LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

November 1995 price £1 conc. 50p

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- Liz Davies exclusive
- Labour Party Conference reports
- Manning Marable
- Liverpool strikes ● Ken Loach
- Nicaragua



one nation?

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Myths of the modernisers



THANKS TO SOME fierce stage-managing and arm-twisting, the Blair leadership emerged from Brighton apparently victorious on all counts.

Labour is now committed to retaining grant-maintained schools but not to a specific figure for the minimum wage. Liz Davies was dumped but Trident was embraced. The new rule book gives the leadership sweeping and arbitrary powers. And we now have the clear threat that a future Labour Government will effectively privatise pensions.

All of this was wrapped in the Union Jack and offered to the voters as a recipe for "one nation". Blair's obnoxious flag-waving was hailed in some quarters as an innovative departure. The historical amnesia afflicting the pro-Blair pundits has now reached epidemic proportions. There is nothing new in Labour leaders taking refuge in patriotic drivel (Kinnock tried it as recently as 1992). But the political assumptions behind it have rarely been made so explicit.

The "social partnership" now advocated by both the Shadow Cabinet and the TUC General Council rests on a Big Lie: and there are no conflicting interests within this "one nation" of ours, that the majority who have to sell their labour on the market can make common cause with the minority who own and control most of the country's wealth and property.

Blair's resort to the proverbial "last refuge of the scoundrel" is proof not only of his own intellectual bankruptcy but also confirmation that there is no greater misnomer in contemporary British politics than "moderniser".

It is necessary for socialists to keep recent events in the Labour Party in historical perspective, even if the "modernisers" refuse to do so. Despite substantial setbacks, there has still been no qualitative change in the Party. Throughout much of the late fifties and early sixties Labour seemed even more stitched-up than it does now.

What happened at Brighton was not the ringing endorsement for the "modernisers" reported in some sections of the media but a triumph for the age-old Labour art of the backroom deal, a triumph ensured by widespread fear of "rocking the boat". To use the inaccurate terms favoured by the Blairites, old Labour saved new Labour.

The TGWU, GMB and Unison are committed to many of the progressive policies which Labour must pursue in office. But thanks to the leaderships of these unions, Blair was let off the hook in Brighton. The deal they struck may have assured them of 50% of the Conference vote in the future, but it has left their members nearly powerless when it comes to shaping the priorities of the next Labour Government.

The Brighton Conference was stage-managed because it had to be, because there is deep-going and widespread discontent with the ideas and the tactics of the Blair clique. The highly qualified but nonetheless positive noises on rail renationalisation, class sizes, unemployment and cuts in VAT on domestic fuel were all wrung from the leadership against its will. They are the autumn fruits of the "summer madness" - and they show that when Party and trade union members shout loud enough, they can make themselves heard.

The NEC results exceeded the left's expectations. Of the 120,000 members who cast ballots, one in three voted for three or more members of the Socialist Campaign Group slate, whose votes on the whole were substantially up from 1994. There can be no doubt that in every section of the labour movement there is now a sizeable minority committed to a left alternative to the "modernisers". We all recognise the powerful attraction of the "don't rock the boat" argument. We are just as desperate as anyone else in the Party to win the next election. But we do not believe that the only way or the best way to win the election is the one promoted by Tony Blair. When in office, we will have to deliver substantial improvements in the lives of the majority or we will be replaced by a right-wing Tory administration. For working people in Britain, the consequences of a Labour Government that collapses in failure are terrifying (see what has happened in France or the United States). Therefore we need to speak out now. We cannot censor ourselves. If we wait for a more convenient and comfortable time to criticise the leadership, it will be too late.

Over the last year there have been welcome steps towards practical left unity. We need that unity in order to build a broad alliance against the Blair clique. The bulk of the labour movement is committed to preserving an egalitarian party of labour with a base in the unions and a democratic structure. It must be mobilised against the presumptions of the neo-Thatcherite authoritarians, who wish to cannibalise Labour to create a new party serving a self-selecting and self-perpetuating professional elite.

That last sentence is presumably the kind of "oppositionist", "vitriolic" attack which has earned *Briefing* the odium of Clare Short and other small minds in the leadership coterie. But it ought to be clear by now that Blair's ruthlessness knows no bounds, that "the project" will be pursued come what may, and that only a concerted and organised counter-attack from the left can save Labour and its supporters from impending tragedy. ❑

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Labour: scrap Trident

Llew Smith MP
Blaenau Gwent

THE DEFENCE estimates for this year are £21.5 billion. If we examine the total figure since 1946 we are talking about defence expenditure of about £990 billion at current prices. Just think of the houses we could build, the jobs we could create and the advances in education we could make with this. I am not a pacifist but in my opinion most of the money is wasted. Take nuclear weapons. If they are a deterrent against war, why is it estimated that 25 million people have died in wars since 1945? Even if I thought that there were enemies in other lands plotting some nuclear confrontation with us, I could never agree to the use of nuclear weapons. I am interested to hear whether both Front Bench speakers are willing to make similar declarations, and if not why not.

A recent editorial in *The Scotsman* concluded: "In this year of all years - the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki - Britain should consign Trident to where it belongs, to the past". Others who have arrived at similar conclusions include Sir Robert Mason, the former chief scientific adviser to the MOD, who chaired the working group that originally advocated Trident, and Sir Nigel Bagnall, former Chief of Defence Staff.

Earlier this year, the 170-odd member states of the Non-Proliferation Treaty agreed to extend that treaty indefinitely as part of a bargain. The nuclear states agreed to show the utmost restraint in testing weapons before a nuclear test ban treaty was completed next year to convince non-nuclear states to agree to make the Non-Proliferation Treaty permanent. China's restraint lasted for a full three days; for France it lasted four months.

I congratulate Professor Joseph Rotblat on being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, having campaigned against nuclear weapons since 1944. The fact that the British Government launched the third Trident submarine last month is an insult to the Nobel Peace Prize and to the people of the world.

Labour should scrap Trident and cut defence spending to the average Western European level. If we did that we would save £7-8 billion per year. This is a key campaigning priority in order for a Labour Government to have resources to improve public services and welfare benefits.

The victims of the nuclear arms race are not just the victims of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki but everyone who could have lived in a more civilised and dignified world if that money had been spent differently.

MPs who voted against the defence estimates:

Diane Abbott, John Austin-Walker, Tony Banks, Harry Barnes, Tony Benn, Andrew Bennett, Richard Burden, Ronnie Campbell, Harry Cohen, Jeremy Corbyn, Cynog Dafis, Neil Gerrard, Ieuan Wyn Jones, Lynne Jones, Terry Lewis, Ken Livingstone, Eddie Loyden, Max Madden, Alice Mahon, John Marek, Bill Michie, Chris Mullin, Bob Parry, Gordon Prentice, Alan Simpson, Dennis Skinner, Llew Smith, and Andrew Welsh.

Motagate continued!!!

Is the connection between Motability (the charity that supplies cars to the disabled) and Motability Finance Limited (MFL) acting in the best interests of disabled people, or is there a deeper hidden agenda for this unusual symbiotic relationship? Our Motamole updates us on the scandal *Briefing* scooped this summer.

Well, well, well! Isn't it amazing that an unexpected delay in the release of the report by the National Audit Office on Motability has coincided with vast reductions on Motability's price list? This couldn't possibly be anything to do with all the criticism in Parliament and the media, could it?

The story circulating is that competition between the insurers and motor manufacturers has made it possible for these price reductions. Now the big question is, if it is okay to put the insurance and supply of vehicles out to competitive tender, why not do the same with the finances?

Peter Lilley referred to stamping out fraud in the DSS at the Tory Party Conference. I suggest that the biggest moral fraud of all has been perpetrated by MFL, refusing to reveal the extent of its partnerships' MCL and MHP sizeable profits and keeping disabled people and taxpayers in the dark.

Secret partnerships called Motability Quarter End Partnerships 'B', 'C' and 'D' are believed to be the mechanism that enables MFL to pass these profits on to the banks.

One might say that the only reason the banks are doing this admirable service for disabled people is that they find this previously unrevealed partnership highly profitable; and as a result, the disabled have been and still are leasing overpriced cars via what appears to be a banking cartel that is funded by peoples' DSS benefits.

Recently leaked documents suggest that in 1993 there was a gross profit of £90m, which makes it look as if more than £500 profit per disabled customer was made by the banks that year.

What would Peter Lilley say if he knew the whole truth? Or is it true that Lord Sterling's involvement (chairman of Motability and major backer of the Tory Party) has rather complicated the issue? I'll keep you posted.

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Against low pay - for human dignity

A GROUP OF just 52 low-paid workers - mainly Asian women - are currently showing more determination in the fight against spiv contractors and NHS privatisers than the entire Labour Party and health union leaderships put together. *Labour Left Briefing* reports from Hillingdon in West London.

The strikers at Hillingdon Hospital have been out since the start of October after bosses at the multi-million pound NHS contractors Pall Mall Services decided to slash their pay.

"We've lost our jobs because we refused to take a 20% pay cut - thirty pounds off our pay packet every week," says Kanila, a spokeswoman for the strikers.

"We just can't put up with it," she added. "They've abolished time and a half for Saturdays, double time on Sundays and time in lieu of Bank Holidays. If that wasn't bad enough, our basic rate will go down from just £3.19 per hour to £2.70. We were already low paid, but this is too much."

In contrast to these poverty wages, Pall Mall bosses made a profit of £30 million last year. But if insulting wages weren't bad enough the strikers have had to put up with racism too.

"We've been treated very badly by Pall Mall," explained another striker. "When they took over the contract a year ago they wanted to see people's birth certificates or passports. They took them all in and made copies of them for their records. They asked ladies who've been working in the NHS for thirty years if they had their work permits!"



"We won't put up with it." PHOTO: Paul Mattsson.

The strikers see their battle as a test case. They fear that if Pall Mall win this one, contractors throughout the health service will go on the offensive. "We're trying to defend the pay and conditions we had in the NHS," Kanila argues, "If we lose, other workers like us will face the same problems."

Unfortunately, the health union Unison has been slow to come to the aid of the strikers. After several weeks without any strike pay the strikers had to resort to barricading an official into his room in order to get a promise of £62.50 per week. A week later this money had not yet been paid, so the strikers decided to lobby the Unison NEC, which meets as we go to press.

Despite the inactivity of the Unison officials the strikers have received strong support from trade unionists. CPSA members have removed Pall Mall's adverts for scabs from the local job centre. Local trade unionists have raised over £3,000 in collections and Hillingdon Council has cancelled a contract with Pall Mall for its meals-on-wheels service.

The strikers also got a big boost when they organised a picket outside Pall Mall's London office. "It was great. All the ordinary workers were giving us the thumbs up from behind the curtains."

Support the strike by:

- visiting the picket line, 6:45am-12 noon, main entrance, Hillingdon Hospital, Field Heath Road.
- organising a collection for the strikers in your workplace. Send money to Unison, Hillingdon Hospital, Field Heath Road, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 3NN.
- sending protest letters to: Philip Brown, Chief Executive, Hillingdon Hospital, Middlesex, UB8 3NN.
- phoning Pall Mall on (0181) 840 4812 or fax 01634 723890.

Factfile

- Pall Mall is owned by the Davis Service Group, which used to be known as the Godfrey Davis car hire firm.
- Investors in Pall Mall include Barclays Banks and BAT as well as other multi-nationals.
- Last year Davis' profits added up to £1,300 per worker.
- The average weekly pay of Davis' workforce is £123.70; its directors earn up to £450,000 a year.
- The Pall Mall subsidiary employs 12,000 people; their average wage is £64 per week.

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Fighting the party within the party

The *Sun*, the *Mail*, the *Mirror* and the *Sunday Times* all offered her the chance to tell her story - and some even offered to pay her for the privilege. But Liz Davies turned them all down to give her thoughts exclusively to *Labour Left Briefing*. And we didn't pay her a penny.

THE MEDIA missed the two real stories about the whole Leeds North East controversy. How did somebody from Islington end up selected as prospective Parliamentary candidate for Leeds North East? And how and why was a dirty tricks campaign to overturn that decision waged by a small clique of Islington Councillors?

I was asked to stand in Leeds North East by Labour Party members whom I knew through the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network and *Labour Briefing*. The Constituency Labour Party had volunteered for an all-woman shortlist and local left-wingers were looking for a candidate. We met and agreed that I would stand. I made my politics clear throughout the process - in every statement I wrote and every speech I made. That was, after all, the purpose of my standing.

The selection process itself was conducted in an exemplary manner with the full approval of the Regional Officer representing the NEC. In the prevailing climate in the Party, to select a left-winger would be to buck the trend. Also, I entered the race as a geographical outsider against three local candidates. I won precisely because the process was not stitched up. It was open and honest and I was able to put the political arguments, which struck a chord with Party members. Thirty-six per cent of eligible Party members voted - a similar proportion to Party members nationally who voted in the NEC ballot and a higher proportion than took part in the Clause IV ballot.

Two days after the selection, the *Daily Mail* ran a "loony left Councillor from Islington" story as part of its anti-PC "Quotawatch" series. The *Mail* was well briefed about my record as a local councillor; its source was clearly someone from Islington.

This story seems to have prompted two Leeds North East members, who had supported a losing candidate, to write to the NEC stating that I had not disclosed my 30 day committal for refusal to pay the poll tax. Those two complaints started the whole process which escalated over the following days until it was well out of the control of anyone from Leeds North East. In the end, the two complainants remarked that they had never intended to stir up such a hornets' nest.

The allegation about the poll tax led Tom Sawyer to tell journalists that I had been "economical with the truth". Frankly, I am fed up with being lied about and smeared by senior Labour figures and I want to be clear about this matter once and for all. As Tom Sawyer well knows, I was exceptionally open about my politics and my political record throughout the selection process. I volunteered at the beginning of that process, in writing, that I had refused to pay the poll tax and had defended those threatened with imprisonment for non-payment. The issue was discussed both informally and formally at a number of ward nomination meetings. The allegation about the poll tax was refuted in writing by Leeds North East Party officers and ordinary members. They have never felt misled or duped - and they are the ones who know what really happened.

I had thought that the selection process was one of the hardest things I would ever have to go through. What happened over the following three months proved much harder. The *Yorkshire Evening Post*, an anti-Labour paper miffed that the *Daily Mail* had broken the "loony left" story, ran vituperative, bigoted articles about me daily for a fortnight. The Constituency was advised by the Regional Officer not to reply, as the publicity would soon blow over. The opposite was the case.

At the end of two weeks, the *Yorkshire Evening Post* reported that Tony Blair had "gone ballistic" at the news of my selection. The story clearly came from Tony Blair's office, and the Constituency officers decided that if the leader could speak to the media, then so could we. We spent the rest of July responding to the smears which seemed to change on a daily basis.

From the beginning, Party officials at Walworth Road told me one thing and the press another. They rarely bothered to communicate with Leeds North East. I was first informed of each key development in my case not by my own Party but by the media.

Dealing with the media was an eye-opening experience. I discovered that inaccuracies are routine and should never go unchallenged. Every time an inaccuracy was printed in a newspaper, I complained to the editor and wrote letters for publication, as did supporters in both Leeds and London. High-ranking political correspondents on a number of national daily broadsheets published false allegations as facts without even bothering to put them to me for confirmation or rebuttal. *The Guardian* was torn. Sometimes its reporting of my case was straight and even sympathetic. Other times it regurgitated uncritically the smears spread by Labour's spin doctors.

When I received a copy of the Director of Development and Organisation's report to the Disputes Committee on 9th September, I discovered a new set of allegations, some of which were scurrilous in the extreme. Islington Councillors Tal Michael and Phil Kelly claimed that I had been involved in "barracking and heckling" throughout an Islington Council Education Committee meeting in November 1994; Cllr James Purnell (a former Blair employee) claimed that I had incited violence at the meeting.

