LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

October 1995 price £1 conc. 50p

inside...

● Labour Conference Special
● No nukes ● Stephen Lawrence
● minimum wage ● union action
● Nigeria ● New Labour purge



anyone for therapy?

Labour Left Briefing

Launch meeting
7pm, Sunday 1st October
Royal Albion Hotel,
Old Steine, Brighton
Speakers: Tony Benn, Alan Simpson, Maria Exall, Dorothy Macedo (chair)

Labour Left Briefing

Annual politically incorrect quiz
Prizes/raffle
8:30pm, Thursday 5th October
Royal Albion Hotel
Brighton

Labour Left Briefing

London Launch

After Brighton - What's Left?

Speakers: Socialist Campaign Group MP Geoff Martin, Chair London UNISON Affiliated Political Fund
Maria Exall, former editor *New Left*
plus surprise guest speakers
Chair: Dorothy Macedo (*Labour Left Briefing*)
Tuesday 10th October 7.30pm
Abbey Community Association
Great Smith Street
London SW1
(Westminster or St. James' Park tube)
Join the campaign to stop the Blair bandwagon!

Labour Left Briefing

Birmingham Launch

7-30pm, Wednesday 18th October
Birmingham Trade Union Club, Pershore Road
Speakers include John Holmes, Secretary CWU Birmingham internal branch (in a personal capacity)

What's in a name?

In response to a groundswell of protest from our readers, the editorial board has swallowed its pride and agreed to name our new magazine *Labour Left Briefing*.

This action is living proof of our openness, pluralism, accountability and general indecisiveness.

Inside this month's *Labour Left Briefing* ...

News and views: Greenpeace and Mike Hindley MEP on nuclear tests, Lord Sterling's Motability scam, triumph for the Lawrence family, 'Travis' Straw, Euro-road rage.....**4-7**

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Front cover and cartoons by Dros.

Communication Workers Union

Thames Central

The 1995 conference of the Communication Workers Union voted for the repeal of all Tory anti-union laws and a positive framework of workers' rights.
Support free trade unions!



Here to stay, here to fight

WELCOME TO THE first issue of *Labour Left Briefing*. Undoubtedly, if Tony Blair had his way, it would also be the last. Luckily for us, the leader does not speak for the whole of the movement. We are confident that there are plenty of punters out there who share our belief that Labour needs open debate as never before.

Party members of all political hues are increasingly uneasy about Blair's course, and with good reason. In recent months we have had the audience with Murdoch and the homage to Thatcher, Littleborough and Saddleworth, Walsall and the Gould memorandum, the flip-flop on grant maintained schools and the "therapy" crack, the double-talk on rail privatisation and the minimum wage, not to mention Straw's attack on the poor and the ill. As Party activists know, Labour's malaise goes much deeper than a mere outbreak of "summer madness".

Increasingly, the Leader appears to believe that he and his office are a substitute for the Party and the movement as a whole. It is just not good enough to respond to every criticism with derogatory remarks about the motives or sanity of the critics in question. Is this how Blair intends to deal with dissent when he becomes Prime Minister? We had more than enough of this sort of high handedness from Margaret Thatcher.

Without its roots in a broad social movement, and in particular its organisational link to the trades unions, Labour will become no more than a Parliamentary caucus. It will also have no counterweight to the extra-Parliamentary powers wielded by the Tories through their friends in the media and the City.

To be effective, the policy making process must embrace the Party as a whole. Conference, as the annual assembly representing all sections of the Party, must recover its role as Labour's sovereign decision-making body. In recent years conference has been increasingly reduced to a showcase for non-committal Shadow Cabinet waffle. If Labour is to be equipped to deal with the challenges that will face it in government, that trend must be reversed.

Increasingly, the fundamental division in the Labour Party is between those who want the Party to remain part of a broad social movement - linked to the unions, committed to ending poverty, moving towards economic equality and improving public services - and the clique attached to Blair (with more members in the media than in the unions) whose neo-Thatcherite, authoritarian trajectory is becoming ever more apparent.

There is nothing in the least "modern" about entrenching the Tories' market mania and the inequalities that accompany it. The real challenge for Labour is to face up to the scale of the disaster wrought by the 'free market', at home and abroad, and to embrace and argue for the policies necessary to climb out of the mire.

Labour must show that it is serious about tackling the disastrous legacy of Thatcher and Major. We must prove that we are not just about soundbites and slick suits. We have to demonstrate the honesty and intelligence to offer concrete proposals for the benefit of the majority. And we must never walk in fear of the rich, tiny minority who have fattened off mass unemployment, low pay and social insecurity.

We have launched *Labour Left Briefing*, with a new and expanded Editorial Board, to help socialists meet the challenges of the future. If the Labour left is to deal with both the dilemmas and the opportunities facing it, we will need greater unity, flexibility and openness than we have demonstrated in the past. *Labour Left Briefing* will be a magazine by and for the Labour and trade union left in the broadest sense.

