources with *Labour Briefing* to produce a joint publication. We see this a step towards a bigger, broader, more credible, more lively and more political diverse democratic publication of the serious left.

Backlash against women-only shortlists

Leonora Lloyd reviews the slow march towards women's representation.

IT IS NOW ten years since the first resolution proposing all-women short lists was moved at a Labour Party Conference. For years the women's organisation has been fighting for the principle, which the leadership has only recently - and grudgingly - accepted.

What women activists have always argued for is all-women shortlists in all seats vacated by a sitting MP and in all winnable seats held by other parties. What we have got is 50% of winnable seats. In by-elections, there have been no seats designated as women-only.

Even to talk about 50% is an exaggeration. The seats are agreed -in theory by consensus - on a regional basis and when there are an odd number of seats then they are rounded down rather than up. Worse, seats vacated by sitting MPs are agreed separately from the winnables and marginals, and these seats too are rounded down. Some MPs, notably Peter Shore, have delayed announcing that they are standing down in order to prevent their seats being included in the initial consensus meetings and have thus reduced the numbers of all-women shortlists even further.

In many seats where women-only short lists have been agreed, women candidates had already stood in the last election. So very little progress is being made. If all goes well and Labour wins the election, there could be 100 women MPs - still less than one-sixth of the total for all parties.

Even this snail's pace towards equality is too fast for many in the Party. 'Labour Supporters for Real Equality' say that the policy is a vote loser and insults women. They did not seem to feel that the 'real equality' we have had in the past was insulting to men.

It is of course disappointing that so many of the women selected are middle-class Blair supporters, but this is not the fault of the system. The whole point of having women-only shortlists is to give the constituencies a political choice among a range of women candidates. There is no reason to suppose that CLPs would have chosen left-wing men if given the chance.

What is interesting is the enormous resistance in certain parts of the country to the whole idea. What has happened in Slough and in the Northern region is as nothing to what is likely to happen in Scotland and Wales, where you need a microscope to find the few existing women MPs. Why do Party members in these areas feel that only men can represent them - is it merely because at one time these areas were dominated by heavy industry or agriculture?

Working together

Leonora Lloyd reports from the Socialist Policies for a Labour Government Conference held in Birmingham on 17th June.

A CONSPIRACY by the combined forces of British Rail and the M6 disrupted travel which led to the conference starting over an hour late and some speakers not turning up at all. Others were unable to come for different reasons - Ken Livingstone had been ordered by his doctor not to speak for a week.

Despite the problems, attendance was good (160) and all four workshops were well supported. The speakers in the opening session, which was chaired by Alan Simpson MP, included Ken Coates MEP, the film-maker Ken Loach, Mark Seddon (editor of *Tribune*) and several trade unionists.

The main message that came over from the speakers was the need for the left to continue what was begun during the Clause IV Campaign - overcoming sectarian differences and learning to work together. This was especially important for the trade unions.

Ken Loach talked about the need for professionalism. He wanted the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs to be in a position to afford a full time press person, who could put out regular statements and line up a spokesperson for any and every issue that comes up. Alan Simpson agreed with this but said that unless all the left MPs decided to come into the Campaign Group and support it financially then this could not be done.

Mark Seddon was prepared to throw the weight of *Tribune* behind the project of uniting the left.

Trade unionists highlighted the intervention of the Labour leadership in the campaign for the election of the General Secretary of the TGWU and argued the need for the unions to remain independent of a future Labour Government.

The workshops were on defending the welfare state, keeping the trade union link, the minimum wage and common ownership. The latter was thought provoking as it debated whether we should be campaigning just for a return to common ownership of the utilities or calling for a much wider programme. It was pointed out that the public was way ahead of the Party, and even some sections of the left, on this issue.

There were calls for resolutions to be put to Annual Conference demanding that the proportion of the block vote should not fall below 50%.

On the minimum wage it was pointed out that the aim of £4.15 per hour (half of the male adult average wage) should be the starting point towards two thirds of the average.

A resolution was passed setting up a steering committee of the Conference participants to co-ordinate the pressure for socialist policies in the Labour Party and to organise a recall conference in the near future.

A look back in anger

As we go to press, the ballots are being counted in the election for TGWU General Secretary. Win or lose, Jim Denham says Jack Dromey has a lot to answer for.

THE SUGGESTION that being married to Labour's employment spokesperson Harriet Harman is of any relevance to his bid to lead the TGWU is, according to Jack Dromey, "sexist claptrap". Apparently, Jack and Harriet never discuss politics over the breakfast table. They chat about the weather, how the kids are getting on at that nice London Oratory school, whether to buy a new blender ... that sort of thing.

When Jack and Harriet invited the *Sunday Times* into their home the interviewer asked Harriet whether she could imagine her husband leading a strike against the wishes of a Labour Government: "She paused and looked momentarily horrified. 'Er, yes,' she wavered, before adding more emphatically: 'Absolutely'". So no conflict of interest there.

Brother Dromey is right about one thing though. His lust for power has nothing to do with his wife. With or without Harriet, he'd always have been a shameless careerist.

Back in the 1970s young Jack made his reputation as the bearded, leather-jacketed 'leader' of the Grunwick strike. He revelled in his media image as a 'hard left' firebrand while in reality acting as a front man for the union bureaucracy. He has never been a rank and file trade union activist.



Jack Dromey

During the 80s Dromey rose through the non-elected TGWU hierarchy, maintaining a left (but not too left) image, finally attaining the post of National Secretary for the union's public sector trade group.

In 1991 Dromey supported Bill Morris for General Secretary, in the expectation that Morris would reciprocate by backing him for Deputy General Secretary. Instead, Morris and the union's Broad Left plumped for Jack Adams, former convenor at British Leyland Longbridge. When a shattered Dromey asked why he had been rebuffed by the ungrateful Morris and the Broad Left, he received a clear-cut answer: no one trusted him.

Jack withdrew his candidature, announcing that he had "no political disagreements" with his opponent. But his cronies soon persuaded him to re-enter the contest, which Adams won comfortably.

After this setback, Dromey cast his eyes towards the Parliamentary Labour Party and a safe seat. Then John Smith died. Suddenly the Party was led by a close family friend. Blair urged Jack to hang on in there in the TGWU, "where you can do more good".

Jack set about re-building his reputation within the union and was soon handed a cause celebre: the Eastbourne dustmen test case. Eastbourne Council sacked all its dustmen when refuge collection was privatised; those employed by the new contractor worked longer hours for less pay. As TGWU public sector National Secretary, Jack fronted the union's successful appeal to Brussels in 1992, which forced the Government to extend the protection of the European Acquired Rights Directive to all public sector workers. Jack was in the right place at the right time. He has milked the Eastbourne decision for all its worth, portraying it as a personal triumph entirely due to his own brilliant legal mind. Of course any union with a halfway-competent legal department would have taken the same steps with the same result. The TGWU legal department is understandably resentful at having its contribution written out of the Dromey version of events.

Jack's big chance came with Blair's offensive against Clause IV. Morris was privately sympathetic to Blair, but enough of a democrat to be bound by the TGWU lay executive's pro-Clause IV policy. The TGWU in common with most other unions held a branch-based consultation, open to all members. The difference between the TGWU and most other unions was that this consultation produced the 'wrong' (i.e. pro-Clause IV) result - despite using the biased Walworth Road questionnaire. TGWU members in public transport and the utilities have experienced first hand "the rigour of competition" and know what it means in practice.

The Blair propaganda machine swung into action. Morris was denounced as "pusillanimous" and "not a bad man, but a weak man" for daring to uphold his union's policy. Backed by Blair, the 'New Clause IV' propaganda team and Mike Craven of the lobbyists Market Access International (not to mention the *Guardian*, *Today* and the *Mirror*) Dromey seized the chance to challenge Morris for the union's top job.

Dromey's campaign was characterised by his usual opportunism and dishonesty. Though he was clearly the right wing candidate against reluctant 'left-winger' Bill Morris, he struck dirty deals with disaffected 'left wingers' in the North West and Northern Ireland. His speeches to left wing audiences in the north west have been full of militant rhetoric, while his press releases have denounced Morris for "threatening the chances of a Labour Government". His glossy propaganda sheet *T&G Challenge* states: "Jack Dromey has fully endorsed the T&G's policy for a £4 an hour minimum wage, publicly and frequently." But he told the *Sunday Times*: "I do not believe in dancing round a totem pole ... most TGWU members earn more than £4 an hour because they are unionised ... we shouldn't be asking politicians to do our job for us."

It would, of course, be 'sexist claptrap' to suggest that Jack's prevarication on this issue has anything to do with the fact that his wife is fronting Blair's efforts to wriggle out of Conference policy for a £4.15 per hour minimum wage. ❑

One second to midnight

Terry Dunn, a former Yorkshire miner sacked during the 1984-5 strike, went to the Court of Appeal to hear how the NUM's overwhelming vote for strike action was set aside by three unelected judges.



THE NUM had balloted its members working at RJB pits over action against the employer's imposition of a three year wage freeze. The ballot returned an 83.4% vote in favour of strike action - the biggest majority in the union's history.

Under the Tories' 1992 anti-union laws, a union has 28 days from the closing of a strike ballot to take action. The Government-funded Electoral Reform Society is responsible for the organisation of such ballots. The ERS informed the NUM that any action must take place no later than 10am on 13th June. The NUM executive met and agreed the time for the strike: midnight on the 12th/13th. They were notified on 9th June that RJB were seeking an injunction that very morning. The injunction was granted but the NUM were given the weekend to prepare their case for the Appeal Court on the morning of the 12th.

The Lords ruled that had the strike been called one second to midnight, then it would have been "lawful". But since it was called at midnight, it was "unlawful". Lady Butler-Sloss stated "that to have backed the union case would mean that we should all be in cloud cuckoo land". I ask you to decide who is living in cloud cuckoo land.

What became painfully clear as I listened to three privileged judges' ruling was just who they really represent. A democratic ballot result of over 83% was overturned by three Law Lords who supported the action of one individual against mineworkers legitimately pursuing a wage claim. The same rules do not apply to RJB who have made unilateral decisions and have categorically refused to negotiate with the NUM or any other organisation representing workers in the industry. If RJB were to decide to close pits, it would not need 28 days notice and it would not be subject to injunctions.