As a matter of fact, I remained silent throughout the debate at that meeting. Had I behaved inappropriately in any way, the matter would have been raised in Islington Labour Party at that time. Nobody had suggested that I behaved inappropriately until these three wrote to the NEC in August 1995 - nine months after the events in question. Their allegations are lies, obviously manufactured to provide a fig-leaf for the pre-determined decision not to endorse me. These lies are damaging to me personally, professionally and politically. I have no alternative but to seek legal redress, a course of action I profoundly regret.

The report to the Disputes Committee also alleged that I was a Trotskyist and that this was proved by my membership of the *Labour Briefing* Editorial Board. For the record: I am not a Trotskyist. I certainly believe that the

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"Tom Sawyer's least favourite Party member. And Arthur Scargill" PHOTO: Ashley Ashwood

Labour Party ought to be a broad church and that Trotskyists have a rightful place within it. And yes, I have worked with Trotskyists as well as others from a wide variety of political backgrounds and perspectives across the labour movement. But that does not make me a Trotskyist and I object to this misrepresentation of my ideas and my politics.

It is now common knowledge that the Disputes Committee failed to uphold any of the specific allegations against me. There can be no doubt that if they had been able to make any of the charges stick, they would have done so.

In an interview with the *Guardian* Tony Blair profoundly misrepresented my voting record in Islington and tried to make a spurious case that I was somehow different from Dennis Skinner or other members of the Campaign Group. He also suggested that I was "piggy-backing" on Labour. "If they stood on a *Labour Briefing* platform, they'd get 500 votes." I have no wish or intention to stand on any platform but Labour's. I have been an active and responsible member of the Labour Party all my adult life and have canvassed for Labour candidates of all political hues. All leaders - including Tony Blair - ought to remember that it is they who "piggy-back" on tens of thousands of people like me, and not the other way around.

The NEC and Clare Short made clear the real reasons for refusing to endorse me: my politics. One comrade commented to me, "They want the Campaign Group to be a sealed tomb; they can't get rid of the sitting MPs, but aren't going to allow any more in."

It was very odd sitting in the visitors' balcony at Conference, having to listen to Clare Short denounce me and misinform the nation about my record, and being unable to respond. I was surrounded by the press pack who were watching (and photographing) my every move. I was under no illusions about the outcome of the Conference vote and was very pleased to receive the support of the TGWU, RMT, NUM and about half the Constituency delegates. I was also confident that Leeds North East delegate Barbara Levy had talked far more sense in her allotted three minutes than Clare Short had in her ten minutes plus.

As I left the balcony I was continuously pushed and jostled by a gang of twenty or thirty photographers. I retreated to the women's toilet to compose my thoughts before giving a statement to the media, which then insisted on dogging my steps around the Conference Centre. I was rattled (though not "sobbing" as reported in the *Sun*) by the behaviour of the press, not the vote in Conference.

Thanks to much hard work and outstanding support from Party members in Leeds and Islington, the smear campaign against me was exposed as a political manoeuvre. In the end, the leadership was forced to hang its case on my association with *Labour Briefing*. I have had hundreds of letters of support from honest Party members who are shocked at the level of intolerance shown by our leaders.

I am very lucky. I have not lost my job or my home or my freedom, which is the price paid every day by people who are victimised at work or in the courts. Becoming an MP has never been my main aim in life. I went into the selection to take part in the Labour Party and to argue the case for socialist policies. Finding myself unexpectedly under the media spotlight was often an uncomfortable and nerve-wracking experience. But as socialists we must never allow ourselves to be ruled by fear either of the leadership or of the media.

The left press was strongly supportive. *Tribune*, *New Statesman* and the *Morning Star* all knew that the real issue was one of the right to dissent. They were not prepared to see an extension of the Littleborough and Saddleworth tactics inside the Labour Party.

Leeds North East Party members remain profoundly shocked. In good faith they took part in a selection process conducted under the rules. They never expected the combination of smear tactics and student politics that emerged from the leader's office and from Islington. An active, united, campaigning local party has been demoralised and Labour's chances of winning a key marginal have been jeopardised.

From the beginning it was obvious to me - and I suspect to Tony Blair - what was really at stake in the Leeds North East controversy. Will the next Labour Government take the serious steps necessary to tackle the legacy of Thatcher and Major? And what pressures will be placed upon Tony Blair to take those steps by socialists in Parliament, the trade unions and the constituencies?

Personally, I remain a Labour Party member in good standing and a Labour Councillor with a high volume of casework. Everything that has happened over the last few months has strengthened my belief that socialists should remain in the Labour Party. Certainly, I have no intention of giving Tony Blair or his henchmen in Islington the satisfaction of seeing me walk out of my own Party and leave it to the mercies of what Dennis Skinner rightly called "the party within the party - New Labour". ❑

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An offence against justice

Huw Richards, self-confessed 'soft left' and ex-Kinnockite, speaks out for Liz Davies and *Briefing*.

TONY BLAIR of all people might be expected to have fond memories of a time when a 30ish Islington barrister whose views were out of line with fashionable opinion could be selected and endorsed as Labour candidate for a northern seat.

Too bad that Tony Blair's Party today will not extend such trust to local parties or allow young, unfashionable hopefuls similar opportunities.

Concern over the treatment of Liz Davies and the Leeds North East Party extends far beyond Blair's habitual critics - not because we believe she is necessarily the ideal candidate for the seat, but because it offends our sense of justice.

The current selection rules, approved at John Smith's last conference, were hailed - and not without reason - as modernising, democratising measures.

Those are the rules under which Leeds North East chose Liz Davies as the best candidate available. But the people most vociferously in favour of those rules were not prepared to abide by their outcome.

A parochial London squabble was elevated above the interests of a local party in a winnable seat. Hard luck, Leeds North East. Your choice may have been made honestly according to the rules, but it did not meet with the approval of the clever people in London who always know better than provincials, and have privileged access to the leadership.

They might have some credibility if they were capable of coming up with a consistent story. Instead, the indictment changed more rapidly than the alibis offered by an amnesiac on a City fraud charge. Alleged economy with the truth over poll tax. Supposed incitement to violence. Serial "oppositionism" amounting to two breaches of the whip in five and a half years.

One wondered what this party version of the CPS would offer next. Cohabiting with an American cricket-writer? "No chance. Even if it is true, nobody will believe that." Having Welsh ancestors? "Neil Kinnock broke the whip 77 times in one Parliament. And we slung Nye Bevan out in 1939." Being a barrister from a notorious inner-London Borough? "Oops, sorry Tony, forgot..."

Association with *Labour Briefing*? Quite where this becomes more of an offence than the last three is a mystery. I can understand why Labour leaders might not regard *Briefing* with total affection. I'm not an invariable fan myself. It is too often shrill, unhealthily preoccupied with London minutiae and prone to see conspiracy where alleged Marxists should discern the more serious and widespread problem of hegemony.

But it never occurred to me that it was anything other than a legitimate contributor to Labour politics. Nor does it seem to have occurred to Neil Kinnock or John Smith, both committed opponents of real entryism. They might not have liked it, but they recognised that unconditional idolatry of the leadership was best left to the Tories (although God help Central Office if it tries to interfere in a local Conservative Association's choice of candidate).

A party which is serious about democracy and pluralism needs the sort of forum provided by *Briefing*, *Tribune* and other party papers - outlet, safety valve, focus for debate. Leeds North East is merely the latest in a series of causes for disquiet.

It isn't that those disquieted are any less interested in winning the next election than Tony Blair and associates. One of the most pervasive irritants is the patronising subtext of leadership response to critics - that those who question the slightest nuance of policy or strategy do not want to win. The sceptics want to win just as much as the leadership coterie does, but do not accept that it has a monopoly of wisdom on the subject.

There's nothing wrong with fiscal continence. But a belief in properly-financed public services is one of the values which still separate us from the Government - even if Kenneth Clarke's *Guardian* interview restated the case with greater coherence and passion than anyone on our front bench seems able to do.

Conducting a Dutch auction on taxation against them is to court not so much continence as disabling constipation.

Nor is there anything wrong with fighting tough at by-elections. But to adopt not only the tactics, but the traditional script, of Tory Central Office at Littleborough and Saddleworth was a betrayal of basic political decencies.

Perhaps with some of the media friendships being cultivated we should not be too surprised. As both Walsall Council and Liz Davies could confirm, any Party member under Tory press fire should look to the leadership. Not for support, but to check where it is in the pursuing pack. ❑

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Our right to be wrong

Paul Anderson, deputy editor of the *New Statesman and Society*, takes aim at Labour's 'pompous asses'.

EVERYONE KNOWS I'm a right-winger. That arbiter of political taste, *Socialist Action*, made it clear just after I stopped being editor of *Tribune* in 1993, when it denounced me as the most shameless right-winger ever to take the helm at that august weekly. Of course, it was spot on. I'd positioned the paper fairly and squarely behind proportional representation, pacts with the Liberals, tactical voting, European federalism, one member one vote and expulsion of Militant.

In Brighton at Labour Conference last month I had it spelt out to me again - in the most brutal terms. Late one night in a crowded bar in the Grand Hotel, Peter Mandelson's chief side-kick, Derek Draper, rehearsed the loony Trot line to me at the top of his voice. "You fucking cunt," he screamed. "You're worse than the fucking *Express* and the *Mail*. You're a right-winger, Anderson. You'd better watch out. We're going to get you."

People's Commissar Draper had, quite rightly, noticed anti-socialist sentiments in a diary paragraph in the *New Statesman*.

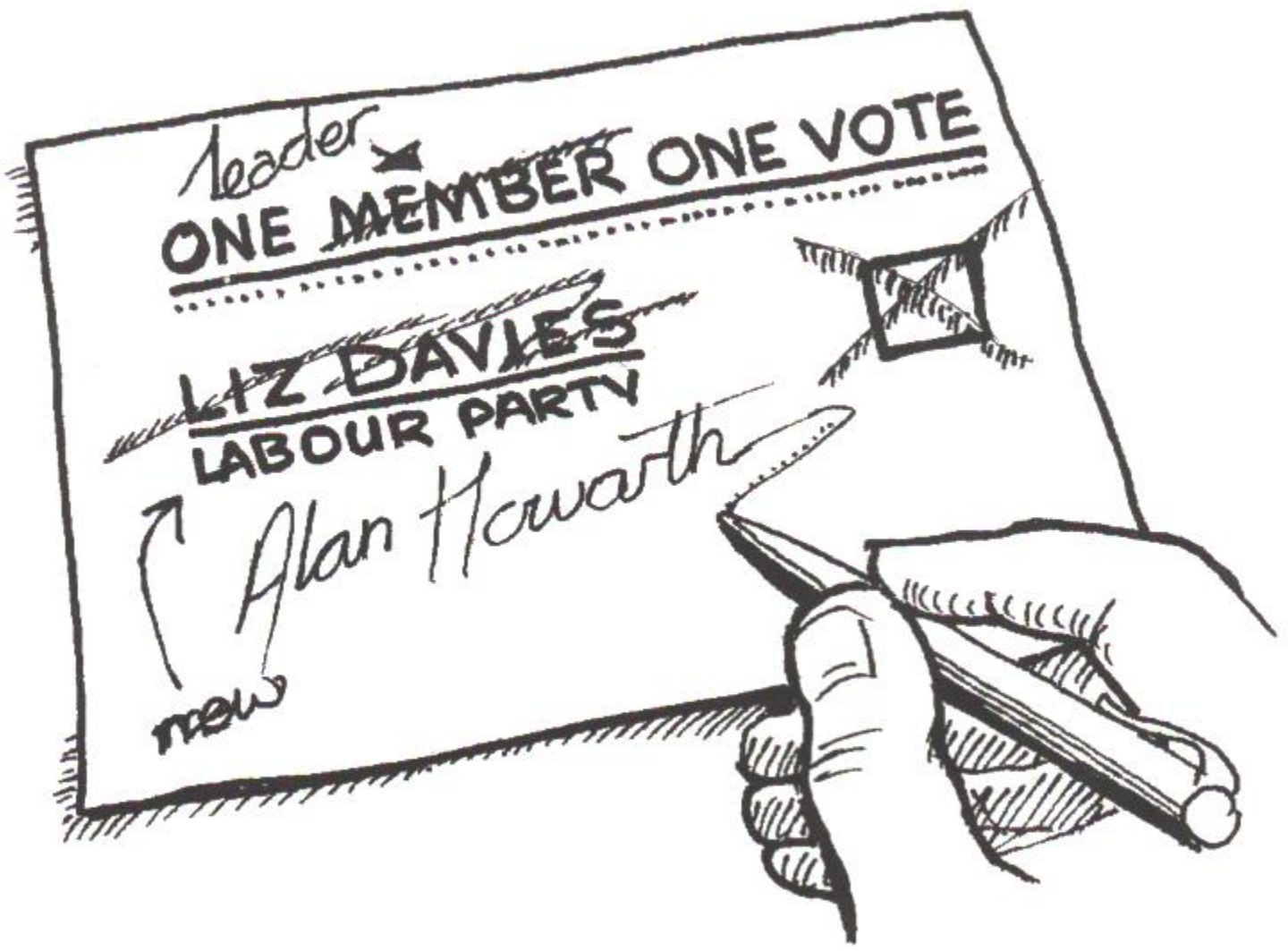
But seriously: my politics aren't those of *Briefing*, as anyone knows who's been about on the left journalism scene for the past ten years. I changed my mind after the debacle of the 1983 general election, a decision reinforced by the failure of the 1984-85 miners' strike. To cut a long story short, I subsequently joined the Labour Party, since when I have never been anything other than a soft-left sell-out so-called socialist, just as Commissar Draper and *Socialist Action* contend.

To make it clear: I have never in more than ten years deviated from the view that *Briefing*'s political perspective is entirely wrong.

It is oppositionist, often puerile, regularly idiotic - sometimes so completely bonkers that I think its contributors, editorial board and readers all need therapy. I obviously need re-education.

But, unlike Commissar Draper and *Socialist Action*, I've never had a humour by-pass operation, and I prefer the whiff of dissenting grape-shot to the stench of putrefying orthodoxy. Whatever else might be said of *Briefing*, it has, at its best, been brilliant, vicious, nasty, uncompromising satire. Some of its portraits in "Class Traitor of the Month" - alas, no longer with us, it seems - cut their subjects to the bone. And the snide, sometimes high-camp, oppositionist stance of its leaders and commentaries (yes, really) has given a welcome edge to Labour's arguments. The pompous asses at the top of the Labour Party have always been legitimate targets for lampooning, and it's no different now that Tony Blair looks as if he has a decent chance of winning an election. If anything, Labour needs its amateur Swifts and Hogarths more than ever.

In other words, I disagree with what *Briefing* says, but I defend its right to say it. More than that, I think that its irreverence and awkwardness are essential elements in any political party that is a living culture rather than a mere electoral machine. A healthy disrespect for all those in positions of power is crucial for any democratic politics: the powers-that-be should get used to it. And I don't want to die of boredom. Plenty of people have laughed at *Labour Party News*, but no one has ever laughed with it.



We will not be silenced!

"We need a socialist paper and long may LLB *continue."*

Tony Benn

Rule by decree

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy outlines the constitutional changes agreed in Brighton.

MEMBERS SHOULD be alerted to the restrictions on Party democracy that have been written into the new consolidated rule book.

● The guarantee that the trade union share of Annual Conference will not fall below 50% has been removed.

This opens the door to further cuts in the trade union share of the vote. While working hard to increase the influence of big business in the Party a section of the right wing has made it clear that they want to get the unions out of Labour altogether.

● The General Secretary is to be invested with arbitrary powers. She or he will be able to veto membership applications "for any reason which s/he sees fit", regardless of the views of the local Party.

The NEC has also acquired powers to terminate existing membership(s), by-passing established disciplinary procedures. These powers have been smuggled into the membership rules. The NEC now has the power to "determine any dispute which may arise in respect ... of membership of a member or members and its decision shall be final and binding".

● The General Secretary and the NEC can delegate their new powers to "such appropriate officers or designated representatives" as they see fit.

What's more the General Secretary and paid officials appointed by her/him shall be deemed to have always had that power. This raises the question: is this rule change designed to justify past abuses of the rules by some officials?