We will provide activists with the news and analysis they need to fight their daily battles. We will encourage the broadest possible debate on the left - and within the labour movement as a whole. Our pages will be open to all socialists - and we will guarantee a right of reply. Our contributors will be free to argue their case - no matter whom they offend.

In recent weeks Walworth Road has denounced our predecessor, *Labour Briefing*, as "disloyal" and "Trotskyist" and implied that we have no place in the Labour Party. Let's be clear. We are activists in the Labour Party and trades unions. We are proud of our tradition of pluralism and we intend to expand and deepen it in coming issues. We will not be silenced. ❑

Everything you want to know about the new *Labour Left Briefing*

Labour Left Briefing is an independent voice and forum for socialist ideas in the Labour Party and trade unions. It is managed by an editorial board elected at its annual general meeting, open to all supporters.

We are happy to offer a right of reply to all members of the labour movement and we welcome criticisms and contributions. If you wish to submit copy for the next edition please send it on a computer disk before the deadline (16th October). You can also E-mail items to us on Email LeeLloyd@GN.APC.ORG. All the articles in *LLB* reflect solely the opinions of the authors, writing in a personal capacity, unless otherwise stated.

To survive and thrive we need the support of our readers. Why not take copies of *LLB* to sell at your Labour Party, trade union or campaign meetings?

Co-chairs: Dorothy Macedo and Sue Lukes; editorial workers: Madeleine Kingston, Alistair Ward;
political correspondent: Mike Marqusee; artist: Gary Drostle.
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Chirac feels backlash



Mike Hindley

MEP

WHEN JACQUES Chirac presented himself to the French electorate earlier in the year, he got 18% of votes cast on the first ballot, just 3% ahead of Jean-Marie Le Pen. Hardly a ringing endorsement for a man who under France's centralised state and Gaullist constitution has unparalleled power in the west.

Chirac's only aim is to go down in history. The France he now so effectively controls is struggling more than any other European power to define a new role in post Cold War Europe, uncertain how to handle a united Germany. The EU itself has been described as little more than an apparatus for the French to control the Germans.

Though France has successfully pursued its national interest in the guise of Europe, it has less and less clout in the New World Order. What France does have is The Bomb. And The Bomb, like Britain's, ensures France does not go naked to the negotiating table - or to the Security Council of the UN for that matter either.

The anti-nuclear lobby has been reawakened; CND has had a rush of new members.

Even the cynical Chirac must be alarmed by the protests against France's testing in the Pacific. France's reactionary claim to be a 'Pacific Power' is again being seriously disputed by the peoples of Polynesia themselves. The anti-nuclear lobby has been reawakened; CND has had a rush of new members.

The Socialist Group, prodded by leader Pauline Green, worked its own staff hard over summer producing anti-nuclear test appeals which have been distributed through local Labour Parties.

After returning from my first week back in the cockpit of European Socialism in the new multi-million pound glass and steel Parliament building in Brussels, I was handing out these leaflets and collecting signatures against further tests in my local market place. The response was instant and encouraging. Note for future - must do more of this! ❑

The Motagate scandal

Our MotaMole reports on missing documents in the Motability scam.

AS PREDICTED, the Motability saga (reported in July's *Labour Briefing*) has run and run.

Motability Finance Ltd supplies finance to Motability, the charity that provides adapted vehicles for people with disabilities. The secrecy surrounding the profits made by MFL and its business associates has attracted criticism from disability campaigners.

On 27th July, Alan Simpson MP, speaking in the Commons, declared: "We must not allow a sleazy bunch of bankers and benefactors to make a fast buck through a no-risk, monopolistic scam, perpetrated on the back of the public and the disabled ..."

Simpson read extracts from the Bircham Report, a damaging study examining the duties of the Governors and Trustees of Motability. He deposited both the Report and a document prepared by top accountants KPMG in the Commons library.

According to the Report, under MFL the return on capital made on vehicles supplied to Motability's customers (and paid for by the DSS) was twice that made by commercial leasing companies. It also noted possible conflicts of interest in the case of Gerry Archer, Head of Audit at KPMG and Brian Carte, then chair of MFL. Lord Sterling's name was also mentioned and it has come as no surprise to well-informed people that both the Bircham Report and the KPMG study were removed from the Commons library following instructions from Lord Sterling.

Figures have been produced showing that some £70 million has been stashed away in a trust and a contingency fund. That's £70 million of disabled people's money. At the same time, Motability has no money to assist with grants!

Does Motability have control over MFL or is it the other way around? MotaMole has learned that the National Audit Office is due to report to Motability around November. The Charities Commissioners have been sent more than one copy of the Bircham Report and are looking into it. Donald Dewar has started to show some interest. As are the Office of Fair Trading, HM Customs and Excise, the Monopolies Commission and the Department of Transport. Even Eddie George, Governor of the Bank of England, was rumoured to be in on a conversation about MFL's £1.5 billion credit facility.