For some years, I have campaigned for the trade union movement to embark on a policy of non-compliance with all anti-trade union legislation. These laws were designed to make trade unions ineffective. The Tories need to blunt the only weapons capable of stopping their attacks on ordinary people. Unless we as a movement unite to break the anti-union laws we will be resigning our children to the unrestricted madness of the free market system.

Tony Blair has indicated that he will not repeal anti-union legislation. Even stranger, several leaders of major trade unions agree with him.

How are these leaders representing their members' interests when they allow the basic principles of trade unionism to be outlawed by those who grow richer while our people become poorer? Of course, the Tories are responsible, but the trade union movement is also responsible because of its acceptance of these draconian laws.

We must submit motions to our trade union conferences calling on non-compliance with anti-trade union legislation. We must send a clear message to Tony Blair that our unions must not be shackled by the Party we created.

Labour - Fifty years on

A conference on common ownership and industrial democracy to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the 1945 Labour Government

Saturday 22nd July
Westfield Campus, Mossborough, Sheffield

Themes of the conference include:-

- Welfare from Beveridge to Borrie
- Industrial democracy in public and private enterprise
- Equality in education and health
- Role of trade unions in the struggle for common ownership and democratic public services

Aims include:-

- To strengthen networking
- Encourage practical initiatives for common ownership and industrial democracy
- Consider whether to set up an Institute for Common Ownership and Economic Democracy

Registration fee : £5 waged, £2 unwaged
Contact: Conference Organiser, 8 Regent Street, Mansfield, Notts NG18 1SS.

Trade Unions

Rail pay ballots

If BR privatisation goes as planned, the ASLEF and RMT ballots for a 6% pay rise will be the last opportunity for a national strike by railway workers. A trackworker explains why it is an opportunity that must be seized.

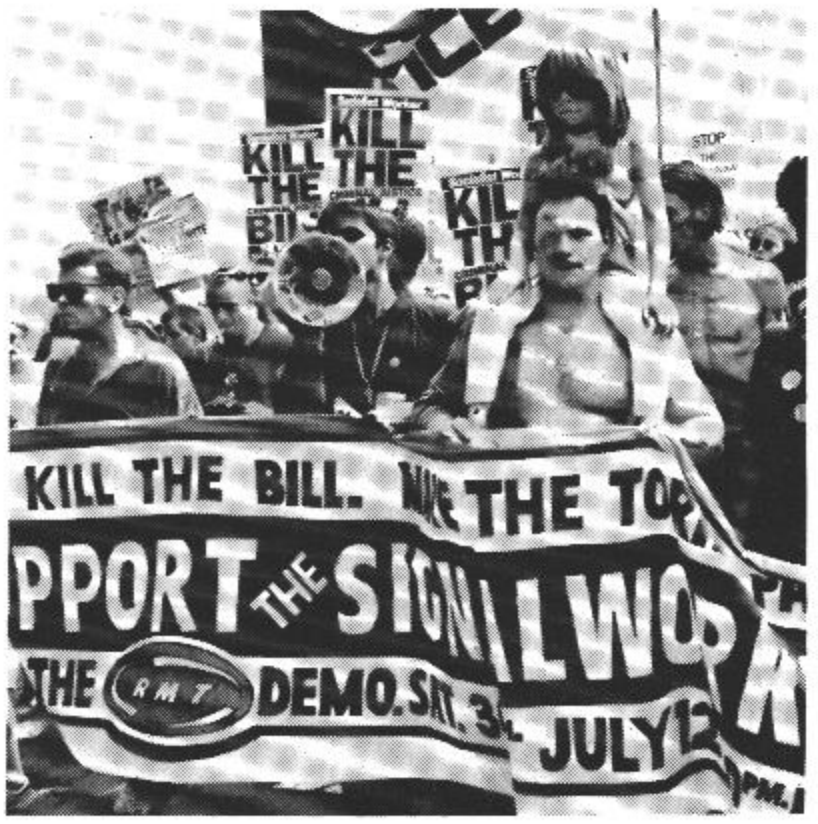
ALTHOUGH PAY is the only issue over which the unions can legally call united nation-wide action it is not the main issue for many of those left on the railways after two years of mass (voluntary) redundancies.

Their concerns are: keeping a job; resisting attempts to pile more duties, responsibility and work on those left in the industry; resisting the drive to remove all the conditions of service that have made the job tolerable in the past; trying to get back the overtime work that was a reliable feature of past earnings; and holding on to money allowances that have boosted low wages in the past.

To many railworkers a fight for 6% on basic earnings can seem a bit extravagant when hanging on to a job has to be priority number one. A lot of railworkers want to know why the union is not fighting to stop the bullying supervisors that swagger around and issue threats daily, why the union is not stopping pressure to work harder to cover for those who have left, why the union has not won workers some job security, and, for those who put two and two together, why the union is not organising to stop privatisation.

This is a dangerous time for the rail unions. There are a lot of frustrated railworkers baffled by the absence of union protection against daily attacks. They are used to a situation in the not too distant past when management listened to the union, negotiated with local reps, and observed national and regional agreements built up over decades. Now they see bullies and ignorant slobs in charge. The union appears to be unable or unwilling to protect them. Many see this as reason to stop paying their union dues, which is all the easier since BR stopped check-off in July 1992 as punishment for RMT solidarity action with the NUM over pit closures (TSSA and ASLEF still have check-off). RMT membership has fallen from 118,000 at the time of the merger of NUR and NUS in 1989 to slightly over 50,000 now and falling.

The financial crisis dominates every other issue in the union which is continually threatened by the banks with foreclosure and only saved by emergency packages. In many ways the RMT is caught in a vice. The members are leaving because the union is doing them no good and this in turn exacerbates a financial crisis which the cautious minded full-timers use as an excuse for not doing anything!



This trend could be reversed by the RMT/ASLEF ballot for strike action over pay. It is a constant cry from the right wing in the union movement that you cannot take action when there are so many non-union members in the industry. But experience shows the reverse to be true. When the unions start to move and prepare to do something in the interests of workers then workers want to join in. During the signalworkers dispute last year around 500 signalworkers rejoined the union.

But the intricacies of anti-union laws make it less easy than in the past for a union to 'do something' in workers' interests. Because the RMT and ASLEF lodged their claim for a "substantial" pay increase before the start of April the claim remains with "BR" even though BR has now been broken up into almost 100 different competing companies. (TSSA were also in with the claim but they have now decided to go for arbitration). That means that the unions can continue to conduct the ballot as a national claim for all "BR" workers. The RMT has also lodged a claim for 6% with Red Star, Rail Freight Distribution and Railtrack - all previously hived off. As none of these had responded adequately by the union deadline of 2nd June then a dispute has been declared with them also.

If the ballots are successful there will no doubt be legal challenges, possibly as imaginative as that brought by RJ Budge against the NUM. Any mistakes in the lists of union members supplied to each railway company will no doubt be used.

In clearing the legal hurdles and galvanising the members to fight, a point needs to be made and made repeatedly. And it needs making because the unions themselves are not legally allowed to make it. Pay is the only issue on which we are legally allowed to fight. Yet a fight against privatisation would hit at the root cause of most of our current problems. We have to say that the problems facing railworkers - bullying managers, daily threats over sickness or timekeeping or workrate or appearance or attitude, worry about job security, lack of overtime, low wages, refusal to pay allowances, flouting of national and local agreements, low morale, etc. are all reasons to vote 'Yes' for action over pay.

A successful strike would help turn the tide against privatisation. A strong union would frighten off potential buyers and we would be better placed in each workplace to defend ourselves. ❑

Communication workers reject Blair's agenda

Trade Unions

Maria Exall, CWU Thames Central, reports from the first annual conference of the newly formed Communication Workers' Union - which decisively rejected Tony Blair's agenda for the next Labour Government.

INSTEAD OF following the advice of the union's NEC - which was not to demand of Blair anything he won't deliver (which means not to demand anything) - the CWU conference voted to campaign for free trade unions, full employment, rebuilding the welfare state, defence of the trade union-Labour Party link and the return of the utilities (including BT) to public ownership.

The debate at conference, which saw postal and telecom workers discussing politics together for the first time, showed that though union rank and filers are desperate for a Labour Government and don't want to see anything stand in the way of that objective, they are not prepared to give the Blair leadership a blank cheque.

Things started badly for the CWU leadership with the discussion on Clause IV. Though most delegates were not prepared to challenge the outcome of the union's ballot - which was pro-Blair - they were prepared to reject the manipulative way it was carried out.

Despite pleas to the contrary from postal general secretary Alan Johnson (Blair's favourite union leader) conference voted to back a motion from the Manchester Amalgamated postal branch which "deplores the partisan manner in which the leadership dealt with the Clause IV debate" and went on to tell the NEC that "in any future consultation exercise on points of principle where there is not already established CWU policy the union leadership shall maintain a public position of neutrality until the consultation exercise amongst the membership is complete."

This was a major personal rebuff for Alan Johnson who had gone out of his way to appear in the media in support of Blair.

Delegates pointed out that it was ridiculous that union branches had received material from the "New Clause IV Campaign" in union mailings while simultaneously being told by national officers that they couldn't debate the issue at branch meetings.

People were also angry at the way the union HQ had distorted the pro-Clause

CWU

IV case. For example the ballot pack contained an anonymous piece presumably written by CWU HQ supposedly defending the old Clause IV which included references to its "old fashioned wording". Would we allow Tory civil servants to write Labour's general election manifesto?

After that setback for the NEC things just got better and better.

The other joint general secretary, Tony Young from the BT side (he plays David Steel to Johnson's David Owen), rose to speak in support of the motion on renationalising the utilities but only on the understanding that BT was not a public utility. It was a case of 'Renationalisation - but not in my industry!' Young's interpretation was challenged from the conference floor. It was made clear that conference was voting on the 'common sense' understanding of the public utilities, i.e. including BT. The result was delightful. Young was defeated and the motion passed overwhelmingly.

A motion opposing any moves to restrict input from trade unions into the Labour Party was passed convincingly despite opposition from Alan Johnson.