● The NEC can now use postal ballots to create a mail-order party. Decisions at branch and CLP level could now be rendered pointless by giving the NEC sweeping powers to force them to conduct individual ballots on whatever the NEC "deem to be appropriate".

This decision was interpreted by key modernisers as giving the NEC the opportunity to release policy statements with the NEC ballot papers each summer. The aim is to further undermine the importance of conference and to deny members the opportunity to engage in informed collective decision making.

Different strokes

DEREK HINDS OF the Joy Gardner Campaign was attending Labour Party Conference to speak at a fringe meeting. While he was leafleting delegates one morning it started raining. Seeking shelter, Derek borrowed a friend's pass and went into conference.

When he left the Centre some time later, he was approached by the police who said that he was not the person named on the pass. They then arrested him for theft and carted him off to the police station. He was kept in a cell for three hours during which time the police made no effort to check with the pass owner if his pass had been stolen. Eventually he was released without charge. At the same time, Lee Whitehead, who said that he would have joined the SDP if he had been in the Labour Party in 1981, entered Conference with a delegate's badge in the name of Gary Owens, Pontypridd.

5,000 Black and Asian members suspended

Graeme Lampitt writes: The Campaign Against Labour Party Suspensions (CALPS) is hoping that Bill Morris will help spearhead the fight for some 5,000 black Party members to regain their democratic rights.

The TGWU General Secretary had talks with Ahmed Shahzad, the former parliamentary hopeful for the Manchester Gorton constituency and secretary of CALPS, during the Labour Party Conference in Brighton last month.

Morris promised to study the controversy that has left up to a quarter of the Party's black membership under suspension. The tally of suspensions is calculated by totalling the membership of suspended constituencies and branches up and down the country.

The Party leadership claim to be investigating various irregularities, from Nottingham to Manchester to Glasgow to Birmingham, but campaigners insist it is no coincidence that all the affected areas have a high black membership and a sitting white MP.

Earlier in September, Shahzad, who was suspended along with the entire Manchester Gorton Black Socialist Society following his appearance on the BBC documentary *East*, lost his High Court bid to have his suspension lifted.

He had hoped to attend the Conference as an elected delegate from his constituency, Brent East, but the judge ruled in favour of the Labour Party.

Shahzad's solicitor, Louise Christian, argued that the Party was breaching its own rule book, as well as the European Convention on Human Rights regarding freedom of speech, by suspending him after he answered factual questions from a BBC journalist.

Despite this setback, CALPS made a considerable impact on the Conference week. Thousands of leaflets were distributed and important speeches made at fringe meetings organised by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, National Assembly Against Racism, Black Socialist Society, National Black Alliance and the Campaign Group.

MPs Diane Abbott and Bernie Grant joined CALPS' chair Ken Livingstone MP in supporting the suspended members, 90% of whom are said to be of Asian origin.

Ahmed Shahzad said: "The discrimination being suffered by Labour's Asian members is a scandal that will not go away. We will carry on raising the issue and campaigning until the suspensions are lifted and all Asian comrades are able to play a full part in the democratic process aimed at a Labour victory."

For more information, write to CALPS, PO Box 9220, London NW10 1WA.

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No comment

Selected highlights from Clare Short's speech to Labour Party Conference on the Leeds North East parliamentary selection.

"There is no suggestion that the procedures of the selection were flawed in any way. What has been concluded after a careful investigation is that on the basis of her stated views and track record Liz Davies is not a suitable Labour candidate. Let me stress, there are no charges to be proved or disproved: this is a judgement the NEC has made...

"The most difficult task I have ever undertaken as a member of then NEC was the action we took to declare Dave Nellist and Terry Fields unsuitable as Labour MPs. They were not candidates but MPs. Most of the people who are saying we are wrong about Liz Davies said we were wrong then. I have no doubt we were right ... The decision was difficult and painful - not least as the two did not admit that they were members of Militant. But it was right and all reasonable people agreed it was right ... The Labour Party has had great difficulty dealing with this problem - because we are libertarians and because there is a tradition in the Trotskyist movements that it is honourable to lie about one's true views. It took us some time to realise that the only way forward was to declare membership of Militant and Socialist Organiser incompatible with Party membership.

"Liz Davies has declared in a letter to the NEC and in her evidence to the Disputes Committee that she is not a Trotskyist. So be it. But one of their influences was to persuade some of their allies that it was honourable and principled to unstintingly attack all figures in the leadership of the Party, to fail to honour whips and to regularly breach decisions democratically agreed...

"On the basis of the evidence laid before us and on the recommendation of the Disputes Committee - the NEC does not feel able to say that Liz Davies accepts these responsibilities. The most serious reason is that she has sat for years on the editorial board of *Labour Briefing* - indeed, she used to be the chair. Now *Briefing* is a nasty, vicious publication which constantly attacks anyone in positions of seniority in the Party for betrayal of some great party that only *Briefing* is able to understand.

"It is far more vicious and destructive than any Tory tabloid. Conference - please note - Liz Davies did not write occasionally for Briefing - though she has not repudiated the content of what she wrote - she was on the board and chaired the board. I have to say, Conference, I do not understand how anyone who supports the *Briefing* line would possibly want to be a Labour MP - unless it is just to cause trouble and conflict within the Party...

"The NEC would be failing in its duty if it were to endorse a candidate with such a track record. We found the decision difficult and unpleasant but we have no doubt it was right. I ask any member of the Party who has any honest doubts to read some back copies of *Labour Briefing*.

"When they do so they will know that the NEC decision was the right one."

Conference reflections

Hannah Wood, Deptford CLP delegate: It was my first Conference and I felt that it was extremely stage-managed. We were all expected to be good boys and girls for the cameras.

I'm not against putting across a good image, but surely at our Conference we also need the chance to have some proper debate; democratic decision-making should not be sacrificed on the altar of media respectability.

It was clear, I think, to many people that speakers were not being taken at random from the floor and that the chairs knew who certain people were and would not let them speak. Many debates were very unbalanced even though there were people who wanted to speak on both sides.

However, I am not hopelessly depressed. I have come back wanting to do things: to campaign, recruit more members and play a part in the election of a Labour Government that can make a difference to people's lives.

Des Kirkland, CWU: Sometimes the level of debate on the fringe was far superior to that of the Conference. Is that an indictment of the sterile media-focused conferences we now hold? Even delegates with different political views from myself expressed disappointment with the way the voting on some composites was conducted. The chair sometimes took votes without a show of hands, and even refused a card vote if a vote was close but could have gone against the NEC.

The Party has now concentrated an unprecedented amount of power in the hands of the NEC and its officers. Constituency parties can now be easily sidelined if it is deemed necessary, especially in respect of OMOV ballots and campaigning. The power now held by the General Secretary to suspend or revoke any member's membership could be held over either individual members or whole constituencies like the sword of Damocles, forcing them to toe the Party line.

Liz - latest

"Islington North Labour Party regrets the decision of the national Labour Party not to endorse Cllr Liz Davies as the prospective Parliamentary candidate for Leeds North East and disassociates itself from adverse comments about Cllr Davies made by a few past and present members of Islington Council acting in an individual capacity.

"We value Liz's contribution as a conscientious and hard-working ward councillor and advocate for women's rights since her election in 1990.

"We fully support her continuing to represent the electors of Tollington ward on behalf of the Labour Party."

- statement issued on behalf of Islington North CLP by Wally Burgess (Chair), Carol Clinton (Secretary) and Sheila Camp (Treasurer).

No retraction

> *"For the leadership it is useful to have someone with a 'feminist' image to make its miserable excuses for not enacting the democratic reforms women want ... Short is easily manipulated by the leadership who consider her a useful idiot."*

Class Traitor of the Month, March 1992

Elaine Jones, NUS, rejects a new scheme for funding university education.

Is a graduate tax the new solution?

A GROUP OF student unionists, under the banner "New Solutions", claims that calls for free tuition and a living grant for higher-education students are "revolutionary and unrealistic".

And elitist, too: the minority, "predominantly of the richer middle classes", who go to university are subsidised by the majority, "predominantly working-class taxpayers", who do not. With the universities expanding to take one-third of the age group, the subsidy becomes increasingly and untenably expensive: "the National Union of Students (NUS) wish list... would mean at least an extra 5 to 6.5p in the pound on the basic level of income tax or an extra 22p to 27p on the higher rate". The 'new solution' is that university students should instead pay for their own maintenance, and maybe tuition too, by having government loans while they are students and then paying them back through a sort of 'graduate tax'.

New Solutions is mesmerised by the movements of cash, ignoring underlying economic relations; for it the problem becomes outrageously high income taxes, and the solution shifts the burden to a different tax, the graduate tax.

This juggling does not solve the real problem - that there is economic inequality, and that the university education system and its financing reflect and reinforce that inequality - but it might aggravate it.

Why not just tax the well-off to pay for university education, and expand the entire system to make it more accessible for students from poor families? To the extent that the well-off are usually university graduates, this approach has the same effect as a graduate tax - only it is simpler administratively, and avoids deterring students by the prospect of debt. On the other hand, why should those who receive large incomes but aren't graduates be exempt from a tax on higher education? By what logic should graduates who remain on low incomes pay more tax?

Actually, in its proposal New Solutions fiddles the cash figures. It estimates that the cost of restoring student grants to 1979 levels, restoring state benefits to students and eliminating parental contributions is £3.6 billion. It inflates it to £11 billion by throwing in the costs of grants and tuition for Further Education students, doing some odd arithmetic (the total then comes to £7.3 billion, not the £8.7 billion they cite), and bumping up the result arbitrarily from £8.7 billion to £11 billion on the grounds that the student numbers will rise.

According to its own figures, £3.6 billion would be covered by an extra 1p on the basic rate of income tax and an extra 5p on the higher rate. But if £11 billion was the right figure, what then? How could this cost be met by a graduate tax? If taxes have to be raised by 5 or 6.5p in the pound on everyone to meet the cost, a tax on graduates alone would be at least 15 to 20p in the pound.

An extra 20p in the pound for tax, on a third of the population! Actually, it would be worse than that. The costs of administration, loan defaults and the lag between expenditure (student loans) and income (graduate tax) would drive the tax even higher, or leave a large part of the cost paid out of general taxation.

The form of graduate tax proposed by New Solutions is completely impractical as a means of paying for higher education. Students would start to pay only when their wages exceeded the average income, about £16,000 a year; they could spread out paying back their loans over a whole lifetime; and the interest rate would be subsidised. All very nice: but most graduates are on less than average incomes for a long time after leaving college (two-thirds of all earners are below the average). If a student has loans of £10,000 for living expenses and £20,000 for fees, and then works 16 years before reaching an average income, his or her debt (applying a modest interest rate of 8 per cent) has become £137,000. He or she then has to pay £11,000 a year just to stop the accumulated debt from increasing!

Expanded university education, open to all who want it, would be an important component of a really civilised society.

With modern technology, society could certainly afford to have everyone spend three of their fifty-odd productive adult years in full-time education. Unrealistic? No. Revolutionary? Maybe.

Campaign for Free Education Conference

Over 100 representatives from colleges across the country are expected to attend the Campaign for Free Education Conference on 24th October.

The success of this campaign will determine whether we will be able to beat the Blairite babes in the student movement for a second time in their pleas to ditch NUS's commitment to free education. The Blairites are currently using bureaucratic methods to undermine the campaign. They can't beat our arguments, so they are closing down area NUS organisations which have built support for free education: NUS London has been closed without any investigation and an attack on South Yorkshire NUS is planned.

However, despite these outrages, the Campaign for Free Education is growing and gaining more support. One of the courses at the conference concentrates on building the NUS national demonstration on 23rd November (which will assemble at 11:30am at Malet Street, London). The leadership of the NUS want it to be a disaster; we intend to make sure it's a success.

If you want to get involved in the campaign, contact Graham Halliwell at Huddersfield University student union, 01484 538156.

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No excuse for poverty pensions

Jeremy Corbyn MP explains the background to his Bill for the Elimination of Poverty, presented in the Commons in October for the twelfth year running.

A MEDIA silence has been cast over the poverty that exists throughout Britain and over the campaigning work done by many pensioners' organisations to expose the disgracefully low level of old age pensions. This summer, the Pensioners' Parliament was held in Blackpool amid a virtual media blackout. This was despite the widespread support for its call for the state pension to be at least one third of average earnings and uprated annually in line with those earnings.

Over the past decade, Britain - one of the richest countries in the world - has had the largest growth in the disparity between rich and poor, a disparity that is growing worse all the time. People did not always sleep on the streets in this country; they did not always beg. It is a crying shame that such poverty exists in our society. My Bill seeks to draw attention to this outrage and proposes some measures to alleviate it.

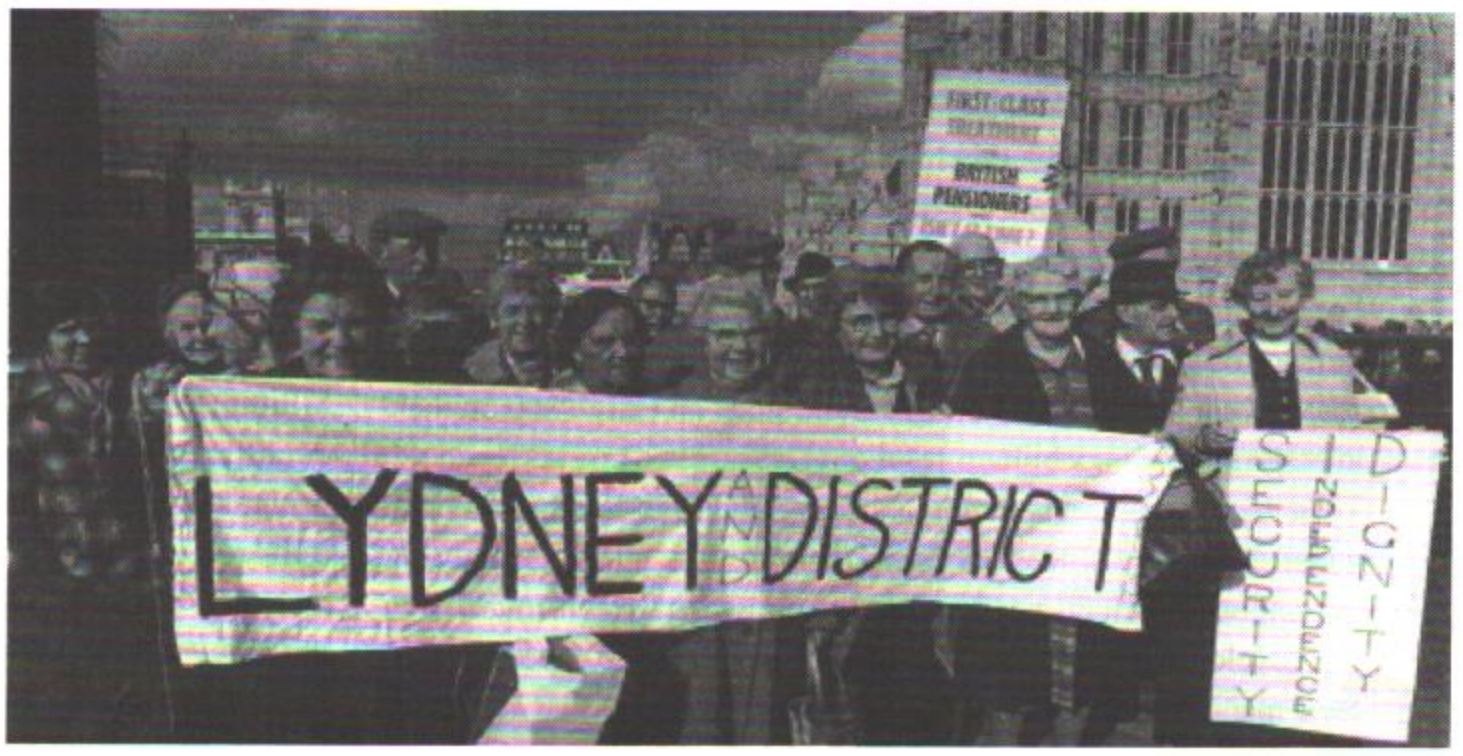
The most recent figures for the poverty line were provided in January 1993. Between 1979 and 1989, the number of people at or below benefit level rose from 7.7 million to 11.4 million.