When Parliament returns, Alan Simpson, Lord Carter and Alex Carlile will carry on digging. Will the issue go to the Public Accounts Committee? Why don't the banks publish the secret figures and prove that they are the benefactors they claim to be? Could the fact that Lord Sterling is a major donor to the Conservative party have something to do with all this?

Watch this space. ❑

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Testing time for non-proliferation

Pete Roche
Greenpeace Political Unit

FRANCE AGREED as recently as May at the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Conference in New York to exercise "the utmost restraint" prior to signing a comprehensive test ban treaty (CTBT). So it is hardly surprising that President Chirac's announcement in June of a series of eight underground nuclear tests between September 1995 and May 1996 annoyed non-nuclear countries, particularly those in the South Pacific.

France argues it stopped testing "a little too early" and needs to calibrate equipment to allow computer simulations to check the reliability of French nuclear weapons before signing the CTBT in late 1996.

But the tests are also needed to develop new warheads for France's submarine launched ballistic missile to be used on the Triophante class of submarine. In 2005 France also plans to introduce a new air-launched cruise missile (Air-Sol Longue Porte) which will require a new warhead.

Strong protests also followed China's 42nd test, carried out a mere three days after the end of the NPT Conference. Reportedly China plans five more tests before the CTBT is concluded, and testing may continue after 1996. France has only said it would stop testing once the treaty "has entered into force".

At the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in June, France and China came in for some severe criticism, including a blistering attack from Switzerland, which referred to the "moral incompatibility" between the decision to resume testing and the commitments undertaken in New York. Expressions of regret and condemnation, following the French announcement, have come from 158 governments all over the globe, with the notable exception of the United Kingdom.

Claims by Labour's Defence spokesperson, David Clark, that Britain is secretly collaborating with the French nuclear testing programme and similar allegations from Washington that Aldermaston is already studying data from the first test at Mururoa go a long way to explaining why John Major has refused to support our Commonwealth colleagues by condemning the French. Opinion polls commissioned by Greenpeace show that only 2% of UK voters support French nuclear testing, with a massive 85% opposed.

Mexico and several other non-aligned countries raised the issue of the transfer of equipment and exchange of information between the US and UK, and complained about US and UK nuclear weapons based in Europe. Nigeria expressed concern about "selective compliance with the Treaty which has enabled non-parties to acquire nuclear weapon capability".

Douglas Hurd made the seemingly constructive promise that the UK would cease production of fissile materials for weapons. Given that the UK has already said it would recycle the plutonium coming out of dismantled WE177 free fall bombs, this announcement will place no new constraints on our weapons production. Hurd ignored appeals from Germany, Australia, Sweden, Switzerland, Finland and Canada for an end to this recycling.

The New York conference agreed to extend indefinitely the NPT, much to the disgust of many non-aligned countries. Malaysia told the conference: "Indefinite extension is a carte blanche for the nuclear weapon states and does not serve as an incentive to nuclear disarmament ... we are abandoning an historic moment to free ourselves from nuclear blackmail and to safeguard future generations."

The NPT Conference failed to result in the dismantling of a single nuclear weapon or stop the production of a single gramme of plutonium; it effectively endorsed nuclear power and civil plutonium reprocessing in spite of the proliferation risks they pose. As diplomats talked, more than one tonne of plutonium was produced, a new nuclear submarine went on patrol in Britain, the US moved closer to new tritium facilities to maintain its arsenal at START II levels until the year 2050, Israel, Pakistan and India remained outside the Treaty, and a controversial shipment of highly radioactive waste - the first of dozens of plutonium and radwaste shipments over the next decade - completed its journey from France to Japan. ❑

News of the Rainbow Warrior and Greenpeace's French Testing Campaign can be found on the World Wide Web on *http//:www.greenpeace.org*.



Photo: Greenpeace/Dorreboom

Lawrence family fights for justice

The parents of Stephen Lawrence, the black teenager murdered by racists in the streets of South London in April 1993, have succeeded where the Crown Prosecution Service refused to tread.

THANKS to the private prosecution mounted by Doreen and Neville Lawrence, two men have now been committed to face trial for Stephen's murder. As we go to press, a third man is expected to be committed. The Lawrences now intend to pursue the case, which should come to trial in April, without the CPS. They are in urgent need of financial assistance.