Arguing that CWU had already agreed in principle to restrict the block vote, Johnson called for the motion to be defeated if not remitted. But conference was adamant - trade union influence in the Party must not be diluted. It was another defeat for the Blair agenda.

The next big political issue was the anti-union laws. Once again Young got up to oppose proposals for anything that didn't go along with what "the Labour Party" (i.e. Tony Blair) was proposing. Once again he was defeated. A "seductively worded little motion" (Young's words) from my branch calling for the NEC to campaign for total repeal of the anti-union laws and for the legal right to strike and take solidarity action was passed by a clear majority.

This majority included large numbers of postal workers who know that their own tradition of unofficial action and Blair's commitment to keep the anti-union laws mean that they will be among the first in the firing line under the next Labour Government.

All in all the CWU conference shows that when the issues are posed directly and concretely large numbers of trade unionists are highly sceptical of Blair's agenda. ❑

Clause IV and the miners

● *Clause IV and the miners* is a new pamphlet published by the Miners' Parliamentary Group. It criticises Labour's new version of Clause IV as less visionary and less radical than the previous one and argues strongly for renationalisation of the mining industry, which passed into private hands earlier this year.

The pamphlet has good detailed figures on the demand for coal, who owns what, the salaries of directors in the privatised utilities - all useful material for activists campaigning for common ownership.

The pamphlet is available from Bill Etherington MP, price £2. All proceeds go to 'Justice for Mineworkers'.

Haven't we forgotten something...?

That's the question posed by Sheila Cohen of *Trade Union News*, writing in a personal capacity.

TWO STATEMENTS in the June 1995 *Briefing* caught my eye as embodying some common but questionable assumptions among socialists:

• "The likely shape of revolutionary transformation of an advanced capitalist society requires that the mass party of the left should be won to a perspective of ... a fundamental transformation of the social order" - Kevin Flack and John Rogers in "Is the Party pooped?".

• "We need to learn how to reach out far beyond our present ranks. That means engaging in dialogue and joint political activity with people to our political right" - Mike Marqusee in "Expand or Die?".

Both these statements could be taken to point to a longstanding problem of the left: its inability to break free from its own claustrophobic, insular framework and actually look clearly at the world it inhabits.

At first sight it might appear that Mike Marqusee's reference to the need to "reach out far beyond our present ranks" expresses exactly the opposite of this insularity. The issue, however, is what kind of "right" is actually meant here; and from Mike's reference to the Clause IV campaign I think we can reasonably infer that he is talking, at least in part, about the kind of left reformist trade union leaders and Labour MPs who joined with the revolutionary left in conducting this struggle.



Leaving aside what were, to my mind at least, the many political ambiguities and confusions apparent in the campaign itself, the main problem with this kind of strategy is its inevitable progress along a well-worn path in which those "to our political right" take us with them, rather than the other way round.

At the same time, paradoxically, another constituency "to our political right" seems to be consistently ignored by those claiming to wish to broaden the audience for socialist ideas. That constituency is the organised working class. The difference between their "right-wingness" and that of labour leaders and Labour Party lefts is that the reformist consciousness of rank-and-file trade union members and activists derives more from an "absence of ideology", a relatively unreflective acceptance of the system in which they are forced to operate, than from any positive endorsement of that system.

Labour is a contradictory vehicle of reformist ideology which raises the need for debate with workers "to the right of us", but the Party itself cannot be "won to a perspective of fundamental transformation of the social order" - because as an organisation, it is by definition reformist. Its central purpose has always been and continues to be to get representatives of "labour" into Parliament.

Yet it is in this very representation of "labour", i.e. the working class, that the meaning and dynamic of Labour Party politics lie; it is the contradictory nature of the reformist ideology enmeshed in this relationship and its ultimate roots in concrete working-class interests, which explains both the left's fascination with and workers' continuing support for this organisation.

Because Labour represents the carcass of a contradictory reformism, the obsession of the left has been with that carcass rather than with the roots of those contradictions. These in fact lie outside the structures of the Labour Party (or indeed the more bureaucratic levels of trade unionism) in the actual material conditions and class position of working class people. What is it that has blinded us to this relationship?

The answer can perhaps be summed up in one word: "Politics" with a capital P. For the majority of the left, issues are met with little enthusiasm unless they are explicitly "Political". The ordinary, unglamorous work of linking and contacting those on-the-ground activists who actually spend their time organising around workers' class interests is seen as, at best, "syndicalist"; workers' everyday material concerns are dismissed as being"economist".

Yet the truth is that there is nothing more profoundly political, at least in its potential, than materially-based workers' struggles against exploitation. This is so for two reasons: because these struggles stem from the production relations of capitalism, and because, in cases too numerous to mention, they sweep otherwise "non-political" workers into direct confrontation with an increased awareness of these relations at both employer and state level.

The objective of initiatives like *Trade Union News* is not to defer to the "economism" and incipient reformism of the working class, still less to endorse the historical error of syndicalism, but to bring out the political and class meaning of workers' everyday resistance to the exploitative relations of capitalism. This means starting where workers are at, not where we might like them to be; drawing out the political implications of their actual activity, rather than presenting them with an ideologically-sound "programme" or abstract "revolutionary party" which most of them rightly identify as a long way from their pressing material concerns. This approach does not preclude more consciously "political" forms of activity, but is an essential accompaniment to them.

In discussing the future of a re-launched *Briefing*, the question has been put of possible forms of co-operation with *Trade Union News*. While I as its editor, would be happy to explore such arrangements, what would make me even happier would be if these arrangements meant that at least as many comrades are fully committed to and active around the project represented by *TUN* as they are around that represented by the new *Briefing*. Perhaps, in the worthwhile aim of "engaging ... with people to our political right", this could be considered as a complementary, but equally worthwhile perspective.

TUN is a bi-monthly rank-and-file trade union paper available mainly on subscription. Contact us at *TUN*, PO Box 6498, London N1 1QW (tel: 0171-700 1550/0181 985 2725).

Flames of rage

Trade Unions

Mick Shaw, FBU London Regional chairperson, reports from the firefighters' annual conference.

THIS YEAR'S FBU Conference reiterated the union's determination to fight to defend members' jobs, pay, pensions and conditions of service - and the level of fire cover provided to the public.

All of these things are under threat. Local government re-organisation is abolishing some county councils and creating unitary authorities in a number of areas. In these areas the fire service will be run by joint boards comprised of the various local authorities in the geographical area rather than directly by the county council as at present. As a majority of county councils currently spend above their Standard Spending Assessment on the fire service current levels of expenditure will be under threat.

The Audit Commission earlier this year produced a report entitled "In the Line of Fire - Value for Money in the Fire Service". This report recognised the enormous increase in emergency calls dealt with by the fire service in recent decades, but made no suggestions on how to address chronic under-funding. Instead, it claims that national standards of fire cover and nationally agreed pay and conditions are too "prescriptive" and inflexible.

The Home Office is currently reviewing the Firefighters' Pension Scheme, with a report due shortly. We do not expect it to recommend improvements but most likely a two-tier pension scheme with worse provisions for new entrants. We are pledged to fight any such proposals with national strike action.

Conference made a number of demands on an incoming Labour Government: the introduction of a statutory minimum wage; the repeal of all Tory anti-trade union legislation and its replacement by a framework of positive legal rights; the abolition of the Child Support Agency; and the repeal of the Criminal Justice Act.

However, not many delegates harboured illusions about the willingness of a Blair-led government to undertake such measures. After all, Blair has already made clear that trade unions will be treated 'fairly', just like the employers! If trade unions want positive measures from a Labour Government, then they will have to fight for them.

An indication of what to expect from the Labour leadership is the new Clause IV of the Party constitution. FBU President Ronnie Scott opened the conference by quoting from the new clause and pointing out how ludicrous and nonsensical it is. A resolution from Derbyshire supporting the original Clause IV and public ownership was passed without opposition.

An emergency resolution supporting the legal action being undertaken by the family of Stephen Lawrence to bring his killers to justice was unanimously passed and a donation of £1,000 was made. In addition, a collection of over £1,600 was divided three ways between the Stephen Lawrence appeal, Workers' Aid for Bosnia and the sacked Badgerline bus workers.

Civil servants back merger

David Pope reports: The National Union of Civil and Public Servants Annual Conference in Bournemouth voted unanimously in favour of merging with the Inland Revenue Staff Federation. The merger will be put to an all-members ballot in the autumn and if carried, will create the largest Civil Service union. It will also highlight the need for a united front against the employer and lead to renewed calls for mergers with the three other Civil Service unions, particularly the CPSA. Conference also agreed to a significant amendment to the merger terms, by voting to delete a proposed rule that would allow the NEC to over-ride Conference decisions by holding membership referendums.

In other matters, Conference revealed the growing division between (mainly) left-leaning activists and the Blairite majority on the incoming NEC. It was agreed that the increasing devolution of pay bargaining to Departments and Agencies should be met by the NEC launching common claims and vetting and approving settlements as far as possible. The Blairites opposed this, arguing that members in many areas had been negotiating their pay for several years already and those elsewhere could be trusted to do likewise. The majority view was that the Treasury held the purse strings and effectively supervised delegated pay bargaining for the employers; therefore we should mirror their organisation and attempt to limit divide and rule tactics.

Conference started in a comradely fashion by censuring the NEC for failing to provide sufficient resources for the check-off campaign. The NEC were also censured for a blanket withdrawal of branch funding in December and paying insufficient attention to health and safety.

Conference agreed to affiliate to the Coalition against the Criminal Justice Act but not the Welfare State Network. It was felt that not enough was known about the WSN and some delegates were concerned that its policy of opposition to the Child Support Agency might have an impact on their jobs. Conference agreed to continue campaigning against the Job Seekers' Allowance and to support Harry Barnes' Civil Rights (Disabled Persons) Bill.



Action against poverty pay

29th July - National Demo

Thirteen TUC affiliated unions representing 700,000 health workers have called a national demonstration in London on 29th July.

Unison, the largest union involved, has already consulted its members and received an overwhelming mandate to reject the Government's pay offer and to proceed with a ballot on industrial action. The ballot is scheduled to be held in the first week of July.