The number of individuals in households with incomes of less than half the average went up from 5 million to 14.1 million. That figure included 4 million children. That means there are 4 million children currently being brought up in desperately impoverished households.

The figures for income changes between 1979 and 1989 show that someone who in 1979 was earning £321 per week was earning £520 per week by 1993; someone earning £171 per week was earning £236. However, some of the poorest people in our society, those who in 1979 were on £75 per week, were getting only £62 by 1993. In other words, while the income for the richest has gone up by nearly two thirds, the income for the poorest has gone down by 17%.

Among the poorest people, life expectancy is lowest, the incidence of cancer and infant mortality highest. All the indices that led the great social reformers of the 19th century to introduce social reforms demonstrate yet again that the greatest enemy of good health is poverty.

Other statistics are even more frightening. For example, the suicide rate among young men aged 15 to 24 has increased by 75%.



Pensioners lobby Parliament. PHOTO: Andrew Moore

The increase in the number of pensioners living in poverty who do not have access to an occupational scheme, a private scheme or any other scheme is increasing rapidly. The Government likes to claim that pensioners' incomes have gone up by 34% since 1979. That is not what people tell me on the street. That is not what is indicated by the spectacle of pensioners queuing up for stale bread outside supermarkets at 5 o'clock on Saturday afternoon, because that is the only way in which they can make ends meet.

Many of us are fed up with the consensus that the welfare state is no longer affordable - that the state pension is too high and no longer sustainable, and that we therefore have to go down the road of the private, portable pension scheme. If evenly distributed, the huge tax allowance increases for the richest would make the poorest households at least £4 a week better off.

Included in my Bill is a provision exempting pensioner households from standing charges. This simple step would immediately raise household incomes for the poorest and in view of the profitability of the gas, electricity and telephone companies, is easily affordable. There is also a need for a universal, nationwide scheme of travel discounts, especially as the schemes that were brought in by progressive Labour authorities in the 1970s and 1980s are under threat from privatisation.

Above all, we must look at the way in which social security entitlements are calculated. In 1980, Geoffrey Howe, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, claimed that his greatest achievement was to break the link between pensions and earnings and to substitute the retail prices index. That single decision has cost every pensioner more than £20 a week. The pension has fallen from 24% of average earnings to a mere 10% of average earnings.

Labour's Commission for Social Justice rejected re-linking pensions to earnings and proposed instead the "safety net" of a minimum pension guarantee. It accepted the perverse argument that the welfare state is "unsustainable".

We must change the terms of the debate. Cutting the welfare state and encouraging people to take out private health, medical and pension insurance will lead only to social crisis and human disaster.

A civilised, decent society does not allow people to sleep on the streets. It houses everybody. And it does not allow its senior citizens to live in abject poverty and misery.

LLB page 13

Full employment and civilised living



This month Alan Simpson MP outlines a plan for economic recovery.

LABOUR'S front bench has been brilliant at detailing the failures, unfairness and outright dishonesty of Tory tax policies. The average family now pays 3% more in tax than they did under the last Labour Government. The richest 2% of the population have had £15 billion transferred to them in tax cuts and concessions. Norman Lamont squandered almost as much in a single night in September 1992 when he borrowed money and then threw it out the window in the futile defence of an over-valued pound locked into the absurdities of the ERM. Ken Clarke's 1993 budget alone stuck an extra £800 on the average family's tax bill.

The big lie that has underpinned Tory policies is that they have taken the state off people's backs. The truth is almost exactly the opposite. Britain has had one of the worst growth rates in the developed world. The free market has failed to invest in our own manufacturing capacity. At constant prices, we've seen less money invested in manufacturing for almost every year of Tory government than under Labour in 1979.

Labour will inherit an economy which functions at 80% of its capacity, has serious skill shortages and is blighted by poverty and unemployment. We will inherit a tax regime that is unfair, a finance sector which has become obsessively short-term and speculative, and public infrastructures (both urban and rural) which are trapped in a netherworld somewhere between decline and collapse. It will take more than a wish and a windfall to turn this around.

No one expects Labour to deliver an overnight miracle on the economy. But there is a presumption that we should stand for something different from the Tories - a commitment to deliver full employment on a stable and secure basis, and to rebuilding the infrastructures of civilised living.

We can argue about the details of how Labour should deliver on the jobs agenda - but we ought to be clear about the commitment it hinges around. Labour still has to be the party committed to redistributing wealth and power in society. The "tax and spend" question is not about how much but how fair it is, and how effective it is in delivering full employment and economic growth.

It would be crazy for Labour to deliver incentives to investment which destroyed employment. No less crazy would be a boost to the economy which accelerated imports and brought on a balance of payments crisis. The latest figures, showing Britain's imports from outside the EU rising at a rate 9 times faster than our exports, ought to sound clear warnings over the wheres and hows of Labour's directed investment planning.

If we were interested, much of the groundwork for a full employment economic policy has already been done for us. Detailed plans abound. We could create the first million jobs through a job focused programme - covering housing, education, health and the environment - at a net cost of £8 billion, less than a Lamont on a wet September night. We could create even more by introducing not a windfall tax on privatised utilities, but a defined set of public service obligations which must be met before perks and dividends are awarded. There could (and should) be obligations to replace the sieve which we have as our current water supply system; paying for energy conservation programmes to raise Britain's housing to Scandinavian standards; and setting requirements for the extension of public transport infrastructures rather than their contraction.

We could even offer to pay for such a programme just by being "average". If our top rate of tax was merely that of the European average of 55%, it would bring in between £3 billion and £6 billion according to where in the £40,000-£50,000 band Labour wanted to introduce it. If we had a level of corporation tax which was merely the European average (40%) this would raise £4.5 billion. If our defence spending was the European average we could save £8 billion. And even the Government's former chief scientific adviser and the chief of general staff are saying that if we cancel the last Trident or mothball the lot we could save ourselves between £10 billion and £50 billion.

Another £1 billion could fall into the Treasury coffers if it brought private health care and private education into the full VAT regime. Even more revenue awaits anyone with the courage to introduce even the most marginal rate of tax on speculative currency transactions.

The truth is that Britain is not a poor country. What we suffer from is the intellectual poverty of 16 years in opposition, and the political insecurity of a party that fails to understand that the country has already turned its back on the greed feast of the 1980s. ❑

LLB page 14

Campaigning by direct debit

William Pickering explains why he won't be giving his bank details to New Labour.



I RECENTLY received a begging letter from the Labour Party, or more precisely a personal invitation from the venerable Mr Blair to help fund his ongoing crusade for 'New Labour'.

I had been expecting a letter of some sort for a while - I had deliberately allowed my membership to lapse many months ago - but it was the tone of the letter that I most resented. Instead of reminding me to renew my membership, it was implied that I owed the Labour Party £5, and by the way could I pay by direct debit because that would make life a lot easier for them. Although it was accepted that I am no longer a paid-up member of the Party, it was automatically assumed that I would be rejoining straight away; I was even sent a ballot paper for the NEC elections, which incidentally, was not wasted.

I have had what you might call a politically aware upbringing, attending my first Labour Party Conference at the age of two and campaigning in the miners' strike at the age of eight and have been involved in political issues in and outside of the Labour Party ever since. I had always believed that the best way to reverse the immense damage that 16 years of Conservative electoral domination has done to this country and its people was through Parliament. And the only party capable of both defeating the Tories and implementing radical change for the better was the Labour Party.

I say 'was' because the Labour Party that sits in opposition today is becoming a shadow of its former self. With its media-friendly leader, bland policies and appeals to middle-class Tory values it may have become more electable, but we already have a Conservative Government with a capital C, the last thing we need now is a 'new' Labour Government with a small c.

Although the Labour Party can and probably will win the next election, the ex-Tories who will vote for that nice Mr Blair will also leave in droves the moment the word socialism is mentioned. Blair is alienating those who have supported and campaigned for the Labour Party up until now in favour of quick votes. This in the long run may do more harm than good.

The thousands that Blair keeps telling us have joined the Labour Party recently may vote for him at the next election, but how likely is it that they will be prepared to spend their own spare time campaigning, raising money or canvassing?

Blair seems so certain to gain power with the help of his new-found friends that he has not only turned his back on the young and the old but also on those long-standing Labour members who have supported the Party for years. Still, they probably couldn't pay by direct debit.

Mr Blair, you have already lost the Labour Party at least one generation of potential supporters, take off your pistachio-tinted spectacles and smell the roses before you lose any more.

Sad Shad Cab flab

Mike Marqusee reports: This year's Shadow Cabinet elections saw backbench Labour MPs resisting heavy-handed pressure from the leader's office and the media.

Uncritical Blairites Brian Wilson, Alastair Darling, Nick Brown and Alun Michael were roundly rejected in favour of candidates with more independent minds.

In an unambiguous snub to the leader, Margaret Beckett topped the poll, despite attacks on her by GP fund-holders (said to have been prompted by Blair's office) in the days running up to the ballot. As Health spokesperson, Beckett resisted attempts to force Labour to embrace private finance initiatives for the NHS. Her promotion to Trade and Industry means that there will be at least one voice within Labour's economic high command arguing against free market policies.

However, it also leaves the Health brief exposed to the depredations of Hariett Harman, who has once again been rewarded for losing a vote of confidence. Harman can be expected to do as much damage to the cause of free and universal health care as she did to the national minimum wage. Rumours that Peter Mandelson has been meeting with BUPA will certainly not allay backbenchers' fears that Blair is about to sell the pass on Labour's core commitment.

Clare Short's appointment to Transport in place of Michael Meacher is equally worrying. Meacher had been pushing for a clear commitment to renationalise British Rail if it is privatised. Now Short, with her notorious capacity for grasping the wrong end of the stick, can be relied on to muddy the waters.

Still, it was heartening to see a majority of the PLP ignoring the ill-informed abuse dished out to the likes of Joan Lestor, Tom Clarke and Gavin Strang in the "quality" press (when it comes to "venom" and "vitriol" the spin-doctors outscore even *Briefing*).

The Socialist Campaign Group MPs played a vital role in ditching Jack Cunningham and electing Tom Clarke.

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Race, class and *Louis Farrakhan*

Mike Marqusee interviews US author and activist Manning Marable.

Q. Farrakhan's march in Washington clearly struck a chord among large numbers of African-Americans. Socialists, however, remain uncomfortable with many of its features. How do you assess the strengths and weaknesses of the Farrakhan march?

A. We have to make a crucial distinction between the positive motivations of those who came to the march, who stood on the Washington DC mall, versus the very questionable and contradictory politics of many of those who stood on the platform. What black men were trying to do in their hundreds of thousands was to make a positive statement about their sense of responsibility to the black community. They wanted to stand up and affirm their humanity and their morality, and that should not be criticised. What can and must be criticised were elements of the programme which called them together.

First, the emphasis on 'atonement' is politically backward. Look it up in the dictionary. Atonement means to ask for forgiveness of sins. We shouldn't be talking about atonement; we should be talking about indictment. We ought to indict the white political establishment, the Republicans' Contract With America and the corporate elite which exploits the masses of working women and men, particularly blacks and Latinos.

Secondly, patriarchy. To hold a march of this scale and not to encourage the full participation of sisters - that's got to be criticised. There were token black women on the podium, including Maya Angelou and Rosa Parks (who led the Montgomery County bus boycott of 1955-56). But in excluding women from real participation and excluding women's issues, the march organisers insulted the sisters who have dedicated their lives to the freedom struggle.

Q. Surely it is impossible for the black struggle to move forward when half the black population is excluded?

A. Yes, but feminists need to take a careful approach to this march. It shouldn't be simply to condemn the whole thing. We have to make a clear separation between the motives of the overwhelming majority of brothers who went to Washington and our criticism of the social programme articulated from the platform. Yes, any division which relegates black women to a secondary status in our community is not only morally bankrupt but politically destructive. We can argue that and still support the positive elements of this mobilisation.

I've engaged in debates with the Nation of Islam over the last few weeks, and what I have said is that there are many good reasons to march, but not to this agenda. There are many good reasons for us to be on the streets, but something is missing.

And that is my third objection: the absence of a public policy agenda. In the last two weeks before the march the organisers began trying to address that by releasing a 16 page document. It was too little and too late. There was no emphasis on challenging the Contract With America. There was no demand for full employment and a jobs' bill - at a time when black unemployment is running at twice the rate of white. There was no discussion about environmental racism - when three out of five toxic waste dumps in the US are located within a 25 mile radius of a black or Hispanic community. There was no discussion of the need for a universal health care system - when 22% of all black Americans lack any form of health care. In Harlem, the median life expectancy of black men is 49 years of age. Only 40% of all black people in Harlem live beyond the age of 65. Shouldn't some of these issues have been at the core of this mobilisation?

They weren't there because of the politics of Farrakhan. Louis is a militant conservative. I agree with him on some things. I agree that we need to build strong black institutions. I agree that we need to tackle black on black violence. I agree on the need to uproot drugs from the black community. On all these we can engage in a serious dialogue and co-operative work with the Nation of Islam. At the same time we must say very clearly where we disagree. There are fundamental divisions on women's equality, on homophobia and especially on class and on political coalitions. The Nation of Islam takes a capitalist approach to development. I do not. Like Walter Rodney and CLR James I see capitalism as a predatory system of exploitation that cannot free black people. We're where we are because of capitalism. That is not the system that is going to liberate us.

Farrakhan has more in common with Maggie Thatcher than with Malcolm X. He believes black people have to pull themselves up by their own boot straps, mainly through entrepreneurial activity.

There is also a strategic unity of sorts between Colin Powell and Louis Farrakhan. Both advocate capitalism as the solution to blacks' problems and both advocate a conservative social policy. Both represent in different ways the interests of the black petty bourgeoisie and both are hostile to the left. Both would take the black struggle away from radical, democratic, coalition-based politics.

Q. Were you surprised by the support the march received from black elected officials?

A. This was simply a case of opportunism. Any time you have a half million people in the nation's capital you're going to get elected officials jumping on the bandwagon. Nearly every member of the Black Congressional Caucus endorsed the march, as did mayors, city council members and others. What is more signficant is the white politicans who endorsed the march. Ed Randell of Philadelphia, a reactionary Reagan Democrat, who is also Jewish, not only endorsed the march, but encouraged city employees to attend it. The American Jewish Committee declared they were perfectly satisfied with the goals of the march. As did Clinton.

Clinton is the architect of the 1994 Crime Act - which pumped over

Student Assembly against Racism

Saturday 4th November
10am-5pm
Tower Hamlets College,
Poplar High Street,
London E14

Speakers include: Diane Abbott MP, Mukhtar Ahmed, Asylum Rights Campaign, Harry Cohen MP, Justice for Brian Douglas Campaign, Society of Black Lawyers, National Black Alliance, Joy Gardner Memorial Committee.

Organised by:
National Assembly Against Racism,
Student Coalition Against Racism,
Youth Connection,
Tower Hamlets College Student's Union.

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$30 billion dollars into the apparatus of social control and coercion. This is a guy who wants to put another 100,000 cops on the street at a time when we already have 554,000 police officers in the United States - and another 1.5 million private security officers. The number of people incarcerated in the US has tripled since 1980. We now have 1.5 million people in jail, of whom about half are black. As we speak, 30% of all black men aged 18-29 are either in jail, on probation or awaiting trial. In this context, Clinton's support for the march tells you a great deal about just what was missing from its programme.

It tends to 'blame the victim' and to endorse the thesis that black people are responsible for their own problems.

We have to make a separation: we as black people are responsible for how we relate to each other within our community, but we are not responsible for the oppression that is imposed upon us. This is a critical distinction that Farrakhan fails to make - because he does not want to speak of a systematic process of exploitation, because he disavows a class analysis. And that's what made it easy for Clinton and his like to endorse the march.