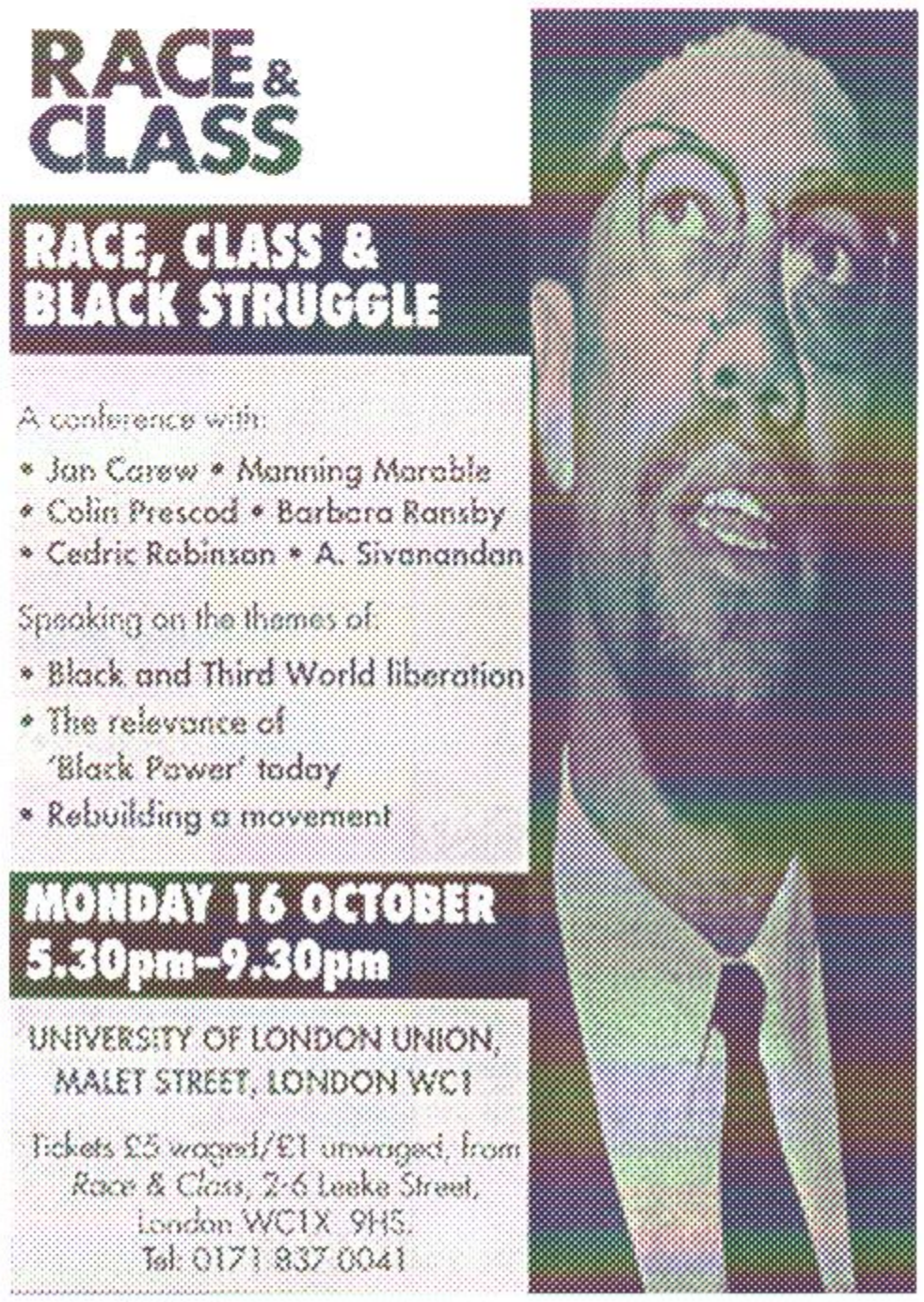
Speaking to *Labour Left Briefing*, Suresh Grover, a member of the Lawrence Family Campaign, and formerly a central figure in the Bradford 12 and Blair Peach campaigns, outlined the significance of the case.

"The CPS record on racial violence is poor. Even where it has been shown that perpetrators are linked to the BNP, the CPS has been reluctant to imply a racial motive. After a Hounslow public meeting last year a white racist was charged with affray. On the first day of the trial the CPS conceded that he was not a BNP member and he was subsequently acquitted. Three months later he stood as a BNP candidate in the local elections.

"The clear message to people suffering racial harassment and to anti-racists is that you cannot rely solely on the legal authorities. The Lawrences' heroic struggle shows that by challenging and embarrassing the system you can move closer to justice.

"We conducted our prosecution in a principled and dignified manner. No one is calling for vengeance or capital punishment or 'law and order'. If we had done that we would have lost sight of the causes of this crime. One significant effect of the court decision is that we will finally be able to explain why we believe the motive of this killing was racial. We have evidence that perpetrators were extreme racists and that they had engaged in racist attacks in the past.

"So far we have raised £45,000 towards our £100,000 target. We have had strong financial support from black communities and some trade unions have been very helpful but the response from the Labour Party has been extremely disappointing. MPs and councillors seem to want to run away from this issue." ❑



The Lawrences speak

"It has been two years since the CPS dropped charges against two men for the murder of our son Stephen without even caring to consult or advise us of their decision. It was an act as hurtful and painful in its effect as the news that Stephen had been killed.

No family should ever have to experience the last two years of our lives. This is the worst kind of fame. We have been brought into the public spotlight not by our own acts but by the failure of others who were under a public duty to act. The decision of the court today stands as the first clear indictment of that failure.