The Government wants to impose a 1% deal and push through local pay bargaining. The unions are demanding 3% and want to retain national bargaining structures.

Unison pressure on Blair

Geoff Martin, chair of Unison London Regional Political Committee, reports on a turn to the left at the National Affiliated Political Forum, Unison's policy making body.

AT ITS meeting in Scarborough in mid-May, the Forum adopted strong policies in defence of public sector services. This will increase the pressure on the Labour front bench at the Party Conference in October.

Unison's position as a major player on the left of the movement was consolidated by its rejection of Blair's "Aims and Values" statement and the raft of socialist policies agreed at Scarborough.

On education, the Forum called upon the next Labour Government to bring all grant-maintained schools back into Local Education Authority control alongside the complete abolition of Local Management of Schools.

Policies were also adopted on both the minimum wage and competitive tendering. Rather than toe the Blair-line, Unison's policy is a minimum wage of half median male earnings (currently £4.15 per hour) rising to two thirds of median male earnings.

The Unison policy of scrapping all competitive tendering, both voluntary and compulsory, has been reinforced and takes us well beyond anything that's been promised by the front bench. This policy is about removing the constant threat of wage cuts and the sack from over the heads of public sector workers and about defending quality services from attacks by cheapskate, money-grabbing contractors. Labour has said that it will remove the compulsory element from competitive tendering, a loophole that not only Tory and Liberal authorities would exploit but also some "moderniser" Labour councils.

On economic policy, a motion from London and the North West, passed unanimously, set out an alternative vision of how an incoming Labour Government could raise the necessary funds to re-build the welfare state. A fifteen point programme included commitments to returning all the privatised utilities to public ownership; full employment; a government-financed national childcare scheme; progressive taxation and a reduction in defence expenditure. The motion also included a clear commitment to "redistribution policies to reduce and eliminate poverty".

It's interesting that at a time when those who advocate this kind of socialist alternative to the capitalist market system are supposed to have been marginalised, the political forum of the country's biggest trade union has embraced it unanimously! Where the alternatives to cuts, the market and competition are argued out clearly with rank-and-file trade unionists, we can win the day.

Unison paradox

Jon Rogers, Lambeth Unison A Branch, reports from the Unison conference in Brighton.

THIS YEAR'S conference was a paradox. It felt like a series of victories for the platform against the left, yet the key policy decisions were positive for the left and bad news for Mr. Blair. In voting overwhelmingly for a minimum wage of half male median earnings, conference gave a firm answer to the refusal of the front bench to abide by the defined formula. The Blair-Brown-Harman strategy of letting employers have a say in the setting of the minimum wage was described from the rostrum as being like "putting Dracula in charge of a blood bank".

However, while Unison took the right side in the key debates within the Labour Party, the conference seemed otherwise to follow the rightward direction of recent NEC election results. A motion calling for defiance of the anti-trade union laws was defeated far more decisively than it had been last year.

The response of the left to this rightward shift was, to say the least, unfortunate. The search for a left alternative to Rodney Bickerstaffe in the election for general secretary has now led to decisions by both the Socialist Workers Party and the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Unison to run candidates. This division and confusion will not help the left build on the support given for public ownership and the minimum wage nor help confront the increasingly right-wing NEC.

Blair babes rejected

Trade Unions

Alison Browne, NUS Women's Officer, looks at the row in the National Union of Students over grants, loans and the funding of education as students voted to back free education.

FOR MORE than five years, NUS's right-wing Labour leaders ensured that the union was dominated by a debate on internal reform. They called themselves 'modernisers' and talked about extending democracy, but their most notable initiative was the abolition of the union's 1000-delegate Winter Conference and its replacement by a National Council of fifty hacks.

Meanwhile, NUS campaigns, aimed at lobbying Tory ministers, became steadily less effective. There was no strategy for mobilising students. After all, students look scruffy and upset Tory MPs and the media. More to the point, students fighting back tend to put uncomfortable demands on their leaders.

Nonetheless, students have fought back. In 1991-92, when student hardship began to bite, colleges and universities experienced a winter of discontent, as thousands of students occupied college buildings in protest at the funding crisis - poor accommodation, low grants, understocked libraries, overcrowded lectures.

In November 1993, Chancellor Kenneth Clark announced that the student grant would be cut by 30% over the next three years. The NUS did nothing - not even a petition. Student activists, co-ordinated by the ad hoc National Student Alliance, called a national demonstration and mobilised twenty thousand students on the streets of London.

The failure of NUS to defeat the grants cuts convinced some in the student movement that winning full grants for all students was an impossible dream, and that NUS should change its demands to something more 'attainable'. Others had more cynical motives for wanting a policy shift, seeking to stroll the corridors of power with those academics and politicians who were already drawing up blueprints of how students could be made to pay.

Labour's Commission on Social Justice proposed that student grants be abolished and completely replaced by maintenance loans. Students would also be made to pay up to 20% of their tuition fees. This is described as a 'Higher Education Contribution Scheme', and, it is promised, would be "sensitively designed". The Tories are considering a similar system at the moment, although they are worried that it will be a vote-loser!

Think-tanks and educational bodies have come up with various other pay-to-learn schemes, including: graduate tax; Maintenance Income Contingent Loans (MICL); Fee Income Contingent Loans; top-up tuition fees; privatised loans; and employer levies.

NUS right wingers argued that NUS must be part of this debate. At Annual Conference this year, they won a vote for NUS to conduct research into the different funding policies. Many delegates who voted for this saw it as a useful opportunity to involve students in discussion and to reaffirm NUS's demand for full grants against any of the other proposed funding policies. The NUS leadership saw this as an opportunity to drop the grants policy altogether.

They began by sending out a questionnaire to student unions. This asked students to decide what public spending priority education should have against health, unemployment and the environment, and what priority further and higher education should have against nursery provision, schools and adult education. Perhaps they should have asked: "Don't you realise that sick people and small children will suffer if you are selfish enough to go to college without resources of your own?" The questionnaire had to be returned in the fortnight of the Easter break.

With the *Guardian* announcing that NUS had already dropped its free education policy, the right wing were confident of winning. So as a follow-up to their 'consultation process', they called a special conference in Derby during students' exams and college half terms. Labour NUS President Jim Murphy saw himself as Tony Blair, the Derby Assembly Rooms as Westminster Central Hall, and dropping free education as New Clause IV.

But Murphy was not to repeat Blair's triumph. The special conference rejected a motion advocating MICL, reaffirmed the commitment to free education and resolved to step up the action for decent grants.

Two factors were crucial to this victory. The first was the successful organisation of the Free Education campaign, uniting students from a broad political range in defence of NUS's free education policy. Free Education organised and took part in debates, mobilised delegates for the special conference, and provided information, arguments, and model motions for student unions.

The second crucial factor was that so many Labour students were prepared to defy their national leadership and vote for a free education policy. The Labour leaders of NUS have done nothing to enhance Labour's appeal to student activists and much to damage it. As a result, Labour Students is discredited as a representative of student Labour Party members. In each year's NUS National Executive elections, more than twice as many Labour Party members stand for election under different banners than on the Labour Students' slate.

What will happen next? A section of Derby's losers are organising to lobby the Government separately, promoting the MICL scheme. Free education supporters will be making sure that NUS campaigning is effectively organised. We will be demonstrating in London in the autumn term, protesting at Tory Party Conference and lobbying Parliament on budget day. Locally, rent strikes, rallies, demonstrations and occupations will be used to step up the pressure and increase student involvement.

The plan of the Labour Students leaders was to ensure that NUS would be on the side of a future Labour Government in any clash with students over the right to free education. They failed. Our task now is to ensure that NUS is as effective as possible in fighting for students and to galvanise the opposition to our leaders' sell-outs within Labour Students. ❑

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Death squads in Turkey

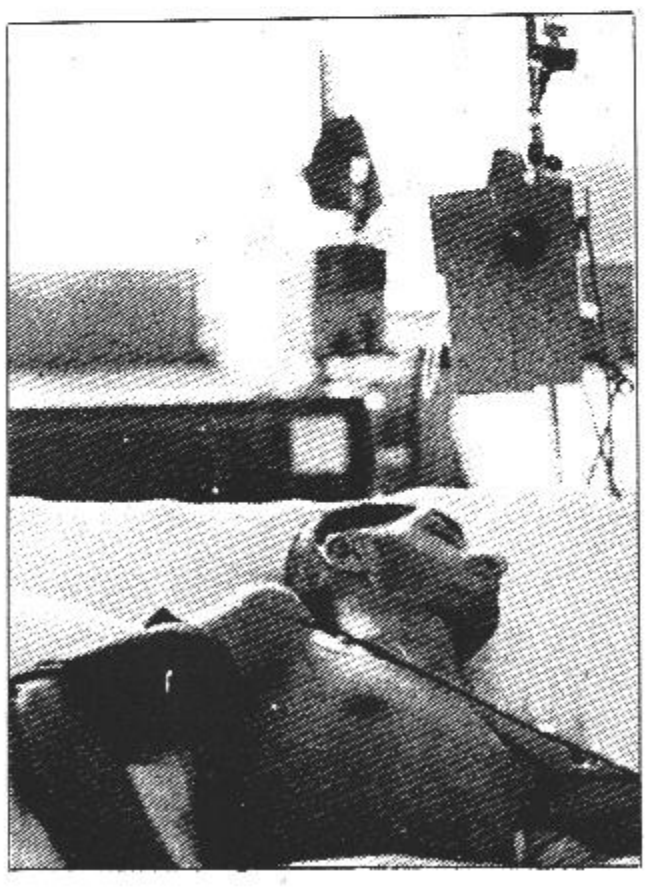
Aynur Taraman of the London-based Day-Mer Human Rights Committee reports on escalating rights abuses in Turkey.

FORTY-SEVEN years have elapsed since the approval of the International Human Rights Declaration and three hundred years since those rights first appeared on humanity's agenda. Yet in Turkey today the rights to travel, organise, assemble, demonstrate, work, speak and so on are regarded as a luxury.