Photo: Paul Mattsson

Q: The balance sheet on Clinton since 1992 must once again raise the question of an independent left political party in the US.

A. I'm sympathetic to the various initiatives aimed at building an independent party to the left of the Democrats, including Labor Party Advocates and the New Party, which has elected over 100 candidates to local public office across the country. There is also a movement for proportional representation, which I support. My own feeling however, is that electoral interventions are not enough to transform the political culture. We need a more effective strategy for linking up democratic grass roots resistance, not from the top down through electoral blocs but from the bottom up. That is not to deny the importance of the electoral dimension. But electoralism in and of itself, however independent it might be, is no substitute for a strategic approach to the development of resistance within civil society.

Of the two, for me, the latter is more important. And I argue this because of the history of the black freedom struggle. My great grandfather was a slave. He was sold for $500 in 1854. My grandfather operated a saw mill in the south and under Jim Crow was denied the right to vote. When my father went to try to vote after World War II they asked him in the literacy test how many bubbles are there in a bar of soap. And if you answered incorrectly you weren't allowed to vote. For black folk, the overwhelming character of our politics and our struggle has been non-electoral. The overwhelming majority of black people in the US were not allowed to vote until 1965. But were black people political before then? Oh yes. Through civil rights and community organisations, civil disobedience, economic boycotts, freedom schools and protests of all kinds. We tended after 1965 to place all of our hopes in the electoral arena - that was a strategic error. We need to shift the balance of our energies towards grass roots struggles and the development of alternative institutions. This is already happening. There are new models of resistance. In west Harlem, where I live, we've got a strong protest against the toxic waste building up in a sewage treatment facility on the Hudson River. We're developing coalitions against the death penalty and in support of Mumia Abu Jamal. We need to develop a national network of progressive organisers, black, Latino and white, who can learn from each other's local experiences. At this point, that is far more important than the setting up of a third political party.

Q. So where does Colin Powell fit in?

A. One third of the total population of the US consists of people of colour. There are 33 million African-Americans and 27 million Hispanics, plus 7.2 million Asian-Americans and 4.5 million Arab-Americans. By the year 2060, the majority in the US will be people of colour. So the Colin Powell candidacy and its support by huge sections of the media and the white political establishment is not accidental. It's related to the demographic transformation of the country and the search for a petty bourgeois strategy to absorb sections of the black and Latino elites into the governing class. Given the demographic trends, it is essential for the rulers to fragment black and Latino communities.

A Democratic presidential candidate cannot win without overwhelming black support. Since 1952, the majority of white Americans have voted for a Democratic presidential candidate only once, in 1964, for Lyndon Johnson. Bill Clinton received only 39% of the white vote. Black votes made the crucial difference in the election of Kennedy, Carter and Clinton - and they will be decisive in 1996. Republicans calculate that if they put Colin Powell on their ticket as vice president they will gain about 30% of the black vote - and that will make it impossible for Clinton to win.

What is needed in both the US and the UK is a radical and democratic coalition across lines of race and ethnicity. The reason I wrote a book entitled *Beyond Black and White* is to advocate the need to transcend simplistic racial identity politics. We have to go beyond the racial categories and the exclusionary racial politics that divide working people. We have to be confident in our cultural uniqueness and our different cultural heritages, while recognising the fundamental class commonalities, the class basis of anti-racist politics, the class basis of radical democratic politics. That is the only firm foundation on which principled unity between various communities and colours can be forged.

Manning Marable's indispensable *Beyond Black and White* has just been published by Verso, £19.95.

Trade Unions

Civil service shenanigans

Trudy Saunders writes: In July, Rob Howard-Perkins, a well-known activist in the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) was sacked by Contributions Agency (CA) management.

Agencies were set up in the civil service as a half-way house between public services and full privatisation. Since their arrival, agency management has been openly hostile to trade unions.

Rob's sacking followed an investigation by CA management after a member of staff supposedly made allegations against him which amounted to "abuse of the flexible working hours agreement". Rob was accused of playing computer games, reading a newspaper and wearing stereo headphones between 5:30pm and 6:20pm when he was supposed to be working.

The only two other staff who were working late that day have stated that Rob was working between 5:30pm and 6:30pm. Management has refused to reveal the identity of the mystery member of staff who made the allegations against Rob. What's more, there are no computer games on the system at Rob's office.

It is clear that the trumped-up charges against Rob and the subsequent manner in which his case was handled, breaching all rules of natural justice, is a result of the CA's anti-unionism. Local activists also believe that the manager responsible for taking the action was publicly exposed by Rob as someone who scabbed during the November 1993 strike against market testing in the civil service and consequently holds a grudge against him.

Rob has applied to both the Civil Service Appeal Board and an Industrial Tribunal. Letters have been sent to MPs and MEPs, and Alf Lomas MEP has already pledged his support.

Please send messages of support for Rob to: Tony Reay, CPSA Benefits Agency, City Office, 60 Commercial Road, London E1. Cheques should be made payable to "The Workers Defence Fund", c/o 105a East Hill, Wandsworth, London SW18 2QB.

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Residential workers dispute

UNISON

As we go to press, over 300 residential social workers in Liverpool have entered their tenth week on strike against management threats to introduce casual staff and cut nationally agreed pay for sleep-in shifts. A Liverpool Unison activist reports.

LIVERPOOL'S Labour Council claims it needs to make savings of £70,000 (out of a £90 million budget). The strikers, who staff homes for young people and people with learning disabilities, face pay cuts of up to £2,400 a year. The Council wants to withdraw payments for those on sick or maternity leave or on training courses. This step would effectively introduce local pay deals, with implications for other Council employers across the city.

Equally worrying is the attempt to bring in casual labour. If the Council's practice during the strike is anything to go by, this will mean hiring untrained, unqualified staff who haven't been police-checked, thus posing a serious safety risk to some of the most vulnerable people in the city.

Management tactics have been an indication of what workers can expect from New Labour: Tory anti-union laws were used against Unison. Young people have been bribed to go on holiday, kept off school in contravention of the law and terrorised in their own homes by managers and "security guards". In one instance Graham Burgess, the manager leading the attacks, sledge-hammered down the door of a home where two young women lived. This is the same man who as chair of the Unison branch several years ago led an unofficial dispute against his own victimisation.

Ironically, Council leader Harry Rimmer has sent a letter of support to the Liverpool dockers, while at the same time treating his own workforce in as vicious a manner as the dock employers have treated the dockers! Support for the strikers has been widespread. Even the local government Provincial Council, which brings together local authorities in the area, has ruled in favour of the workers, who are confident of victory.

Trauma for tube managers

Martin Donoghue, RMT London District Council Executive, reports: RMT's action against London Underground is beginning to pay off. Since April we have been fighting for a 6% pay rise, a cut in hours and job guarantees for areas threatened with the "make or buy" privatisation review. We've been out on three increasingly successful one day strikes.

We were forced to reballot by an injunction banning new members from taking action. However, the new ballot result will be out on 24th October and all looks set for a big vote for more action. A 48 hour noon strike is planned that will cause three days' disruption and really pile the pressure on.

Management is clearly wounded. It has postponed the "make or buy" review for most lines for two years - past the next election. However the ASLEF leadership has signed up to a three year productivity deal agreeing to wage cuts, a blank cheque on productivity and part-time drivers. Hundreds of ASLEF drivers have joined RMT in disgust. Indeed RMT has now signed up over a thousand new members. Management meanwhile has stepped up intimidation - an act of desperation as tube workers gain in confidence as they see the results of action.

Women organising for action

Maria Exall reports: London Labour and trade union women are planning to promote Labour policies for part-time workers' rights and a national minimum wage in London and the South East.

All Labour Party women and women trade unionists are welcome to the launch conference. Our objective is to mount a campaign of local work within the South East region. The conference will include workshops so Labour Party and trade union activists from the same geographical area can get together to plan activities.

Rights for part-timers and a national minimum wage now!



Ninety per cent for strike action

As we go to press, a seven day cool off period has been agreed in the Liverpool firefighters dispute. A similar retreat occurred last month.

Management then merely reasserted their cuts plan. The FBU on Merseyside responded with a 90% vote to step up the action with a series of 24-hour strikes.

The two month old dispute is over Merseyside Fire Authority's plans to axe 20 jobs and cut holidays by three days to cover the posts and fund savings of £702,000.

The FBU claims its members wouldn't be able to run the service adequately. Forty posts were lost last year and all vacant posts have been frozen.

Already this year ten out of 27 Merseyside Fire Stations have failed to meet Home Office guidelines because of under-staffing.

The Labour-led fire authority is backing the Chief Fire Officer, even though the vast majority of local people are fully behind the firefighters. When the union pointed out that the fire authority has over £500,000 in reserves, the authority initially set aside its plans to cut the posts and the holiday entitlement, but it has now reverted to its original position.

The ballot for stepping up the action was even higher than the original ballot for nine-hour stoppages - an indication of the anger of firefighters at management attitudes.

The union is confident that the members will remain strong: the action being taken by the dockers and care workers in Liverpool can only strengthen their determination.

Women organising for action

A campaigning conference for women workers' rights

Chair: Barbara Switzer MSF

Speakers:
Rita Donaghy, Unison
Dawn Primarolo MP
Carole Tongue MEP

Called by the SERTUC Women's Rights Committee and the GLLP Women's Committee

Saturday 25th November
11am-4pm

Congress House, Great Russell Street, London

RMT activist victimised

Chris Jones, a long-standing Rail, Maritime and Transport Union (RMT) activist at Longsight Depot, Manchester has been sacked. The decision by West Coast Inter City Ltd (part of British Rail) was taken because Chris did not cross an ASLEF picket line.

On 14th July, Chris Jones talked with ASLEF pickets outside his workplace for about an hour. Management chose to believe that he was part of the picket, and was therefore taking unofficial industrial action in breach of his contract.

He was sacked on 27th September. Other non-ASLEF workers across the country didn't cross picket lines that day but only Chris has received such harsh treatment.

The RMT General Grades Committee has instructed Jimmy Knapp to seek a meeting with Ivor Warburton (head of West Coast) and is preparing a ballot for action at Longsight. Manchester MPs and MEPs (including Michael Meacher, until recently Labour's Transport spokesperson) have written to ask for Chris's re-instatement.

This is a blatant case of victimisation. Chris has been sacked because of his record as a staff representative in a depot where strong representatives have stood up to management as they rush towards privatisation.

If you want to see this injustice put right you can:

- circulate leaflets and petitions
- make a donation (cheques to Stockport & District RMT)
- write to Ivor Warburton c/o British Rail, Longsight Depot, Kirkmanshulme Lane, Manchester
- write to your MP.

For more information contact Stockport and District RMT, Department 61, 1 Newton Street, Manchester M1.

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Trade Unions

Dockers fight union busters

A striking Liverpool residential social worker looks at the Liverpool docks strike.

FIVE HUNDRED Liverpool dockers have been sacked by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) because they refused to cross a picket line of fellow workers at Torside labour agency.

Dockers' leaders recognise that this dispute is as a result of the 1989 strike; since then, the workforce on Merseyside has been halved. In recent months management have been attempting to enforce a return to casualisation, including advertising the dockers' jobs in the local press, and interviewing 1,800 applicants. None were taken on: it was merely a ploy to intimidate the existing workforce into accepting new contracts. 170 out of 200 dockers in one section have been subject to disciplinary action, with one worker sacked. He was reinstated after an unofficial strike.

The MDHC has also refused to recognise stewards they don't like and tried to impose their preferred representatives.

Six unofficial strikes in 1994/95 have stopped the MDHC from getting its way. In the Torside dispute it seized its chance.

MDHC is claiming they need to cut jobs and change contracts because of financial reasons; yet Liverpool Docks is one of the most profitable and successful ports in the UK, recording £38 million profits last year.

Millions of pounds of public money has been pumped into the docks on the understanding that tens of thousands of jobs would be created. Instead thousands of jobs have been slashed: from 6,000 in 1985 to 500 today.

Last week the MDHC again advertised for jobs: 1,000 part-time 'casual' posts. Apparently the response has been poor.

The dockers remain united. Only 11 people are crossing the picket line, and support for the dispute has been widespread and across Merseyside.

Over one thousand trade unionists marched through Liverpool in support of the dockers, the firefighters and the residential workers, showing that trade unionists who stand and fight for jobs and conditions do get public support no matter what the Blairites want us to believe. All the Merseyside Labour MPs in dock areas have given their support. So has Liverpool Labour Council - despite attempting to casualise their own residential workers' service!

Harry Rimmer, Leader of Liverpool City Council, wrote to the MDHC, demanding that the dockers be reinstated, and condemning the "over-the-top" action of the company in sacking its entire workforce.

The dockers have received support from the local TGWU branches but are still waiting for an indication of whether they will get backing from the union nationally. TGWU branches throughout the country should be writing to Bill Morris demanding that the full weight of the union be put behind the Liverpool dockworkers.

The dockworkers' dispute is one of three currently happening on Merseyside. All three have a common thread - attempts by management to undermine national pay agreements, break collective bargaining and introduce casual labour.

The disputes thus have implications far beyond Liverpool, or even their own industries, and the labour movement must mobilise in defence of the striking workers.

Send messages of support and money (the dockers are sacked and thus not in receipt of strike pay) to Jim Davies, Dockworkers Strike, c/o TGWU Transport House, Islington, Liverpool L2.

Scab Service

TGWU NATIONAL OFFICIALS have been told by the MDHC that they are poised to withdraw from cargo handling operations, and wish to transfer this work to Drake Ports Distribution Service.

Drake have a history of strike-breaking. They recently put together a strike-breaking force of 80 scabs on £175 standby money at Southampton docks, another former Dock Labour Scheme port.

Behind the scenes MDHC bosses have told TGWU officials that they would be able to "use their influence" with Drake to get "some" dockers their jobs back. But they are not prepared to give meaningful guarantees.

The fact that the MDHC is talking at all shows it is not in as strong a position as they would like us to think.

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Liverpool dockers need your help

Jimmy Nolan, chair of the Merseyside Port shop stewards, appeals for support for 500 sacked Liverpool dockworkers.

INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS in the Port of Liverpool, and especially with the major port employer - Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) - have deteriorated badly since the abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme in 1989. The imposition of draconian employment contracts, under the threat of 90 days' notice if not agreed, have resulted in dockers working twelve-hour shifts, seven days a week, 365 days a year, for substantially reduced wages and worse conditions.

The use of casual labour in the Port since 1989 has increased dramatically. In September, Torside - an agency working for MDHC - wanted to sack 20 young, full-time dockworkers and replace them with casuals. An official ballot was organised by the TGWU. Torside then threatened to sack the whole workforce of 80 people. Before the deadline for industrial action, they rescinded their decision, and accepted that 80 full-time jobs could still be found in the Port.

Within days, Torside engineered an industrial dispute by instantly dismissing five dockworkers, and the rest of the workforce walked out in solidarity. They began picketing the main docks, although without an official ballot. Dockworkers, many of whom have sons among the pickets, refused to cross picket lines until all 80 Torside workers were reinstated.

The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company then sacked all 500 workers in the Port. The Port of Liverpool has profits of over £38 million. Turnover and tonnages are now the highest ever recorded in its history.

The majority of dockworkers in the Port have, on average, thirty to forty years' continuous service in the industry. They have now all been dismissed. This situation is the culmination of years of bad management, in which the dockworkers have been treated in an appalling manner. They now find themselves without work in a city already beleaguered by unemployment.

On behalf of 500 sacked Liverpool dockworkers, I appeal to you for your support (see box left).

Trade Unions

An engineered strike

A sacked TGWU shop steward talked to *Labour Left Briefing* about the background to the Liverpool Docks strike.

A LOT OF us think the dispute has been deliberately engineered, and that some union officials have played as bad a role as the employers.

If you go back to the 1989 national strike over the abolition of the Dock Labour Scheme, the Port employers were not strong enough to take us head on - like they did at Tilbury, when 150 lads were sacked. So they waited.