We have come this far without the CPS and it is our wish to continue to the end without their involvement. Through this prosecution we have had a role and a voice. We are not about to lose that freedom to a body that was deaf to our existence, our needs and our concerns."

● Doreen and Neville Lawrence

TUC backing

An emergency resolution pledging support to the Stephen Lawrence Family Campaign and instructing trade unions to assist in meeting the costs of the Lawrence family's private prosecution was passed unanimously at the TUC in Brighton.

The resolution was proposed by John Sheldon, General Secretary, NUCPS, and seconded by Joanne Anderson, TGWU.

Face up to racism

"The barbaric outrages that occur on the streets of this country are an extension of state policy. There is no question that the young white men responsible for the murder of Stephen Lawrence are psychologically damaged and that the effects of institutionalised racism are at least material to the damage. Until the white population face up to this then the savagery that has devastated so many black families will not only continue - it will increase. It will increase in tandem with the protracted degeneration of the British people as a whole."

● James Kelman, novelist

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Classless house of Straw

Roger Piper writes: Shadow Home Secretary Jack "Make My Day, Punk" Straw claims to be rather surprised and just a tad miffed at the negative response to his attack on those threats to civilisation as we know it: beggars (sorry, "aggressive" beggars - the polite ones are presumably OK) and "squeegee merchants".

He explains to readers of *Tribune* that his views on such matters are entirely consistent with 'socialism' and then goes on to give his definition of that word:

"We are socialist because we want a much fairer society, with greater opportunities for all, in which we fight greed, not celebrate it. We also believe that individuals can only achieve their best as part of communities. The major difference between us and the Tories is our commitment to community and our rejection of the 'me first' society."



Now over the years I have developed an infallible method for bullshit detection when faced with statements like this: imagine saying the precise opposite ("We are socialist because we want a much less fair society with fewer opportunities..."). The more improbable and outrageous it sounds, the bigger the bullshit quotient of the original statement.

But Comrade Straw's definition of socialism (which, come to think of it, sounds remarkably like the new Clause IV, as far as I can remember it) is not merely bullshit. It is part of a systematic attempt by Blair and his cronies to redefine socialism. Just as Communist Party apparatchiks used to say "What Stalin says is the left", now what Blair says (or in the case of education, does) is 'socialism'.❑

Warning: Big Idea coming your way

Mike Hindley
MEP

THE BURGEONING European Union budget for Trans-European Networks (TENs) means a motorway coming to a beauty spot near you soon.

The TENs is an interesting lesson in the gestation period of a Big Idea. In 1984, the EU's most successful and modestly discreet big business pressure group, the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) published a paper entitled "Missing Links". The thesis was that the European economy would get a massive boost if the missing transport links (cross Channel, trans Alpine, etc.) could be spanned. Goods (but not people, especially black and Asian Europeans) could then shuttle round the EU making money for everyone, and as Thatcher said and Blair believes, all profit filters down. If big business makes money, there will be no beggars on the streets for Jack Straw to lock up.

We were assured that little government support would be needed and the private sector's resources would suffice. The value of that assurance is clear after the collapse of Eurotunnel.

The ERT's links with the EU Commission are cosy. The ERT was set up by former Industry Commissioner Etienne Davignon. And after the success of "1992" (also an ERT Big Idea) and the slow-down in Single Currency (yes, another ERT Big Idea), the Commission decided to adopt the 1984 ERT paper and launch its TENs programme.

You know that an idea's time has come when the New Labour Party picks it up. TENs has been enthusiastically endorsed by Transport Commissioner Neil Kinnock, late of the Sheffield Rally 1992 Tour.

In the Socialist Group meeting in Brussels dissident voices complained that the TENs programme was encroaching onto other areas of the budget, notably and worryingly the social agenda. One Labour MEP complained about cuts in the poverty programme. Not to worry, enthused another Labour MEP, vintage 1994, we all know that the only sure way to get the economy going and provide real jobs for the poor is to give lots of public money to the TENs. Truly, another ERT Big Idea has arrived. ❑

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We will not be silenced!

AS WE GO to press, the NEC Disputes Committee is considering the fate of Liz Davies, the left-wing Islington councillor selected to fight the marginal seat of Leeds North East.

The official report to the Disputes Committee, prepared by Peter Coleman, Labour's Director of Development and Organisation, far exceeds the mandate given by July's NEC and amounts to what one legal expert called "an exercise in character assassination".

New allegations have been added (but never put to Davies) notably that Davies "incited violence" at an Education Committee meeting last November and that she is a "Trotskyist entryist" and therefore "disloyal" to Labour.

The report is a sloppy job, riddled with factual errors and unsupported assertions. The sole evidence advanced for Davies being a Trotskyist entryist is her association with *Labour Briefing*. The allegations about "violence" come from three right wingers in Islington, Cllr Tal Michael, Cllr Phil Kelly and former councillor James Purnell. Michael works for his father, the Labour MP Alun Michael, in the House of Commons; Purnell has just moved from Blair's office to a highly paid job doing nothing in particular for the BBC. Kelly, a former Tribune editor, now works as a press officer for Union Railways, the bit of BR that is building the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. None have made the allegations previously, though given ample opportunity to do so by both the Labour Party and the press. Davies is taking legal action against all three.