Even the right to life is under serious threat. You may "disappear" one day in police custody. You may be killed in the middle of the street by "unknown" perpetrators. You may be executed extra-judicially. You may be tortured and forced to sign a false confession or become a police agent. You may be imprisoned for something you have written or said. If you are a socialist, a dissident or a Kurd, then it is much more likely that your rights will be violated.

In the last few years, a new term occurred in Turkey: "disappearance in custody". According to the daily newspaper *Cumhuriyet* 328 people "disappeared" in 1994 alone. The story usually goes like this. Police or plainclothes officers take people from their houses or the streets in front of eyewitnesses. Then they deny holding them in detention. When this happens, it means the "disappeared" are no longer alive.

A member of the Ankara Bar Association told Amnesty International: "People do not worry so much about torture nowadays. If your son or daughter just comes out of police detention alive, it is cause for rejoicing. Because the police now habitually fail to register properly, every detention is a crisis. The Human Rights Association and the lawyers are being worn down."



Harun Getin was detained on 15th March 1993. His skull was broken as a result of torture. He spent 6 months in intensive care and died on 5th September 1993.

One of the most striking examples of "disappearance" is the case of Hasan Ocak. He was detained by the police on 21st March 1995 in front of seven eye witnesses. Despite all the efforts of his family and friends the police denied holding him. After a long campaign his family found out that Hasan Ocak's body was found in a wood five days after his detention and he was buried as it was believed that he had no relations. His family said there were electric shock marks on his body and he was thrown off a cliff.

Another example is Kenan Bilgin. Nothing has been heard since his detention on 12th September 1994. Despite written statements by ten detainees, the authorities have not offered any explanation of his case so far.

Ordinary civilians and Kurds, opposition political activists, academics and journalists like Ugur Mumcu, Turan Dursun and Muammer Aksoy are among the many people who have been murdered by "unknown" perpetrators. The term "unknown" is the state's euphemism. In fact this term refers to paramilitary forces organised by the state itself. This is proved by the statements of the commission set up by the Turkish parliament to investigate these murders. Members of the commission believe that when they reached a certain point during their investigations a "mysterious hand" intervened to prevent them from delving deeper into the role of the state itself.

Meanwhile, more than 100 writers, academics, journalists, trade unionists and publishers are in prison in Turkey for expressing their non-violent beliefs. Dr Ismail Besikci, Dr Haluk Gerger, Dr Fikret Baskaya are just a few examples. The world famous novelist Yasar Kemal is on trial. Munir Ceylan, the ex-president of the Oil Workers' Union, served a seven-month sentence. Atilay Aycin, the president of the Civil Aviation Workers' Union, has just been imprisoned for 20 months. Even six elected MPs from the DEP (Democracy Party), the majority of whose members are Kurdish, are on trial. Mehdi Zana, former mayor of Diyarbakir province in southeast Turkey, is now serving four years for testifying to the Human Rights Sub-Committee of the European Parliament.

What is happening in Turkey-Kurdistan is genocide. Kurdish villages are being bombed and burnt down and depopulated in order to make it easier to control them. The villagers are being assembled, beaten up and killed arbitrarily. Those who stay alive have two choices: either to become a village guard and side with the state or to leave the village. In 1994 alone, 1,500 villages were depopulated.

Human rights violations have escalated in the last few years. This is because Turkey is experiencing the deepest economic and political crisis in its history. Over one million workers have been made redundant. Wages are decreasing day by day. As a result, there is opposition from workers and the Kurdish people. Despite repression, people in Gazi and Elbistan marched directly against Government institutions.

On the surface, it seems Turkey is governed by an elected centre-right social democratic coalition. In reality, the main decision-making body remains the General Staff. The Government and parliament are just there to approve the generals' decrees.

Recently, as a result of pressures from European countries and Turkey's desire to join the European Union, the Government launched the comedy of "democratisation". It has founded a Ministry for Human Rights which has no function. There is now a debate on the abolition of Article 8 of the Anti-Terror Law which restricts freedom of expression, but even if this article is abolished there are still 152 other articles which restrict this freedom. ❑

A giant concentration camp

INTERNATIONAL BRIEFING

Ihsan Qadir, editor of *Kurdistan Focus*, looks at the latest wave of Turkish repression.

TURKEY IS facing a major economic, political and ideological crisis. High inflation, negative growth and high unemployment are coupled with rapid but unplanned urbanisation. The gap between the few who are rich and the rest of the country has widened so much that social discontent is kept under control only by strong repressive measures.

In spite of recent changes in international politics and the end of the Cold War, Turkish leaders continue to keep an army of over 750,000, the second largest in NATO.

Turkey wants to join the rich club of the European Union without paying the price of structural change. It wants to hold on to its autocratic laws and anti-union legislation. Turkish leaders are hoping that western governments will continue to provide aid and support in spite of Turkey's brutality against the Kurds, its undemocratic political institutions and imprisonment and torture of hundreds of activists.

Turkey's policies towards its Kurdish population are aimed at dehumanising them by breaking their resistance and national pride and then assimilating them into Turkish identity. The Kurdish language is banned. To speak, write, publish or possess things to do with Kurdish is a punishable crime. It may sound incredible but last month the Department of Religious Affairs in Turkey even banned the publication of the Koran in Kurdish.

Despite this, the Kurds have found a way of by-passing the Turkish persecutors. They have raised enough money to hire a satellite TV station in London and have started to broadcast a programme in Kurdish for three hours daily.

The political system in Turkey has traditionally rested on three No's: no to religious interference in politics, no to Kurdish nationalism and no to communism. While the perceived threat from communism has receded and communist activities are no longer banned, the regime is deadlocked over the issues of religion and Kurdish nationalism. The coalition of the conservative True Path Party (DYP) and the 'left' Social Democratic Party (SHP), in power since 1991, has totally failed to keep its promise to "recognise the Kurdish reality".

The war in Kurdistan is costing the Turkish economy more than $10 billion a year and it looks as if this figure will rise further. The whole Kurdish area of Turkey looks like a giant concentration camp guarded by over 300,000 troops. Since 1984, more than 16,000 people have lost their lives in this war and over 3,000 villages have been destroyed by the army. According to reports released in Turkey, the National Security Council has agreed a plan to relocate up to 79,000 villages and put their inhabitants into 4,500 newly-built 'collective villages' - where they will be protected by the Turkish Grey Wolves!

Despite these atrocities, Kurdish leaders, including the leader of the PKK, Abdullah Ocalan, have on many occasions called for dialogue and negotiation. They have expressed their readiness to sit and discuss any option that might lead to a complete cessation of hostilities. Sadly, the Turkish Government has turned down these offers.

Kurds have stated that they are ready to participate in the political process if their parties are unbanned. A number of democratic platforms and movements have already been set up to test the ground.

The Kurds are aware of their heavy responsibilities and the dangers that await them. They have extended the olive branch to Turkey. It is now up to the leaders of the Turkish state either to go down the hard road of building a pluralist, multi-ethnic democratic society or to become a totalitarian state isolated from the civilised world.

For more information, contact *Kurdistan Focus*, 19 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG.

Human rights violations in Turkey in 1994:

Number of people:

arrested	1,209
detained	14,473
"disappeared" in custody	328
murdered by "unknown perpetrators"	292
killed in detention as a result of torture	298
allegedly tortured	1,000
killed in armed clashes	5,000
The number of civilians killed	458
" " injured	574

Number of:

villages burnt down and depopulated	1,500
associations, parties and publications closed down	123
assoc., parties, publications and trade unions raided	119
places bombed	191
publications confiscated	450
MPs, writers, academics, journalists, trade unionists and publishers arrested	100
workers sacked	700,000
Total prison sentences	537 years

Source: The 1994 Report of Human Rights Association Turkey.

Free Atilay Aycin

TRADE UNION leader Atilay Aycin was arrested on 16th May 1995 and sentenced to 20 months imprisonment for giving a speech at a meeting on 'anti-terrorist legislation' organised by the Human Rights Association in 1991.

Aycin, leader of the Civil Aviation Union, was arrested along with other trade unionists on the 21st day of a strike against the recently privatised aviation company.

The Fire Brigade and Bakers unions nationally, along with Labour MPs and MEPs and local union branches, have joined the campaign for Aycin's release.

● For more information contact 0181 533 7111 or 0171 275 8440.

The media and the Nigerian crisis

Sean Coyne reports on the struggle in west Africa and the beginnings of a solidarity movement in Britain.

A JOURNALIST friend who works for a 'quality' paper in Britain pointed out that if a tenth of the coverage given to the World Rugby Championships in South Africa had been devoted to what is happening on the African continent as a whole, readers might begin to appreciate that there is more to events there than the distressing reports of violence and famine which tend to fixate editors here.

Everyday the media invite us to concur with the racist view that the crisis in Africa is down to 'tribalism', 'corruption' and 'underdevelopment'. The impact of direct imperial rule, followed by decades of distorting neo-colonialism, exploitation by multi-nationals, austerity measures imposed by the World Bank and the IMF, the arming of military regimes by western governments, and the encouragement of corruption through the awarding of bogus contracts and sweeteners are rarely mentioned.

In Nigeria, the military regime of General Sani Abacha refuses to hand over power to a civilian administration and continues to imprison the winner of the 1993 presidential election, Mashood Abiola, as well as leaders of the oil workers unions who campaigned for him. It has also banned the leaders of the Nigeria Labour Congress and harassed and arrested trade union and human rights activists. The internationally renowned writer and environmentalist, Ken Siro Wiwa, is currently on trial on a trumped up murder charge - because he dared to demand reparations from the Shell Oil Company for the damage it has done to Ogoni land. The British Government says it regrets this unfortunate state of affairs, but that has not stopped it supplying the regime with tanks and other means of repression.

Under pressure from African-American activists, the US Congressional Black Caucus has declared that the restoration of democracy in Nigeria was to be its main international campaign after the ending of apartheid. As a result, Clinton's adviser on Africa has announced that sanctions may be imposed against the regime. Given that the US buys most of the oil produced in Nigeria, this has sent shock waves through the multi-nationals and the World Bank, which is owed billions by the regime.