Once the strike was over, they split us all up into six different units. Then they bribed people with £35,000 redundancy money. On my section at the time - general cargo, which is where all the rebels, rogues and reprobates were sent - the workforce was reduced from 300 to 100 in one year.

After they got many of the older men out of the way, the company and the TGWU came along with the idea of setting up an agency to provide work for unemployed youngsters.

They were only offering £170 a week to start, and £180 when the lads had learned to drive a stacker truck. But we all thought it was better than the dole. We all fell for it, myself included. Especially when we were told we would have control over recruitment, so we could get some jobs for dockers' sons who were unemployed. We didn't realise then that we were being set up.

Also after '89, we were slowly moved back into one place: Seaforth container terminal.

The management deliberately provoked the recent fight at Torside. First, there was an attempt to sack 20 lads and replace them with casual labour. Then, when Torside backed down after the 100% ballot for strike action, we still thought they would try something. Which they did.

The actual strike started over what was really only a minor hiccough. Far worse things have happened. But management wanted a dispute.

It's not in anyone's contract, but it's always been custom and practice that if they want us to work a couple of extra hours, we do so - as long as we get plenty of notice so we can phone home; and we get paid for two hours, even if the job's over before then.

What Torside did was wait until 3.15 on a shift that finished at 4.00pm, to tell the lads they were needed for an extra two hours. Then the gaffer came up and said, "Oh, by the way, you'll only get an hour's pay."

So the five lads refused. They worked until the end of the shift, and then went to the canteen.

Their employer, Bernard Bradley, the guy who set up the Torside agency, used to be a docker - he grabbed the £35,000 after scabbing at Garston Docks during the strike. He came straight up to the lads in the canteen and shouted, "You are all sacked!"

The rest of the shift - working on the ship - carried on loading and worked the two hours. In the morning, when they reported for work, they were told that the first five lads had been sacked. They said they wouldn't work if the others couldn't. Bradley then said, "Right, you're sacked, too."

News spread to the rest of the Torside workforce, who all walked out.

The Torside lads came up to see our stewards. They were told to go and see the union, and get a proper ballot organised.

But Jack Dempsey, the local official, the same guy who tried to convince the lads to take 20 redundancies with the argument that "in every war there are casualties", told them they had no choice.

"I told you. You knew what you were doing. You're sacked."

So the kids didn't think they would get union support for a ballot. They told the stewards they would be putting pickets on the Seaforth gate.

The MDHC told us that if we didn't cross, the responsibility would be ours. Jack Dempsey from the TGWU didn't do anything. So the Torside lads put the pickets on, and of course we didn't cross.

Looking back, the dock company had been preparing for it. In '89 they said, "Let's get them back, split them up, and then do them in our own way." I'm convinced they put dockers' sons into Torside because they knew we wouldn't cross their picket lines.

Dempsey has been sent on holiday by the TGWU, so now he's out of the picture. Thank God. And the negotiations at Acas are in the hands of General Secretary Bill Morris, Deputy General Secretary Jack Adams and John Connolly, the national officer for the docks.



Tory laws mean that strikes to defend workers sacked for not crossing picket lines are illegal

They ruin our lives

Doreen McNally explains why the Liverpool dockers must win.

I AM SPEAKING as the wife of a man who has worked for 28 years on the docks. He has refused severance several times because he wants to work.

I look after my elderly parents, our children are still in education and we are totally dependent on my husband's income.

I am standing firmly behind my husband. I've watched the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company bully him and seen the effect this has had on our family life.

We get phone calls on a daily basis altering his shifts. A 7am to 3pm shift will suddenly be changed to 7am to 7pm. You get calls the day before a rest day saying you have to come in instead and work a twelve-hour shift. We've had calls when he's been in bed just hours after finishing a night shift and he's had to be back at work just five hours after finishing work.

If you're not there when they ring they want to know where you are. I resent this gross intrusion into our family life. We don't make social arrangements any more because you get fed up cancelling them.

It affects your health - the insomnia and the stress. Over 300 men didn't cross the picket line. What kind of man would? We are just numbers to the Mersey Dock and Harbour Company. But we are not numbers. We are human beings.

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Trade Unions

No tolls on the information super highway

John Holmes, Stourbridge CLP and a member of the CWU delegation to Labour Party Conference spoke to LLB.

LABOUR'S NEW proposals for the information super highway - though they've not been spelt out in detail - look like giving BT a licence to print money and a licence to extend their monopoly. As such they're very dangerous proposals. They will enable BT - with the removal of the asymmetry rule - to provide leisure services on their phone network. We need to look at this issue both as socialists and as members of a union whose members work in BT.

As a BT worker I would be looking for a number of commitments. We want the additional work to be done by people in regular full time employment with full pension rights and not by bringing in casual labour (which is exactly the way BT currently deal with demands for extra labour).

We also want to see more jobs created by BT cutting the working week and by taking on more staff.

We now work a 37 and a half hours week but the reality is that with increased travelling times following centralisation most BT workers do more hours per week than before the recent 'reduction'. So we will be pushing for our consistent demand of 32 hours per week. We would also like to see a cut of 50% in our executives' salaries. We would also like to see BT returned to public ownership but first we need a decent campaign to put public ownership of BT back on the agenda, because at the moment it isn't.

Unless the technology provided is accessible to everyone - that, after all, was the point of the phone network in the first place - only those who can afford to pay will benefit.

This is a fundamental technology that everyone needs. These are massive opportunities with the information super highway. This doesn't just apply to education but also can benefit anyone who has problems leaving their homes through illness, disability or whatever. We can give them additional facilities: security, entertainment and cultural opportunities to enable them to play a full part in society. There are wonderful possibilities which won't be available if access is limited to those who can pay.

From a socialist point of view we want to see technology which is democratic. That means that access points are open to all. This will only be done by a company that is not doing it for a profit. Labour's new deal with BT, although still sketchy about practicalities like these, does not seem to address this crucial question.

Plebiscites to Rule OK?

Ian Murch
NUT executive

THE NUT Executive has agreed (26 votes to 15) "that a motion be submitted to Annual Conference 1996 putting forward proposals for greater consultation with and participation of union members in the affairs of the union, and that union members be consulted on the above proposal."

The NEC background paper on this motion talked of members being consulted about the agenda of Conference, the use of regular ballots and surveys, and the direct involvement of members in putting forward nominations in union elections. Union meetings were dismissed as "unrepresentative", and particularly unsuitable as a vehicle for determining conference motions.

If the form of this intervention from the NEC and the General Secretary is as partisan and misleading as it was in the industrial action ballot following Conference 1995, then it will be a vehicle for dictatorship rather than democracy. Anything which gives the General Secretary so much power and enshrines that power in the rule book must be stopped. The real significance of what is proposed is the enormous power it gives to the General Secretary as the Executive can already survey and consult to its heart's content. What we must fear is the General Secretary determining the agenda for Conference, holding whatever ballots he chooses to overturn its decisions, and potentially even intervening in the electoral process.

Welfare State Network

Budget Day Lobby of Parliament
Don't let the Tories make more cuts!

Tuesday 28th November
1pm - Lobby
2pm - Rally in Parliament

Speakers:

Tony Benn MP, Rosie Woods (NUS NEC), Jack Jones (National Pensioners Convention), Trade Unionists Against JSA, Diane Abbott MP, Alan Simpson MP

Campaign to Defend the Welfare State/Full Employment Forum

National Conference
The choices for Labour

Saturday 2nd December 1995
10.30-4.30

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

Speaker include:
John Edmonds (GMB), Diane Abbott MP, Roger Berry MP, Ken Livingstone MP, Prof Peter Townsend

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Labour Left Briefing

Launch Meeting

For a Labour Victory: socialist candidates with socialist policies

Speakers include:

Alan Simpson MP
Liz Davies
Councillor Colin Hall
Lynn Jones
(Delegate, 1995 Labour Party Conference)

Monday, November 6th

7.30pm

The Spread Eagle, Charles Street, Leicester
Sponsored by: Leicestershire Socialist Campaign Group

New Labour: What's left to be done?

Open Meeting

Speakers:

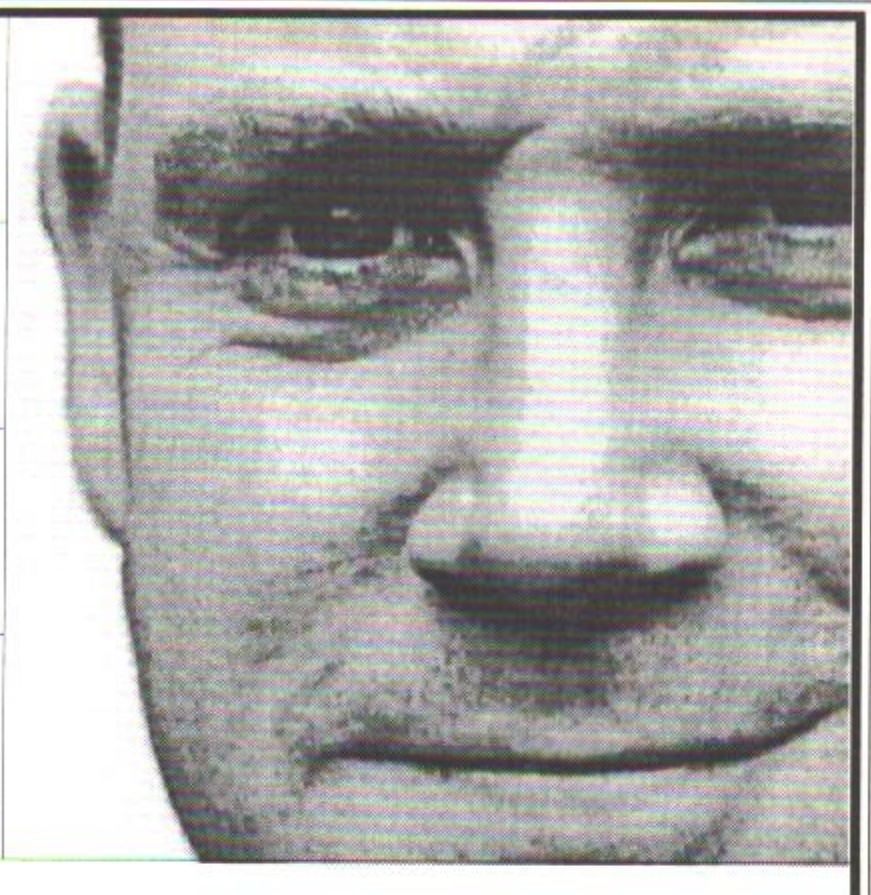
Dennis Skinner
Liz Davies

Tuesday 14th November, 8 pm

Lewisham Labour Club, Limes Hall, Lewisham SE13
Deptford Labour Party
0181 852 5045

Leading with the left

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



● SO KEVIN KEEGAN pops up at the Labour Party Conference to knock a few balls about with El Leadero. For what it's worth, my view is that Kevin Keegan should only be remembered for three things;

1. Getting sent off with Billy Bremner in a Charity Shield final.
2. Snogging Margaret Thatcher.
3. Poncing around the park with the most ridiculous seventies perm - traces of which are still visible to this day.

Are we witnessing the launch of yet another party within a party - Dodgy Blow Waves For New Labour? If so, is Blair going to join? And where does it leave the likes of Donald Dewar? I can confirm that in a classic knee-jerk response to this threat the first meeting of Slapheads For Socialist Policies will be convened shortly. Watch this space.

● I WAS PLEASED to see in the letters page of the last *Labour Left Briefing* that the "Geoff Martin Backlash" has now kicked off big-time. Top prize goes to the comrade who likened me to a "former NUPE official steeled in the politics of the Communist Party". This is cracking good stuff and far superior to "Flabbergasted Fred" from Islington whose half-hearted rant peaked far too early. I'm sure that all of the contributors will be offered places on the Unison delegation to next year's Militant Labour Party Conference when Roger Bannister secures his victory.

● DID YOU CLOCK the Newsnight/ Fabian Society debate live on the telly from the Party Conference? I have to own up and admit I was there - along with the rest of the aristocracy of the hard left and a gaggle of well-polished modernisers.

BBC bosses shunted us into a nightclub bar with free booze a full two hours before transmission time. A mate of mine, who shall remain nameless, promptly attempted to see how much of his licence fee he could recover in Foster's Ice - outrageous behaviour and not to be condoned.

The programme itself was a complete disaster for Paxman and the BBC. The set-up had been spotted well in advance and there was a tacit agreement that we wouldn't slug it out just for the benefit of the Beeb. I'll row with the LCC over their hijacking of the Party any time and any place, but I won't do it just to boost the BBC's viewing figures. Well, not without consulting my agent first.

● HIGHLIGHT OF THE Conference for me was having my photograph taken with the FA Cup and when I eventually track down the prints I'm intending to have them plastered all over this column as a replacement for the psycho shot you're currently stuck with. The FA Cup picture will run either until Chelsea get knocked out of the tournament or *LLB* sacks me as a columnist for being too right wing. Whichever is the sooner.

A combination of Chelsea's current erratic form and *Militant*'s description of me as a "so called left" should ensure that it's a close-run thing.

● YOU'LL HAVE seen that smart-arsed 14-year-old kid spouting a stream of right-wing garbage up at the Tory Party Conference.

His hardline views on things like dole scroungers, privatisation and the trade unions have been too much to stomach for some members of his own party.

I dare say that when he grows up in a couple of year's time he will find his true political home - the Labour Co-ordinating Committee.

Revolution betrayed

Pat Byrne (Streatham CLP) reviews
Land and Freedom

KEN LOACH'S film about the Spanish Civil War does not pretend to be a comprehensive account of the stirring and tragic events in the 1930s that paved the way for the Second World War. He describes his film as simply "a story from the Spanish Revolution". Just by calling it a 'revolution' rather than the more common 'civil war', Loach indicates that this is going to be an unusual account. For this is the nub of the film: should the civil war lead to a complete change in society or fall back into the old bourgeois rut of private ownership, hierarchies and uniforms? From the outset, it's clear which way the director's sympathies lie.

This film will not please old Communist Party members. It certainly pulls no punches in showing the role of Russia and the Spanish Communists in first obstructing and then brutally suppressing the revolutionary forces. In fact, it lands them one after another.

The film is told from a very personal angle and uses the completely convincing social realism that Ken Loach has made his hallmark. More unusually for Loach this is a film with lots of action and romance, but these are essential ingredients to a tale of the Spanish Civil War.

Ian Hart (of recent *Loved Up* fame) is great as a young, unemployed Liverpudlian communist who decides to go and fight for the Republican cause and ends up in the Trotskyist trenches. In a refreshing departure from convention, his opposite number, Rosana Pastor, a fellow fighter whose relationship with him is as much political comradeship as personal attraction, plays the more politically committed character.

Among the film's numerous memorable scenes, particularly vivid moments include the earthy debate among the peasants and soldiers about whether to collectivise the land; and the surprising discovery of a Mancunian on the other side of the sandbags during a battle in Barcelona.

The film pulls no punches in showing the role of Russia and the Spanish Communists in first obstructing and then brutally suppressing the revolutionary forces.

Ken Loach with producer Rebecca O'Brien.



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Taking on a Spanish subject was a courageous endeavour for a British director; however, Bigas Luna, Spanish director of *Jamon, Jamon* and *Golden Balls*, has described *Land and Freedom* as "the best movie ever made about the Spanish Civil War." Hopefully, this will be just the first of a series of international subjects to be captured by Loach's merciless camera.

The only criticism I had of the film was that its introduction to the Civil War could be confusing for those unfamiliar with the details. A creative effort to explain a few basic points at the outset could have illuminated the subsequent story, particularly as the film focuses only on one small section of the Aragon front and developments back in Barcelona. Still, perhaps I'm being unkind - I'm still waiting for that panoramic version of the Spanish Civil War that can do justice to Felix Morrow's brilliant book *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*. After all, there can be no better tribute to a film than that it makes you want to know more. If *Land and Freedom* has stimulated you with a desire for a more in-depth analysis of the Spanish Civil War, then you can do no better than beg, borrow or steal a copy of the Morrow book. You won't regret it.