Davies has submitted eyewitness accounts of the events in question from five independent witnesses as well as coverage from the Islington Gazette. All exonerate her of the charge - and all make clear that they regard the motives of the three complainants as "mischievous". One councillor, a right winger who voted for Blair and the new Clause IV, has written in support of Davies, stating: "I am writing because I am disgusted with the way that Liz is being treated and the lies that are being spread about her by jealous cowards."

Leeds North East CLP officers have written to the Disputes Committee complaining about Coleman's report: "It is a totally biased tissue of irrelevancies, smears, falsehoods, half truths and omissions ... it suggests a deliberate and contrived attempt by some senior elements in the Party to prevent the endorsement of our properly selected candidate." ❑

On behalf of the *Briefing* Editorial Board, co-chairs Sue Lukes and Dorothy Macedo responded to the ludicrous allegations made against the magazine in Peter Coleman's report. The following is a much abridged version of their reply.

THE REPORT TO the NEC Disputes Committee condemns *Labour Briefing* for "attacking the Labour leader" and "criticising Labour policies". We plead guilty to these charges. But if these are to be the charges against us, then we must be joined in the dock by Tribune, the New Statesman, the Guardian, and a large number of trade union journals.

Of course, we have made sharp criticisms of the Labour leadership over the years and we have published articles which have offended some people high up in the Labour Party and the trade unions. In a democratic movement, that is our prerogative.

Some Party members may not approve of what Mr Coleman calls the "tone" of some articles in *Labour Briefing*; that is their prerogative. We think many more members will not approve of the "tone" of the indictment of Liz Davies.

Mr Coleman claims that "there is a question mark over the loyalty of *Labour Briefing*". He seems to confuse loyalty to the Labour leader with loyalty to the Labour Party. We are not aware of any provision in the Party rulebook that requires members to refrain from criticism of the leader.

Labour Briefing is not and has never been a "Trotskyist" magazine. Over the years, members of the *Labour Briefing* Editorial Board have included some who would describe themselves as Trotskyists but many others who hold no brief for Trotskyism whatsoever. There has never been any ideological test for EB members or contributors.

Our watchword is pluralism - both within the pages of the magazine and the Labour Party. It is a pity that Liz Davies' persecutors do not share the same commitment.

Mr Coleman's use of the word "Trotskyist", which he does not define, does nothing to enhance or clarify current debates about Labour Party policy or structure. As with "Communist" in the past, this word is now frequently applied to left-wing dissidents of all types in an attempt to label them without responding to the substance of their criticisms. It is a classic example of the McCarthyite tactic of declaring dissent "beyond the pale" by associating it with a popular bogey-figure.

To support his claim that the magazine is "Trotskyist" Mr Coleman cites an advert placed by *Labour Briefing* in *Socialist Organiser* in 1985. We have also placed adverts in *Tribune*, the *New Statesman*, the *Guardian* and (several times) *Labour Party News*. The *Morning Star* and *Tribune* have advertised in *Briefing*. Does that make them "Trotskyist" too? That is the twisted logic of guilt by association - and it is the only logic Mr Coleman's treatment of Briefing displays.

Any attempt to penalise Liz Davies or any one else because of an association with *Labour Briefing* in the past or with *Labour Left Briefing* in the future would be an attack on free speech and a free press in the Labour Party. We will vigorously contest any moves to deny Party members the right to express their opinions in the pages of *Labour Left Briefing*.

Trotlist?

Peter Coleman claims that Labour Briefing has been "Trotskyist" since 1979. Since 1979 the following have contributed articles or interviews:

Diane Abbott, Richard Balfe, Tony Banks, Steve Bassam, Tony Benn, Ronan Bennett, Roger Berry, David Blunkett, Steve Bundred, Barbara Castle, Alan Clinton, Ken Coates, Harry Cohen, Mike Connarty, Jeremy Corbyn, Bryn Davies, Bill Etherington, Neil Fletcher, Bernie Grant, Peter Hain, Iltyd Harrington, Toby Harris, Peter Heathfield, Mike Hindley, Margaret Hodge, Arthur Latham, Alf Lomas, Ken Livingstone, Alice Mahon, Geoff Martin, Alex McFadden, Jonathan Michie, Seumas Milne, Jim Mortimer, Stan Newens, John Pilger, Dawn Primarolo, Andrew Puddephatt, Arthur Scargill, Mark Seddon, Christine Shawcroft, Dennis Skinner, Alan Simpson, Chris Smith, Llew Smith, Phil Turner, Keith Vaz, Michael Ward.

STOP PRESS: London Region Women's Conference voted to call on the NEC to endorse Liz Davies

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Malaise at Labour's heart

Mark Seddon, editor of *Tribune*, Labour's independent weekly, argues for unity to resist the modernisers.