Last month, the Abacha regime arrested hundreds of army officers, following rumours of a coup attempt. Reliable reports have indicated that at least 300 middle ranking officers have 'disappeared' and are feared dead. The regime is now blatantly stirring up ethnic tensions between north and south in an attempt to head off popular opposition.

This is why the trade union movement in Nigeria is central to any long term solution to the crisis. Trade unions are the only organisations which have a mass base, a democratic structure and the ability to unite workers regardless of ethnic and geographical considerations.

Despite the banning of the NLC, unions affiliated to it have formed a Co-ordinating Committee representing over three million workers. They are campaigning vigorously for democracy, trade union and human rights, and are determined to establish independent unions free from state control. The ability of the unions to maintain this struggle will depend upon a number of factors, including the strength of international pressure on western governments which criticise the Abacha regime and then conduct business with it as usual.

The Nigerian Community in Britain has begun to recognise the role it can play in an international campaign. Last month over a hundred activists gathered in Brixton to discuss building a solidarity movement. The TUC and a host of British unions have carried resolutions of solidarity with Nigerian trade unionists, and the opportunity to build a united front between the trade union movement and the Nigerian community is now a real possibility.

TGWU members working at the Shell Haven Refinery in Essex have called for a boycott of Shell because it has unilaterally broken the recognition agreement. Actions of this type provide an opportunity to put the case against Shell, not just for its union busting activities in Britain, but its support for a union busting regime in Nigeria.

Information on Nigerian Solidarity activities can be obtained from the African Liberation Support Campaign (ALISC) 0181 202 6292.

An everyday story

A radical Nigerian writer describes an interview he recently conducted with a senior security officer in the Nigerian regime:

"HE SAID HE wanted speak to me about my future. I told him that I was happy doing what I was doing. He said that he was under some pressure to make sure that I stopped writing articles which were critical of the regime, and that people in high places were becoming less and less tolerant. I said that I simply tried to tell the truth, to write what I saw was happening in the country I love. 'No,' he said. 'You do not understand. We do not deny your patriotism, or the fact that you are an important and

World women's conference in trouble

With only four months to go to the United Nations Beijing conference on women, controversies are piling up. Leonora Lloyd reports.

LIKE PREVIOUS conferences, the fourth UN Conference on Women will be in two parts: the official conference, made up of governmental delegations, and the separate forum for non-governmental organisations. In the past, the NGO forums have proved useful opportunities for grass roots women's organisations to get together, produce new ideas and create new international alliances.

The conference is being hosted by China as part of its bid to normalise relationships between itself and the rest of the world. Criticism has been raised over the host's decision to move the NGO forum from its original site close to the official conference to one many miles away in the small tourist town of Huairou, over an hour from the main conference in Beijing. Huairou has only 16,000 beds. The meeting rooms and tents erected for the conference will hold under 10,000 people. A further 2,000 can be accommodated nearer the main conference, at the Beijing Conference Centre.

It is true that the number registered to attend the Forum - some 40,000 - is greater than for previous conferences and more than the Chinese had expected. They have said that they only wanted 20,000 to attend and they banned almost 500 NGOs. But political issues are the main problem for the Chinese authorities.

They have denied accreditation to Tibetan women's organisations and also to nine international groups involved with Tibetan exiles or who have monitored the treatment of Tibetan women. Exiled Iranian women's groups have also been turned away. The authorities seem worried about other groups backing abortion and homosexual rights, human rights and Taiwan.

As a result of the direct intervention of UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the Chinese have agreed to relax some of the restrictions on Forum numbers, but not to change from the new site (though they have agreed to improve disabled access). At the time of writing, it is not known what groups, if any, currently being denied accreditation will be allowed in.

Another problem facing potential participants is that the Chinese authorities have not yet decided what literature and videos they will allow groups to use and distribute. This will be the first UN Women's conference faced with this type of censorship.

It is not just the Chinese who are causing anxieties. Since the last UN Women's Conference fundamentalist groups of all types have grown and what they have in common - whatever religion they profess - is their hatred of women's emancipation. At a recent meeting in New York which was part of the international lead-up to the conference, representatives of these groups argued against parts of the proposed Platform for Action which included mention of 'gender' and differentiated this from 'sex'. They also opposed mention of reproductive rights.

As a result 40% of the draft Platform remains 'bracketed' - unagreed - even at this late stage. The document is a step backwards from previous UN World Conferences.

The main purpose of the conference should be to raise women's issues to the top of the agenda of the world's governments and international agencies. Despite many fine words since the last conference, women's poverty world wide is increasing, few countries have increased women's representation in their legislatures and women's rights generally are still less than men's.

While Australia and the Scandinavian countries have organised national debates and produced masses of information about the conference, in this country the Government has produced only a 'state of the nation's women' report and there has been little or no debate - certainly none initiated by the Government. The delegation will be headed by Ann Widdicombe whose natural instincts will be to align with the fundamentalist groups and their concerns. If the British Government has made any representations on the NGO Forum, they have been a well-kept secret. Certainly they are giving much less help to British NGOs to enable them to attend than most other western countries.

All over the world women have been making preparations and putting energy and hopes into the forthcoming conference. It is still not too late to make some changes. Individuals and groups should bombard the Government with demands that it raises its voice along with others from around the world. ❑

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influential writer, it is just that we cannot trust you.' I asked him to explain what he meant. He said that he had investigated my circumstances. He had looked into my bank account, and generally at my prospects, and it was this that had worried his superiors. He said it was hard to trust me because I did not own any property. I looked at him in a puzzled way, and he said, 'Why don't you allow us to help you. Let us give you a car and a driver, perhaps a new house, or settle the school fees for your children. Why not let us put you in a position where you can relax, and write whatever you want, whenever you want? Become a man of some property, and then we will be able to trust you, and leave you to your patriotic duties.'

I said I was a modest man and that my needs were simple, that I had no need for the property he offered. He said I should think carefully about what he had said, and that a man without property could not only not be trusted, but could also live a short life. That's when I realised I had to leave the country."

Che and the art of motorcycle travel

***Mike Phipps** reviews*
The Motorcycle Diaries
by Ernesto Che Guevara, Verso Books, £14.95.

"The bike was more or less mended and we were all set to leave the following day, so we decided to let our hair down with some of our new pals who invited us for a few drinks. Chilean wine is very good and I was downing it at an amazing rate, so by the time we went on to the village dance I felt ready for anything. It was very cosy evening and we kept filling our bellies and minds with wine. One of the mechanics from the garage, a particularly nice guy, asked me to dance with his wife because he'd been mixing his drinks and was the worse for wear. His wife was pretty randy and obviously in the mood, and I, full of Chilean wine, took her by the hand to lead her outside. She followed me docilely but then realized her husband was watching and changed her mind. I was in no state to listen to reason and we had a bit of a barney in the middle of the dance floor, resulting in me pulling her towards one of the doors with everybody watching. She tried to kick me and as I was pulling her she lost her balance and went crashing to the floor. As we were running towards the village, pursued by a swarm of enraged dancers, Alberto lamented all the wine her husband might have bought us."

EIGHT YEARS before he led the revolutionary seizure of power alongside Fidel Castro in Cuba, Ernesto 'Che' Guevara went on an eight-month journey with a friend up the western side of Latin America from Cordoba in Argentina to Caracas, Venezuela.

Che was 23 when he wrote *The Motorcycle Diaries*, a misleading title since the bike in fact broke down before they even got out of Chile. Much of the journey was therefore accomplished by bumming lifts, a process which reduced the "two Argentinian doctors" to the status of ordinary tramps.

Che's travels begin full of youthful exuberance with numerous accounts of heavy drinking and daring scrapes (see box). These are entertaining enough, but as the journey progresses, and the two travellers become poorer, hungrier and, in Che's case, sicklier, there is a growing maturity, a nascent social awareness and sympathy for the oppressed.

Treating an old woman for asthma and a bad heart in dire poverty, Che observes: "It is in cases like this, when a doctor knows he is powerless, that he longs for change ... For people whose horizons never reach beyond tomorrow, we see the profound tragedy which circumscribes the life of the proletariat the world over."



Elsewhere we see Che's contempt for the middle class: "ignorant as the next man, but their petty victory in life has gone to their heads."

At the end, in a remarkably prescient statement, he concludes: "I now know that when the great guiding spirit cleaves humanity into two antagonistic halves, I will be with the people." Two years later he met Castro in Mexico and began training for guerrilla operations in Cuba. For the next 23 years until his death at the hands of the Bolivian army, Che would be 'with the people.'

This book is worth reading for more than novelty value. In his journey across Latin America, through the Andes and the rainforest, Che's diary is full of original observation, hilarious mishaps and human understanding.

Foot in paperback

***Mike Phipps** reviews*
Michael Foot, a biography
by Mervyn Jones, published by Victor Gollancz, £9.99.

IT'S STILL HARD to believe that the crusading orator who inspired the left for two generations could play such a shabby role between 1974 and 1983 - operating the Social Contract to police the unions, drawing up the Lib-Lab pact and deals with the Ulster Unionists to stay in office, persuading Callaghan to stay on as leader after 1979, opposing attempts to democratise the Party, supporting the sending of the Task Force to the Falklands in 1982, publicly attacking Peter Tatchell's candidature in Bermondsey, and so on.

Close to his subject, like many biographers, Jones is far too lenient to Foot in these years, dismissing the anger of the 'extremist' left after 1979 with trite media slurs. This is the weakness at the core of his finely written book. By insisting that Foot remained true to his socialist principles, he cannot explain why such a towering intellect became such a figure of contempt.

Bankable Blair

"The **leader** of the Labour Party delivered a speech that could have been made by Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, or Michel Camdessus, managing director of the IMF," writes **Will Hutton** of *The Guardian*. It was based on the "underlying assumption that capitalism works best if left to its own devices" and "effective bipartisanship with Messrs Clarke, Major and George".

"A stable macro-economic framework, the audience was told, is essential if companies are to plan. This is a position borrowed straight from the new right revolution of the 1970s whose intellectual authors include Milton Friedman and Friedrich Hayek.

"The whole point of the economics in which left-of-centre politics is rooted is that capitalism is definitionally unstable and its workings inequitable." Clearly in **Blair**'s eyes *The Guardian* must have been taken over by extremists.