Ken Loach spoke to *Labour Left Briefing* about his new film *Land and Freedom*.

"MY FILM IS set in the first few months of the war, when the Spanish people decided that they would not only fight against fascism, but would also fight to liberate themselves from the landowners, the church and the big employers. So they took over the land and the factories with collectives. We wanted to celebrate those few months of hope and then to try see why it fell apart.

"This is one of the big stories of the twentieth century. Everything about this century can be put into perspective if you know the Spanish story. You know that when the Berlin Wall fell it was not socialism that collapsed but Stalinism, which was something else entirely, as was revealed in Spain. You know that the social democrats have always lined up behind the employers and helped the Stalinists to destroy the revolution. You know that Britain and France were quite prepared to see the fascists win so their pose as the great anti-fascists in the Second World War is rather hollow.

"We were very apprehensive about what the Spanish would think. But actually they were very generous and I think it's gone down well in Spain, particularly among the young people, who have gone to it in droves. This part of the Civil War has been a secret within a secret. Obviously, you couldn't talk about it under Franco, and the Stalinists and the social democrats didn't want to talk about it because they turned out to be the bad guys.

"In terms of my future work, I take every story on its merits. My next film is going to be about the Sandinistas and the Contras in Nicaragua in the 1980s. It starts with a Nicaraguan refugee in Scotland and finishes in Nicaragua."

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Stop arms to Indonesia!

Eric Ferguson, from the Stop The Hawks - No Arms To Indonesia Coalition, reports on the campaign and how Labour has responded to it.

AS THE population of East Timor staged yet another uprising against the Indonesian occupation, a weak, uncontroversial resolution on arms supplies to Indonesia was remitted at Labour Party Conference. Evidently, the politics of so-called ethical socialism do not apply outside these islands. But the campaign goes on. Plans gather pace for a weekend of action on November 11th & 12th.

November 12th is the fourth anniversary of the massacre in which over 500 people were gunned down in a cemetery in Dili, the capital of East Timor. Many not murdered on the spot by Government forces were later given a lethal injection by security forces. Campaigners internationally will also be taking action against the arms deal.

The Government has granted BAE a licence to export Hawk ground-attack aircraft. But campaigners will be visiting the sites, staging public meetings and holding street stalls to press the case for cancelling the deal.

The labour movement response has been mixed. Unison and the FBU have supported the coalition and are helping to build the lobby of Parliament on 7th December. The Labour Party's approach is to do as little as possible to disturb the status quo.

The Wednesday after Party Conference, Shadow Defence Secretary, Dr David Clark MP, launched the Labour Party's new defence policy, "Strategy For A Secure Future".

According to the PLP media office, "the defence industrial base is a strategic national interest in both defence and economic terms. It is a preserve of high-tech innovation which Britain cannot afford to lose. Decline of Britain's capability in this field can and must be averted".

Central to maintaining a military-industrial base in the UK is the export of massive amounts of equipment to world arms markets. Indonesia is one such market which the Labour front bench does not want to lose.

But in East Timor the repression, torture, rape and murder continue. November 11th & 12th is likely to be a focal point for resistance, in East Timor and internationally. Support it.

● Stop the Hawks - No Arms To Indonesia: c/o 88 Islington High Street, London N1 8EG 0171-561-1236

NVDA actions will be taking place at British Aerospace sites on the 11th November at Warton near Preston (0161-834 0295) Brough near Hull (01482 470621), Farnborough, Hants 01865 793820 and on Sunday there will be a protest organised by the British Coalition for East Timor at the Indonesian Embassy, Grosvenor Square (0171-252 7937).

Sandinistas split

Twelve months before next year's presidential and legislative elections in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas have split three ways and the prospect of a hard-right victory is looming. Mike Phipps reports.

THE FSLN, which led the 1979 revolution and lost office in 1990, split last year when former vice-president Sergio Ramirez set up the MRS - the Sandinista Renewal Movement. Now a new grouping led by former chief of police Doris Tijerino has emerged from within the Sandinista parliamentary party. This new group is critical of both FSLN intolerance and the MRS for declaring Ramirez's presidential candidacy prematurely. It seeks to heal the rift within the movement before next year's elections in order to maximise potential support.

The reasons are clear. A recent opinion poll shows that the hard-right liberal Arnoldo Aleman would get 24% of the vote if the election were held now, compared to just 22% for the FSLN. Aleman is the ruthless mayor of Managua who had the Sandinista murals in the capital painted over. He enjoys strong support despite the fact that a recent survey showed that a majority of those polled thought that he was dishonest.

At the root of the Sandinista divisions are differences over how to respond to the devastating neo-liberal offensive which has seen 40% of the former public sector workforce laid off, unemployment climb to 60% and poverty intensified by the introduction of fees in health and education, higher water and electricity charges and sales taxes, all at the demand of the International Monetary Fund. "It's always said that true revolutions are irreversible," observed FSLN leader Thomas Borge recently, "but the last few years have shown that to be untrue."

The state of Nicaragua's health service illustrates the crisis.

Since the 1990-91 IMF-led structural adjustment, many health centres have been able to stay open only by introducing charges. The volume of drugs bought by the service has fallen to one-eighth of its 1989 figure. Preventable epidemics rage as a result: this year it's haemorrhagic dengue - nearly 2,000 cases were reported in the first 7 months of 1995 (compared to 519 for the whole of last year), the highest incidence in Central America.

The return of the Sandinistas to power next year may be one precondition for tackling these problems, although many commentators are more pessimistic, believing that a broad coalition will be necessary just to stop Aleman. As the spilt in the Sandinistas consolidates, however, with mutual recriminations flying and the MRS establishing separate structures in 90 out of the country's 149 municipalities, the chances of a united Sandinista campaign look slim.

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Science

Electromagnetic peril?



Our Science Correspondent, Les Hearn reports:

FOR SEVERAL years, some people have claimed that living near electric power lines can cause diseases, including leukaemia and other cancers. Generally, these claims have been dismissed because it did not seem possible for the magnetic fields generated or for any radiation produced to have a significant effect on living cells.

Nevertheless, studies have continued to be carried out and evidence of an effect has continued to accumulate. The latest report leaked out in the USA last month and was featured in *New Scientist*. Prepared for the US Government's radiation advisers, the National Council on Radiation Protection, it claims that the electromagnetic fields (EMFs) produced not only by overhead power lines but also by many household appliances are over its recommended safety level.

The report has been assembled over the past nine years by a committee of eleven of the USA's leading EMF experts and is said to be the most comprehensive study ever on the health effects of low-frequency EMFs.

The fields arise as a consequence of the flow of electric current. There is a magnetic field around any wire carrying a current and this fact is used in devices as diverse as the electric motor and the loudspeaker. Since we use alternating current in our electricity system, these fields are changing direction all the time: 50 times a second or 50 hertz (Hz) in the UK; 60Hz in the USA. This is a low frequency and it was thought that the radiation associated with these, very long radio waves, carried too little energy to have any effect.

In addition, the magnetic part of the fields is far weaker than the natural magnetism of the Earth. Around the British Isles, the natural field strength is up to 50 microteslas while the field under a 400,000 volt power line is some 40 microteslas. Other power lines have a lower voltage across them and a lower field under them. Vacuum cleaners produce fields of 2 to 20 microteslas, while electric ovens produce fields of 0.15 to 0.5 microteslas. Other appliances fall in between.

The effect, if it exists, must depend on the oscillation of the fields. The report highlights suggestions that these fields interfere with the production of a hormone, melatonin, by the pineal gland (the gland which connects with a third eye in some reptiles!).

This may interfere with the growth of receptors to another hormone in the breast. Researchers are looking into a link between power lines and breast cancer. Melatonin may also be involved in helping prevent degenerative diseases such as Parkinson's, Alzheimer's and coronary artery diseases.

There is said to be strong epidemiological evidence of a link between EMFs from power lines and leukaemia in children, and between EMFs at work and leukaemia and brain cancer in adults. There is also evidence that EMFs encourage the growth of tumours and that they may have effects on the immune and reproductive systems.

The maximum exposure level to these magnetic fields recommended by the report is 0.2 microteslas. This is substantially below the present maximum level of 1,600 microteslas permitted in the UK and below the fields produced by many household appliances. However, we are not told what sort of exposure times would be necessary before significant risk was incurred.

I would suggest that being in the same room as a smoker would be more dangerous than running the Moulinex for a few minutes. Clearly, living or working in high fields would result in much more exposure. Electricity companies have always resisted putting power lines underground because of the cost: soon they may find the pressure overwhelming. ❑

Latin America goes to market

Mike Phipps reviews
Duncan Green's
Silent Revolution: The Rise of Market Economics in Latin America,
published by Latin American Books,
price £11.99.

IN 1955 scholarships were given to an elite group of Chilean graduates to attend the Department of Economics at Chicago University. These "Chicago boys" returning to Chile, fired up with the free-market ideas of Milton Friedman, gave the intellectual underpinning for Pinochet's dictatorship.

Neo-liberalism is now the guiding philosophy of the IMF and the World Bank, institutions that decisively influence the well-being of a majority of the world's population.

The impact in Latin America has been devastating, as state-protected industrialisation was abandoned in favour of globalisation and the market. In 1982 the regional economy shrank for the first time since World War II. Latin America moved from importing to exporting capital - $218 billion between 1983 and 1991. One World Bank director observed: "Not since the conquistadors plundered Latin America has the world seen a (financial) flow in the direction we see today."

The human cost has been staggering. Fifty-five million Latin Americans are undernourished. Mortality rates for chronic non-infectious diseases have doubled recently. Eighty per cent of Bolivians live in poverty. Unemployment has rocketed. Peruvian wages fell last year to half their 1980 levels. Inequalities have worsened as governments switch to sales taxes which penalise the poor.

On the top of all this comes NAFTA, the triumph of the multinationals over national sovereignty. Mexico's border with the US now ceases to exist for investors, but not, of course, for Mexico's would-be migrants.

A generation ago neo-liberal policies could be pursued only under the iron rule of military dictatorship. Now Latin America enjoys civilian administrations. Neo-liberalism is popular, World Bank and IMF officials argue: in Bolivia in 1993 the architect of structural adjustment was elected president.

However governments have ridden roughshod over democracy to force through their policies. In Peru, Fujimori staged a coup against Congress in 1992. In Argentina, Menem issued more decrees in three years than all his civilian predecessors since 1922 put together. In Uruguay 72% of voters rejected privatisation in a referendum.

Popular protest too has been widespread, with 30 general strikes or street riots across the region. The worst "IMF riot" was in Venezuela in 1989 because of the doubling of petrol prices. Soldiers killed 1,500 people in Caracas alone.

Given his lucid analysis, it's a great shame that Green is so weak on solutions. The economic model of South Korea and Taiwan is given a lot of coverage, but Green has no hesitation in labelling them successes. Since he also ridicules the "laws of economics" which assume that "a person with ten cars is ten times as happy as a person with one", it's sad that he lacks the vision to conceive of a solution that transcends the economic system which created such a treadmill.

Militancy in blue

John McIlroy reviews
Keith Sinclair's
How The Blue Union came to Hull Docks
available from 27 Struthmore Avenue,
Hull, price £1.00.



Hull dockers proudly display their new 'Blue Union' cards. PHOTO: Innes Studion

'DIG WHERE you stand' is the motto of the workers' historians of Scandinavia. They place immense importance on retrieving the history of their organisations and localities. Keith Sinclair, secretary of Hull Trades Council, has followed this advice painstakingly. He reconstructs the events in 1954 which led to thousands of Hull dockers quitting the TGWU and joining the 'blue' National Amalgamated Stevedores and Dockers union (NASD). He carefully chronicles the exodus from the undemocratic dock section of the 'white' TGWU (the term referred to the colour of the membership cards) sparked by the demand for the mechanisation.

Sinclair has interviewed survivors from the period and dug up newspaper reports of what dockers termed "the biggest jailbreak in history". This pamphlet helps to debunk caricatures of the 1950s as a decade without struggle, when trade unionists went to sleep, and of the Trotskyists of the time as an impotent force.

Coming from a family of dockers, it brought back to me vivid memories of the cramped, arbitrary world of the 50s where exploitation and insecurity held sway. As long ago as 1920, Lord Shaw's commission on the docks concluded: "The system of casualisation must be torn up by the roots - it is wrong". It was "discreditable to society". Well, we got rid of casualisation. Then we got rid of the dockers themselves.

The system on the docks made for fragmentation and competition between workers which all too often produced an apolitical factionalism. That this was overcome, and that portworkers built a culture of solidarity militancy and workers control, was due in no small part to the efforts of those remembered here. Suitably adapted, their efforts can sustain us in today's very different world.

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Scargill fan?

How did this one slip past the censors at **Unison**?

In the latest official *Unison Focus* paper, a report from union's TUC delegate (in fact, at 20 years old, the youngest delegate at the TUC) comments: "I am too young to remember much about the miners' strike so it was great to see some of the historical figures from that time like **Arthur Scargill**."

Cricket, lovely cricket

On the eve of the England squad's departure for the new South Africa, **Devon Malcolm** won an apology and undisclosed damages from ***Wisden Cricket Monthly*** for printing **Robert Henderson**'s racist attack on black cricketers.

Surely it's time that Mike Atherton, David Gower, Matthew Engel and Frank Keating, who sit on the *WCM* Editorial Board, considered their positions.

Meanwhile, Hampshire County Cricket Club has announced that it will not play against the touring Pakistani side next summer. When the Pakistanis were last here, in the "ball tampering" tour of 1992, there was "trouble" when they played Hampshire - "trouble" caused by the refusal of Hampshire's recently retired public school captain, Mark Nicholas, to walk when given out.

Shouldn't the Test and County Cricket Board take action against a county which insults overseas visitors?

Ian Botham and Alan Lamb recently took their inane "Beef and Lamb in a Stew" double-act to Bombay, where they regaled the well-heeled assembly with derogatory remarks about Pakistan and Pakistanis. Bombay's local government (and much of its cricket) is controlled by the extremely right wing Shiv Sena, which is virulently anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistani.

If this make you mad, contact Hit Racism for Six, c/o Centre for Sport Development Research, Roehampton Institute, London SW15 3SN. Tel. 0171-561-1606.

Unlikely allies

Lefties will find the *Labour First* bulletin distributed at this year's Party conference a riveting read.

Surely, you protest, *Labour First* is a right-wing breakaway from the LCC (if such a thing is possible)? Ah yes, but they do defend the trade union link (it was very useful to defeat the CLP left in the early eighties). And if you thought that *LLB* was obsessed with the LCC you should read *Labour First*. They attack the LCC for "claiming to speak for Tony Blair" and condemn **Paul Richards**, LCC Chair, for having said: "We're winning on Clause IV, next it will be the union link". They go so far as to suggest this would "destroy the Labour Party and ... our election chances." They add: "It is incoherent nonsense to argue that all representative structures should go as the LCC and Peter Hain are now doing." If it weren't for the fact that they boast about working "for the expulsion of Trotskyists from the Party" we'd ask them to join our EB.

Self-help

Yes, another **Islington** story, only this one has nothing to do with Liz Davies.

Chief Whip and arch-Blair babe **Stephen Twigg** has declared his candidacy for Council leader. Never mind that the Labour Group elections won't be held until April, or that current leader **Alan Clinton** has no intention of resigning, it is clear that campaigning for this august post should consume at least as much time and energy as that devoted to, say, the Republican Presidential nomination.

Meanwhile, the Islington Labour Group has decided on a substantial increase in councillors' allowances. This story somehow found its way into the *Mail* and the *Express*, which used it to attack Alan Clinton - unfairly, as he had made it clear that he would not be claiming the increased allowance.

However, should the unthinkable occur and Twigg succeed in his leadership bid, young Stephen will certainly find the extra cash useful. His current employer, MP **Margaret Hodge**, is unlikely to want to subsidise his political career.