IT WOULD seem that it is now an offence, as far as the Labour Party is concerned, to write for *Briefing*.

This is just one of the ludicrous charges brought against Liz Davies, the Labour candidate selected to fight marginal Leeds North East. If so, I am happy to offend, because I can now claim membership of an impressive array of previous offenders, including Margaret Hodge MP. In my defence I will argue that I didn't agree with much of what Margaret Hodge wrote then in the same way that I don't now. The irony is that Ms Hodge, having been dipped in pink rose water and miraculously transformed from hard leftie to sweet smelling moderniser, did not have to face a kangaroo court when she was seeking selection. The disgrace is that Margaret Hodge supplied an NEC panel with material aimed to discredit a former fellow Islington councillor.

The Davies case goes to the heart of the malaise currently afflicting the Labour Party.

That there has been increasing centralisation and intolerance for almost a decade is widely known. But what many both inside and outside the Party are only now beginning to appreciate is how deep this process has gone. The Militant Tendency has been replaced by the Modernising Tendency: you either are part of the "Project" or if you demur, you are written off as "Old" Labour. This new political apartheid is apparent in the rubbishing of long standing Labour Party member, Liz Davies, in comparison to the preferment for Tony Blair's part time economics adviser, Derek Scott, whose intervention in Swindon as the SDP candidate deprived Labour of that seat in 1983 and 1987. Miraculously, Mr Scott has recently learned that he has received five trade union nominations for the marginal constituency of Worcester. So it seems New Labour is not above using some of the arm-twisting tactics of Old Labour.

No serious professional organisation would be allowed to get away with this. Nor would any serious professional organisation risk legal action by re-interpreting its own rules. Yet this is precisely what has happened over Clause IV. Whether you agree that it was right for the NUM to pursue its case in the courts (and *Tribune* doesn't) the truth is that the NUM was right in its interpretation of Labour's constitution and senior Labour officials, whose duty it is to uphold that constitution, were plain wrong.

And now we have the leaked strategy document, The Unfinished Revolution, penned by a decidedly amateurish former advertising executive. It argues that modernisation must go on, and with it yet more centralisation and control. The National Executive Committee and the Shadow Cabinet seem to have been removed entirely from the picture. Labour's Deputy Leader John Prescott had to ask to see the document after reading about it in the papers. What on earth is going on?

What we are now seeing is a great democratic movement with all its glories and all its faults being bent to the will of a handful of individuals who believe above all that they know best. Fear - of the media, of dissent and radicalism, above all of losing - risks turning Labour into a presidential party stuffed with clones. Philip Gould truthfully remarked in his document that the new party is without a philosophy. Bizarrely, it begins to look like the old Communist Party without the politics.

Yet the real world is seething. People are angry. As yet the anger is unfocused, but late twentieth century capitalism carries with it few hopes for the vast majority. The greatest opportunity for social and economic change since 1945 is hanging like a ripe plum to be picked by Labour, the only party that still has the potential to channel unfocused anger into socialist change. At the moment we are a long way from even beginning that task.

All those who believe in having a party of labour have an immediate duty to preserve the federal nature of our movement. In the short term that means ensuring that local Party democracy is preserved from the deleterious attentions of those who want Labour to be a top-down organisation. It also means that the collective voice of the trade unions in the decision making processes is kept. There is no reason why an efficient party cannot also be a democratic and radical party.

In the longer term the left of the Party has to think through and unite around its own policies for the redistribution of power and wealth. These have to be in place as an alternative, if, as seems possible, the sheer weight of events knocks a politically weak Labour Government off course.

This requires a new "think tank" of the left that can act as a counter-weight to the free market leanings of the Fabians and the Institute of Public Policy Research. The money will have to come from those trade unions which are serious about maintaining some influence on Labour.

The left as a whole must become better organised and more adept at getting its views across to a wider audience. In the final analysis, if democratic socialists within the Labour Party fail to engage, enthuse and recruit a new generation of activists, the political margin beckons. ❑



The paper they grin and Blair

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LLB page 9

Last chance for unions

Vladimir Derer, secretary of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, spoke to *Labour Left Briefing* about the future of Party Conference.

***LLB*: Many delegates will be attending Party Conference for the first time. What can you tell them about how Conference has changed over the years?**

VD: The structure is much more stage-managed. The agenda is organised in five main groups, which are then divided in sub-groups. Individual resolutions which do not fit into any of these are left out.

In the past, many resolutions were referred back to the National Executive Committee (NEC) because there was no time to discuss them but it is now done in a politically biased why. Subjects which are inconvenient are kept off the agenda.

A recent example is the amendment from Finchley and Golders Green which questions the new powers given to the General Secretary and the NEC. This was ruled out of order.

***LLB*: Some people say that Conference has to be stage-managed to present a good image to the media.**

VD: Conferences are not for the benefit of the media. Conferences are supposed to determine policy.