Gissajob?

"We may therefore find to our surprise," concluded **Ken Livingstone** in a recent *Guardian* article, "that Blair could yet deliver a Labour Government of which socialists could be proud if he's prepared to take on the vested interests of the City".

That's some if!

Periscope welcomes off-the-wall ideas from other contributors who wish to play 'Fantasy Labour Government'.

Right of centre

"The buzz words of the eighties have become the boo words of the nineties. 'Flexibility', 'dynamism', 'enterprise', 'competitiveness' - even 'choice' - now send shivers down the nation's collective spine. We know that they are code words for harder work for longer hours, with less protection against more powerful bosses ... **New Labour** speaks a different dialect from the Government's, but not a different language."

Not some hard left whinge but ex-SDP academic **David Marquand** writing in *The Guardian* recently.

Par for the course

Tony Blair has ordered his entire top brass to attend a £1,000 a head three-day course at Cranfield, Britain's elite management school.

The Cranfield School of Management publicity brochure pledges to work with clients like the Labour Party to "gain an understanding of what you are attempting to achieve as a business." Other Cranfield clients include the Bank of England, British Telecom, Kodak, Pearl Assurance and Nissan Motors. What next for **New Labour** - a Stock Exchange flotation?

Glenys' priorities

When Cardiff International Airport was sold off to property developers one of the first callers was the **Welsh MEP**, fearful she might now have to pay for parking her car.



It never ends

If you thought the **Poll Tax** fight was over you'll be shocked to hear of the latest developments from the Netherlands.

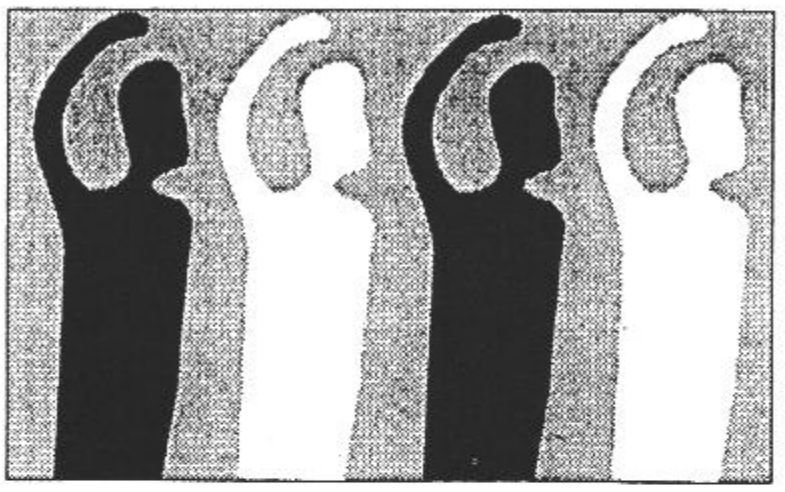
Nicholas Jeffries, who was accused of riot, violent disorder and ABH during the Trafalgar Square demonstration in 1990, has been extradited and will face charges at Bow Street Court.

Begging the question

"We will not tolerate the intimidation of shoppers and visitors to Manchester by people begging aggressively." Another rant against beggars from John Major? No - **Graham Stringer**, Labour leader of Manchester City Council.

NATIONAL DAY OF ACTIONS

against detentions and deportations



Saturday 24 June 1995

DEMONSTRATE AT

Harmondsworth Detention Centre, 12pm
(Colnbrook By-pass, Harmondsworth, Hounslow West tube)

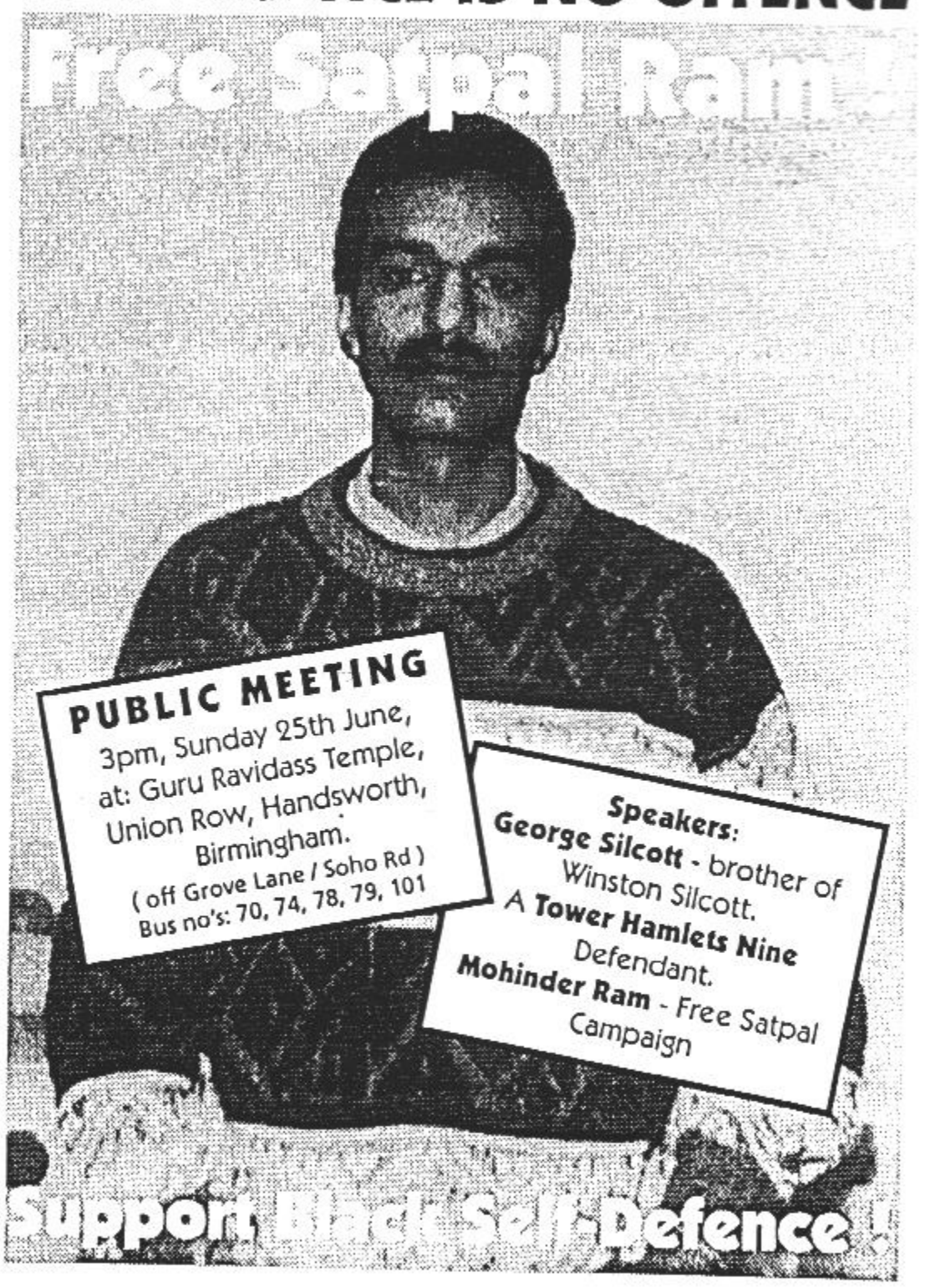
Campsfield Detention Centre, 12pm
(Kidlington, Oxford)

Winson Green prison (Birmingham) ring (0121) 551 4518

Haslar prison (Portsmouth) ring (01705) 698435

■ WE REMEMBER JOY GARDNER, KILLED BY A DEPORTATION SQUAD ■ WE REMEMBER OMASASE LUMUMBA, MURDERED IN PENTONVILLE PRISON ■ WE REMEMBER JOSEPH NNALUE, JUMPED FROM A WINDOW TO AVOID DEPORTATION SQUAD ■ WE REMEMBER KWANELE SIZIBA JUMPED FROM A WINDOW TO ESCAPE POLICE

SELF-DEFENCE IS NO OFFENCE



Your letters are welcome, but please keep them short

Write to:

BRIEFING
PO BOX 2378
LONDON E5 9QU

It was disappointing to see a previously respected comrade, Paul Gosling, acting as a right-wing propagandist in response to recent *Briefing* coverage of Leicester.

The battle lines in the conflict on the city council are confusingly drawn, but I cannot think of anybody active within the left in Leicester who is prepared to support Peter Soulsby's bid to regain the leadership of the Council. With regard to Gosling's comments about "angry Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims", the overwhelming source of community anger has been the attempt by Soulsby and his allies to use sectarianism as a means of regaining power.

For example during the recent local elections, attempts were made by Hindu fundamentalists in certain areas of Leicester to highlight candidates' religious backgrounds in order to influence voting behaviour. Although such attempts were ultimately unsuccessful, the levels of harrassment suffered by many Labour supporters led to a police investigation.

Gosling's accusation of correspondents being "very selectively briefed" is especially ironic in view of the account he gives of his deselection as a councillor in 1990. While he mentions the dispute between Keith Vaz and himself concerning the *Satanic Verses*, he omits the fact that at the time he represented a ward containing one of the largest mosques in the country. Gosling's public defence of Salman Rushdie, while principled, appeared to many of his constituents as ill-judged and even provocative, and caused considerable damage to Labour's relations with local Muslims.

Regarding the comments on Keith Vaz, as a former employee of his, I know as much as anyone about his weaknesses and his efforts to secure a prominent place on the Blair bandwagon. However this doesn't mean his overall record of achievement should not be placed in a proper context. When he was selected ten years ago as candidate for Leicester East, the constituency was Tory-held and seemed likely to remain so. It is now, after Bolsover and Chesterfield, the safest Labour seat in the East Midlands. Vaz has a house within the constituency and doesn't seek to exploit his position for financial gain, nor does he act as an apologist for certain Middle Eastern regimes. Although these may appear to *Briefing* readers as the most minimal of standards for Labour MPs, some of Gosling's new friends seem to find it difficult to conform to them.

Yours in comradeship,
Cllr Colin Hall,
Leicester City Council.