Bad news for British capital

The prospect of a Labour victory is now regarded around the City as a racing certainty. So much so that the public relations companies are falling over themselves to hire Labour people to open doors for them with the next Labour Government.

Colin Byrne, a former Labour press officer and close buddy of **Peter Mandelson**, is now at Shandwick in the City; and *Periscope* hears Ian Greer Associates have hired **Jonathan Hopkins**, a former adviser to Doug McAvoy, the teachers' union leader.

Phil Cole, once a regional organiser, has gone to a rather more glam post at Burson Marsteller - via a spell at the RSPCA. And **Neal Lawson**, one-time lieutenant of Gordon Brown, is already well installed with Sir Tim Bell at Lowe Bell. **David Gardner** and **Paul Wheeler** have recently left Walworth Road to join Public Policy Unit - a private lobbying company.

Turning to the Tories, one of the more intriguing moves in the market place was the appointment of Michael McManus, David Hunt's former political adviser, to Sir Edward Heath's private office. McManus now has the job of assisting the former PM in writing his memoirs, purportedly being produced at a pace rather slower than the building of the Great Pyramid.

Frank the predictable

The same month that the NEC decided **Liz Davies** was unsuitable to be a Labour candidate, it ignored MP **Frank Field**'s call for Labour supporters to vote Liberal in certain constituencies.

The man who spiked Lol Duffy's chances in 1987 in Wallasey is at it again. Party members in North Devon, West Devon and North Cornwall were singled out for the Field treatment. We await - but not with bated breath - the National Constitutional Committee's action on this matter.

Tough on statistics and the causes of statistics

The **Met Police**'s review for 1994-95 revealed a clear-up rate of just 22%, but Government targets for this year are just 20%, enabling the Met to achieve even less.

So where is investment going? Despite shots being fired at just 16 officers (down two on the previous year), there is to be an increase in the number of armed response vehicles patrolling London and a piloting of the use of a CS gas incapacitant spray.

The poor response to burglaries has resulted in a drop of 14% being reported (presuming that there isn't actually a reduction in the number taking place). No place in the report for details of the Met's notorious sickness rate or details of its expensive wage structure.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Your letters are welcome but please keep them under 300 words

WRITE TO:

Labour Left Briefing
PO Box 2378
London E5 9QU



● Prize Letter of the Month

It gets worse! Which member of the NEC was most vociferous in denouncing Liz Davies' "disloyalty"? Why, Clare Short, who has persistently voted against the Labour whip on matters such as the Prevention of Terrorism Act (quite rightly in my view) and resigned from the front bench over the Gulf War. She is, therefore, in no position to question Liz Davies' "loyalty".

As a member of the Campaign Group until 1988, Clare Short associated herself with the organised broad left, which is all Liz Davies was doing by involving herself with *Briefing*.

You that are without sin ...

Simon Hewitt,
Brunel University Labour Club.

"Arthur has spoken on behalf of his 15,000 members, I will now answer on behalf of my 350,000 members ..." Thus spoke Tom Sawyer, General Secretary of the Labour Party, in answer to Arthur Scargill's speech regarding Clause IV.

This comment typifies the nauseating self-righteousness that victory by blackmail ("vote with us or put in jeopardy a Labour election") and unconstitutional means (see *LLB* October 1995) has given the current incumbents of the Party hierarchy.

Sorry Tom, I don't remember being asked to cast a vote for the election of the Party General Secretary and I don't remember you wearing a pass at Conference indicating that you had been delegated by any members of our Party.

In any future feeble attempts to belittle Arthur Scargill or any others at Conference, please preface your comments with "I am Tom Sawyer, installed as General Secretary 'on the nod', speaking in a personal capacity ..."

Paul Morris,
Sutton.

Roger Piper is correct to identify "a systematic attempt by Blair and his cronies to redefine socialism" (*LLB* October).

Blair's new Clause IV accepted the commonplace offered by communitarian writers that human beings can achieve more as members of a community than they can on their own. Membership of the community, for which read nation, imposes a system of reciprocal rights and duties which keeps society stable and ensures a consensus of common interest for all: from bankers to bin men. Conflict only arises from anti-social elements.

Such notions of community provide an important corrective to the unfettered individualism of the New Right, but are too indistinct to offer a sufficient basis for constructing a socialist ideology. It is socialism without any critique of capitalist class relations, and it threatens to scapegoat marginal groups on the fringes of the community. The ideal in Blairite Britain will be workplace consensus between co-operating bosses and trade unions, and if the trade unions seek to disrupt this harmony, they can expect the same treatment as the "squeegee merchants". By reducing socialism to sociability Blair has denuded it of its critical content. The imperative for the left is to reassert a fuller definition of socialism - a task I hope *LLB* will fulfil in the coming months.

Dr D Stack,
Queen Mary and Westfield College,
University of London.

Back in 1988, while at Ruskin College, I had many late night discussions about the rightward drift of the Labour Party. As an active trade unionist and Labour Party member for the previous eight years, I shocked many when I told them I was joining the Greens. They saw it as a foolish gesture, as real politics was about getting elected and getting things done. However, they did concede that if Kinnock moved to drop unilateral nuclear disarmament a lot of them would follow.

When Kinnock dumped the policy as a vote loser, I waited to see what my friends in the Labour Party would do. Nothing, was the answer. They dug in and held on. After all, there was still the hope of transforming society, symbolised by Clause IV. Well we've just had the same kind of debate, and a lot of good socialists have decided to continue digging in.

Now, with the Liz Davies case, the broad church which allowed a few left wingers to become MPs, the last strong argument for Labour Party membership, has been demolished. If the leader doesn't want you, then it's one person, one vote - Tony Blair's.

The reason why Blair can take the Labour Party ever -rightward is simple. There is no vocal alternative to which a lot of pissed off people can turn. If there was, and it started picking up a lot of Labour supporters, then you can be dammed sure that Blair and Co. would start using the word socialism more often.

Ian Wingrove,
London N16.

May I correct some inaccuracies in the article on MSF under my name in the October *LLB*.

The office closures announced in September were proposed by Assistant General Secretary John Chowcat, without at that time having the approval of the NEC. The NEC did decide in September to proceed with a redundancy programme and indicated that compulsory redundancies would take place if there were insufficient volunteers. However, at that point they did not finally decide on the total numbers involved.

While many aspects of the situation remain to be sorted out, not the least of which is whether MSF employees will have to reapply for their jobs, there is an upheaval going on in the union and MSF members should be demanding to know what is being done in their name.

Hugh MacGrillen,
Secretary,
MSF London Regional Council.

I enclose a cheque to renew my subscription for a further year. Overall your magazine has become dreadfully dull during recent times compared to many others on the left: *Red Pepper*, *Campaign Group News*, etc. In view of the fact you are reorganising yourself I will however carry on for another year in the hope that you get a bit better. Can you not recapture the spirit of younger days?

Richard Balfe MEP,
London SE18.

Well done, science correspondent Les Hearn! Richard Dawkins' book on human origins richly deserved an enthusiastic page-length review.

Les's dead-pan tone, however, fails to alert *LLB* readers that this is dynamite. In a class-struggle journal, he has opted to defend science! "So what?", you may ask. For two decades, the academic and 'Marxist' left have been mounting a witch-hunt, smearing Dawkins by associating him with eugenics, sexism, racism, you name it. Even today, within the Socialist Workers' Party, support for 'Selfish Gene' theory constitutes grounds for immediate expulsion.

Les is to be congratulated for keeping a clear head in relation to what could prove the most humanly empowering scientific revolution yet.

Chris Knight,
Senior Lecturer in Anthropology,
University of East London.

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Dave Holland's contribution to the symposium on the former Yugoslavia misses the point. He seems to be under the impression that NATO is merely an 'imperialist alliance' and that the left has to be quiet on its role for fear of becoming cheerleaders. I called for NATO use of force to defend the Bosnian people (*Briefing* September 1995) because I could not see that any other agency was actually capable of doing that. The UN arms embargo having deprived the Bosnian people of the means to defend themselves, the least the international community (including the NATO states) could do is stop the armed attack against Bosnia and the massive humanitarian tragedy.

NATO and the United States should not be seen as fixed evils forever. We should be discussing not how horrible they are but what policies they should be adopting and how we can campaign for them. We cannot determine in advance whether or not NATO's actions will be progressive. What we can do is demand that those with power act in the interests of human rights. In the case of Bosnia that means arguing for the use of force in defence of the victims of the worst war crimes seen in Europe since the Second World War. The limited return of life to Sarajevo after the NATO air strikes must be seen as a step towards achieving this. The use of force has aided and not retarded peace talks in the region.

The left has come to terms with the European Union, as Ken Coates' interview (*LLB* October 1995) demonstrates, and it is time we came to terms with NATO too. In eighteen months we hope a Labour Government will be in office and we ought to have proposals for a progressive humanitarian agenda for that government to argue inside the alliance.

John Strawson,
London.

Briefing was right to say that if Bosnia falls the forces of reaction will be strengthened. However, John Strawson has got it wrong when he says that the West should be militarily involved on the basis of the principles of the UN. I would not look for principles from an organisation set up by Stalin and the major imperialists. Likewise I would not trust British, French and American imperialist forces anywhere (whatever the colour of their berets).

The main issue is how we answer the forces of reaction. Workers' Aid thinks that we answer by both direct action and political campaigning. We take food and other supplies to Bosnia regularly. This help for people in need is important. More important is the way in which the working classes of the countries participating in this work are linked through this activity.

If your readers want to find out more they can contact us through: PO Box 9, Eccles SO, Salford M30 7FX or they can phone 0161 226 0404.

Geoff Barr,
Workers' Aid for Bosnia.

Dave Holland (*LLB* October) is deluding himself if he thinks he is impartial on Bosnia. He attacks *Briefing*'s support for the lifting of the arms embargo on the Bosnian Government, effectively supporting the status quo which has overwhelmingly favoured Serbia and Croatia and their nationalist acolytes in Bosnia. Because he refuses to take sides over the partition of Bosnia, Dave is, in effect, supporting its carve up between Serbia and Croatia.

Dave asks us to view the ethnic cleansing of Srebrenica and subsequent execution of thousands of male Muslims "in context". He cites the area's UN commander: "the Bosnian Muslims had burned around 200 Serb villages in the area surrounding the city." This myth, like so many others, is perpetuated by Mladic, Karadizic and their ilk to excuse genocide. Srebrenica, remember, was a city under siege for over three years, with the UN unable to get in or out without Bosnian Serb say so. Yet Dave chooses to believe the wicked myth that its besieged inhabitants were somehow able to terrorise no less than two hundred surrounding Serb villages! The UN commander, who handed over all Srebrenica's Muslim males to Mladic for execution, is complicit in genocide and has a vested interest in promoting this vile propaganda.

John Turkie,
London.

Tony Blair's "there's nothing too good for the middle classes" speech at Brighton reduced some people to tears, according to the Birmingham press. It reduced a lot of activists to tears alright, but not for the same reasons. I've reached three score and ten this year, so I suppose I can safely say I'm old Labour.

What gets up my nose is to see good socialists like Liz Davies getting hammered, yet people like Alan Howarth are welcomed with open arms.

I've spent hours canvassing on the doorstep with Liz. I suspect the only time Howarth's been on the doorstep he was selling double glazing.

We all saw Norman Tebbit at the Brighton Conference and thought, what the heck's going on? Who's next, Mark Thatcher? We could invite Saddam Hussain - he's never written for *Briefing*.

I was starting to get a wee bit depressed with this Party of ours. Then I went to Blackpool with the students to lobby the Tories. We met the march to defend the welfare state. They had walked from Bury to Blackpool; mixture of pensioners and youngsters. It was a shot in the arm, I can tell you.

Keep right on *LLB*: we need you now more than ever.

Len Mason,
Birmingham.

Prize Letter!

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

A.O.B.

"I came into politics to build a fairer society. Now it's all I can do to stay awake" - **Austin Mitchell MP.**

"Mr Blair is radical only in the way he ditches all that Labour used to stand for and espouses Thatcherism" - **Bernard Ingham.**

"There is no choice between being principled and unelectable, and being unprincipled and electable" - **Tony Blair.**

"The result of the shadow cabinet elections...looked suspiciously like a victory for old Labour" - ***Daily Telegraph.***

"The shadow cabinet elections, which absorb so much energy, are a waste of time" - ***The Guardian***

"His message is the very same message as my message" - the message of **Norm Olsen** commander of the Michigan Militia on Louis Farrakhan.

"Jack Straw was awful...His great big glasses goggled unhappily at the House. One longed for a kindly squeegee merchant to wipe them down...It was a rare example of a Straw clutching at a drowning man." - **Simon Hoggart**'s view on Straw's weak performance versus Michael Howard.

"I'm finished with Liz Davies" - **Tom Sawyer**.

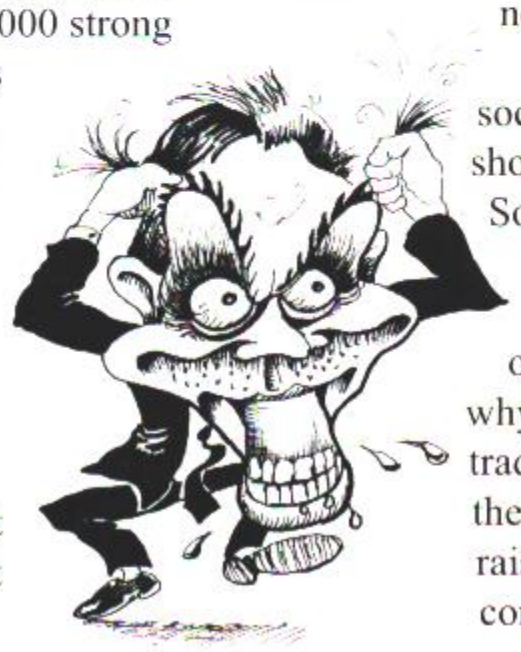
"It is clear that some Labour MPs were convinced that Mandelson orchestrated the critical commentaries [on the shadow cabinet election results]...I don't think for one moment that the accusation against Mandelson is true. It is certainly untrue in my own case." - **Martin Kettle**.

SOCIALIST
Campaign Group
NETWORK

Build the network to campaign for socialist policies

INSTEAD OF seeing the advantage of being a democratic, participatory party, based on people's involvement at local meetings, leading to resolutions, debates and decisions by a delegate national conference, the media is constantly portraying our Party as a one-man presidential campaign with a 300,000 strong support group. Style (if that's what you want to call it) has defeated content. Thatcher's style of leadership is copied, indeed praised even though she is visibly off her trolley these days - a sad reminder of what happens when stars lose their fans.

But how should the left respond? Should we just wait for Tony Blair's hair to thin and his middle to thicken and let the image dissipate in post-Folletism? No, we should be using exactly this moment in time to pronounce our opposition to the Tories, our support for any action taken against anything they stand for and our commitment to promote socialist policies for the next Labour Government.



That's why every socialist in the Labour Party should be coming to the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network Conference in Manchester on 18th November. That's why the issues of education, trade union rights, Ireland and the minimum wage will be raised and discussed, in comradely and participatory fashion, by all who attend. That's why we, the rank and file membership of the Party, won't be sitting at home playing Armchair Internet New Labour with ourselves; we'll be telling our MPs to keep up the struggle against the Tories and the Liberals, with Tony Blair or despite him.

The message from the Network's conference this year must be that this Party is our Party, not the personal possession of Tony Blair, nor the political football of Alistair Campbell or Rupert Murdoch.

The Network is a grass roots organisation of Labour Party socialists, here to stay, here to keep the Party Labour and here to make sure that the next Labour Government puts socialist policies into practice, not for one individual, but for us all.

John Nicholson, chair of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network.

Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network AGM

10.30am to 4.30pm, Saturday 18th November
Manchester Town Hall

✂ ----------

Registration form

Name .....
Address .....
..... Phone .....

Please return with £5 or £2 (concessions) to SCGN, 3 Blades House, Kennington, London, SE11 5TW.

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