I feel compelled to write in response to your coverage of the fractious nature of Labour politics in Leicester. Sadly the comments of Paul Gosling incorporated a very selective account of events in the city which needs rebutting.

There were ambiguities in respect of eligibility to vote in the council selection contest that helped remove Gosling from office. But his downfall also rested on his long- standing inability to garner support from beyond the middle class white membership of a ward with substantial ethnic minority population, which was reflected in the make- up of the branch itself.

The poll tax rebellion and opposition to the cuts budget had no bearing on his departure from the council. He was by no means unique, for 14 members of the City and Councils took such action and mass deselections of these individuals didn't follow as a result. It is about time Gosling faced up to his own inability to build alliances.

The current Leicester City Council leadership is at best centrist in party terms, but unlike the Soulsby regime it is characterised by some degree of openness and collective group decision making. And, unlike the previous administration, this rainbow coalition does see left-leaning figures (including *Briefing* sympathisers) assuming positions of influence.

What Gosling also fails to report is the leaking of contentious documents by his new allies to the Murdoch press in order to vilify opponents. Such actions most socialists will find inexcusable!

Sadly, the Labour Party across the city is rotten to the core. Leicester West CLP has seen party membership seemingly manipulated to ensure the safe return of ultra right-wing candidates to public office. By strange 'coincidence' Party membership in the constituency has had a habit of increasing before the cut-off dates to be eligible to vote in parliamentary selection meetings.

With the left in disarray within the Party the need for unity amongst socialists is more urgent than ever. It is time for Paul Gosling to desist from his reckless and futile exhibition of 'personality politics'.

Yours in Struggle,
Barrie Wood,
Former Leics. county councillor.

The unattributed article "Racist violence: blaming the victims" in your last edition gave the wrong impression about the involvement of Hounslow Council in Mrs Uppal's case.

From the outset the Uppal family have received advice and support from council officers. The family have been placed in temporary accommodation and provided with additional security such as surveillance cameras and security locks. Legal action is being taken to repossess the council property inhabited by perpetrators of the racial harassment.

Finally, Hounslow Council has agreed to fund the private prosecution taken out by Mrs Uppal against her perpetrators. Hardly the action of a council "more concerned to protect the attackers".

Chris Langstaff
Director of Housing,
Hounslow Council.

Considering the fact that John Smith and Harold Wilson both chose to be buried on islands off the British coast I'd like to suggest that in the event of Tony Blair being run over by a bus that the Party should invest in a plot on the Isle of Muck!

Yours in solidarity,
Alan Bedford,
Goole.

Some people seem determined on leaving the Labour Party in the wake of Blair's victory over Clause IV.

I understand the feeling, but we should remember that the Gang of Four left the Party in a huff because things weren't going their way. I for one have no intention of joining Roy Jenkins and Shirley Williams in betraying the greatest political party this country has seen.

Only a Labour Party guided by socialist values can democratise and civilize this country and set a good example to the rest of the world. Those who understand this have a duty to stay and to remember that what has been changed once can be changed again.

Yours,
Graham Day,
Stirlingshire.

Briefing's AGM, which I attended, was a sham. The issue of whether socialists should remain in a bankrupt outfit like the Labour Party was not addressed: nor was there any analysis of the current political situation.

What took place instead was a discussion that had clearly been set up about *Briefing* hitching up with *New Left*. In itself I have no problem with such a debate. The left is fragmented ludicrously, and if groups can join together in a non-sectarian manner for reasons other than just talking about the class war, then that is good news.

However, my main concern was what the meeting had ostensibly been called for: the futility of being in the Labour Party. The fact is that Labour has never been a good place for socialists to be. The battles over the years have been lost one by one, as the class conflict slipped by almost unnoticed. The fight over Clause IV should be seen not just as another battle, but the final one - the war is over and you lost. Socialists are not wanted in the Labour Party and by staying you are having yourself tarred with the same anti-working class brush. Working class people, faced with the attacks that are to come from a Labour Government will not say "Blair's a cad, but the people in *Briefing* are OK". They will simply say "The Labour Party is attacking us - they are the new enemy".

In terms of appealing to the working class proper, instead of just making the usual lefty noises, only Leonora Lloyd at the AGM made the valid point that the left must try to communicate with a far wider audience. I trust *Briefing* will take that on board.

For a debate such as this, the services of a Labour MP, however left sounding, are not required. In fact Jeremy Corbyn was a disgrace. Not having the decency to turn up on time, he seemed to think it acceptable to wander in and out of the meeting while people were discussing his contribution. He couldn't even be bothered to stay to the end. I do not know who dragged Corbyn up in his formative years, but on the council estate that I was brought up on, we were taught that such actions were arrogant and unacceptable.

Yours fraternally,
Dave Hammond,
Some CLP.

By the time you get round to printing this letter, I hope you have decided to keep *Briefing* going. I know running a magazine involves enormous sacrifices from good comrades, but we need a broad spectrum of alternatives on the left more than ever.

To the point of the letter. Both your editorial and the article by Kevin Flack and Jon Rogers come to the depressing, realistic and pragmatic decision that socialists should stay in the Labour Party. I shall say 'yes' to that for the time being, but the main reason why there is nothing else to do for many of us hinges on our voting system. More than anything else it is the "first past the post" system that makes grim determination to stay in a reasonable choice. I have in the past argued for maintaining our system because, not least, it forces socialists into the Labour Party and gives socialists a chance of influencing a government. The obverse is that it leads the Party right and opportunists to take the left for granted.

If we have PR there is a real chance of a socialist party making an electoral breakthrough. Most countries with PR have seen a split between Social Democrats and Socialists. Arguably, the left on its own would then have more influence on any future Blairite government, than the left inside, always in hock to party loyalty and "keeping the Tories out". I think the Blairites know this too and any ardour for PR will diminish among "modernisers".

But his line means that I and, I am sure, other socialists in the Labour Party and beyond will be re-considering the merits of PR as an alternative more fruitful that your gloomy editorial.

Best wishes,
Michael Hindley,
MEP.

I am not a member of the Labour Party or any other political party.

Blair's 'amendment' of Clause IV will prove to be of negligible importance. The next Labour Government will behave in exactly the same way as it would have if Clause IV had remained.Clause IV was written to appease left-wing activists. It was clear, even by the Party Conference of 1918, that the leadership did not intend any concrete action to be based upon it.

Every Labour Government has had no problems in completely ignoring Clause IV. There is no evidence to suggest that a Blair Government would have been any different. Clause IV was part of a vain hope that one day socialists could transform the Party. This was never a possibility.

Clause IV was of only symbolic importance. Its passing will have very little real effect on the Labour Party.

Yours,
Paul Allender,
London NW2.

Please, socialists, stay!

Historically, every split from the Labour Party has resulted in the group concerned disappearing into obscurity. Militant's consistently mediocre performances in elections since 1990 illustrate this perfectly. The SDP is now defunct, merged with the Liberals.

Blairite, right-wing, empty though it is, the Labour Party is a symbol of hope to millions. They look to us as the only force capable of defeating the Tories and delivering something better. Surely it is a duty for socialists to remain within Labour, to pressurise the leadership and to voice the concerns of the poor and oppressed?

If we leave we are abandoning these millions of people to the mercy of Blair and his minions. How could we live with the shame?

Yours,
Alan Thomas,
Southampton.





Joy Gardner's mother and son outside Joy's home in North London. Photo: Paul Mattsson.

Joy Gardner: no justice

Frances Webber of the Institute for Race Relations indicts the racism which has let Joy Gardner's killers walk free.

THE MEDIA tell us that, with the acquittal of DS Linda Evans, PC Colin Whitby and PC John Burrell of the manslaughter of Joy Gardner, justice has been done. If by justice they mean that the judicial process ran its course, that the officers were called to account at a full criminal trial, that's true. It's a rare enough event. It was only the second time police officers (or any other public officers) have ever stood trial in respect of the death of a black person (the first was David Oluwale, drowned in the river Aire in Leeds in 1969). Despite verdicts of unlawful killing at the inquests of Winston Rose, Oliver Pryce, Leon Patterson and Omasase Lumumba, the DPP has consistently refused to prosecute police and prison officers involved in black deaths.

But a prosecution is not enough to achieve justice. There is no justice in a verdict which allows deportees to be treated the way Joy Gardner was, in a verdict which does not reflect outrage at the use of thirteen feet of tape wound seven times round the head and face of woman already trussed and shackled and lying on the floor.

We have been assured that since Joy Gardner's death in August 1993, gags have not been used. They have been outlawed. But Amnesty International does not believe that assurance. In July 1994 it issued a report, 'United Kingdom: cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment during forcible deportation', naming four people who claimed to have been gagged during deportation or attempted deportation.

Similar allegations have been made about others since. Also there has been no assurance that the specially designed body belt (with attached handcuffs) has been or is to be outlawed. The equipment and the holds used to subdue and restrain - an issue which frequently arises in connection with policing of black people - has never been properly dealt with. Who authorises? Who monitors? What criteria are used?

Another issue thrown up but not dealt with by the trial is the unaccountable nature of immigration policing. There was no apology for the fact that Mrs Gardner's arrest and deportation was calculated to defeat the possibility of legal action. The idea was to get her out of her house and on to a plane before her solicitors were aware that her application to stay had been rejected. When she tried to use the phone, it was unplugged. If she had been a criminal suspect there would have been outrage. But she was an 'illegal immigrant'. So that was all right.

Anything goes for illegal immigrants. They can be, and are, locked up for months, on no charges at all, guarded by private 'detention orderlies' earning £4 an hour. They will soon be policed by those same detention orderlies, who can enhance their earnings by 50p an hour by joining the Group Four riot squad, whose formation was recently announced to keep order in the immigration detention centres. They are taken off for deportation duties by private companies with names like 'Loss Prevention International'.

In 1994, two more people died because of immigration policing. Both Kwanele Siziba and Joseph Nnalue were so terrified of being taken away by immigration officers that they tried to escape when officials (in Kwanele's case they were bailiffs) came to the door. Both slipped and fell to their deaths.

Justice will only be done when institutionalised racism ceases to dictate the treatment of immigration suspects and deportees, when they are enfranchised and brought into the mainstream of people with human and civil rights.

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