There are still controversial items on the agenda, like education and the minimum wage. On the balance of voting, the NEC is proposing to transfer 20% of the Conference vote from the unions to the Constituency Labour Parties (CLPs). There is also a composite which proposes to increase the CLPs' share only proportionately to the increase in CLP membership. That would transfer about 4.5% of the Conference vote to the CLPs, if my arithmetic is right.

The reason why the big transfer is being pushed is that at the moment the leadership finds it opportune to rely on the CLP vote. It is a gamble for them up to a point but if we can go by the Special Conference in April and the last Annual Conference, the constituencies are safer for the leadership than the trade union vote. It used to be the other way.

The leadership is going to try to whittle down the union influence. The Phillip Gould memo published by the *Guardian* makes it clear that they want to eliminate the trade union vote altogether.

***LLB*: How should the left respond?**

VD: The left no longer carries a lot of weight. If the unions continue to concede to the demands of the parliamentary leadership, the left can do little on its own. Clearly, it should back those unions which are unwilling to accept diktats from the leadership.

Obviously a conflict between the unions and the parliamentary leadership is in the offing and will become acute if a Labour Government is elected. Then, hopefully, the conflict will also find expression in the constituencies.

However, this Conference may be make-or-break for union influence. Once the unions are reduced to 50% and so long as the CLPs can be relied on to abide by the leadership's wishes, the leadership can do anything it likes. If the unions miss this opportunity, it may be difficult for them to regain the lost ground.

The reason for all these setbacks is not some superhuman powers which the leadership commands. In fact the present Shadow Cabinet is an assembly of mediocrities. We are paying the price now for the opportunities the left missed in the 1980s.❑

Details on items ruled off Conference agenda and on proposed changes in Conference voting are included in the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy's conference newsletter. To join CLPD, send £15 (£5 unwaged or low-waged) to CLPD, 10 Park Drive, London NW11 7SH.

Labour: Asians need not apply?

Graeme Lampitt reports on the racist scandal brewing in Labour's backyard: "If this was being done in the Conservative Party, we would be denouncing them and urging people to take the problem to court," said Ken Livingstone, chair of the new Campaign Against Labour Party Suspensions.

In Manchester almost 100 Labour Party members were prevented from attending the final selection meeting for the Gorton constituency (where Gerald Kaufmann is the sitting MP). A BBC television documentary subsequently highlighted the grievances of local Asian people and questioned whether Kaufmann would have been endorsed had all members been allowed to participate.

Following this, all Party members who were interviewed for the programme, including parliamentary hopeful Ahmad Shahzad, were suspended. Gorton's Black Socialist Society was also suspended, en masse, after sending a video copy of the BBC programme to Tony Blair.

Birmingham has 14 MPs, all of whom are white. In February, four constituencies (Sparkbrook, Small Heath, Ladywood and Perry Barr, all with sitting Labour MPs) were suspended after allegations of abuse of housing improvement grants. Three independent inquiries (by the District Auditor, City Auditor and the Ombudsman) found no wrong-doing. A Labour Party investigation has subsequently uncovered 'membership abuse' - 400 members out of 4000 are not on the electoral roll.

Kevin Scally, Sparkbrook constituency Chair, observed: "The common thread is racism. No one in Birmingham supports these suspensions except the MPs who fear deselection to Asian candidates."

In Bradford, two predominantly Asian wards have been suspended (a total of about 1,000 members). As in Manchester, potential Asian recruits are issued refusal letters from Walworth Road, asking them to explain "why you should be accepted into the Labour Party".

In Nottingham, Hassan Ahmed, a founder member of the Black Section, has been expelled from the Party after three years' suspension. A former City Councillor, Ahmed was accused of encouraging members to break Party rules at a branch meeting. The complaint was made by the wife of sitting Nottingham MP John Heppel; but 26 out of 28 branch members, including the minute taker, backed Ahmed.

Andleeb Sajjab, who was asked to explain why she wanted to join the Party and whose mother's application was also rejected, commented, "Getting into the Labour Party has proved harder than finding a job for me. They have given me no reason for turning me or my mum down, or our neighbours, but we are all Asian. If the Labour Party only wants whites, then say it and stop wasting our time." ❑

Contact the Campaign Against Labour Party Suspensions, PO Box 9220, London NW10 1WA, or Ahmad Shahzad (Secretary) on 0181 452 8380.

LLB page 10

New terrain for the Labour left

Labour Left Briefing interviews Peter Hain, Labour MP for Neath, whose new book challenges Labour to face up to the realities of global capitalism.

IN *AYES to the Left: a Future for Socialism,* Peter Hain sets out a 'libertarian socialist' programme for Labour - a programme which he believes could win popular support and enable the next Labour Government to initiate a radical social transformation.

"I wrote the book because the left has not engaged seriously with the need for policy and has allowed the modernisers to set the agenda," Hain explains. "Too often we've merely reacted to what others propose. There have been momentous changes over the last ten years and this is an attempt to define where socialists ought to stand in the modern era.

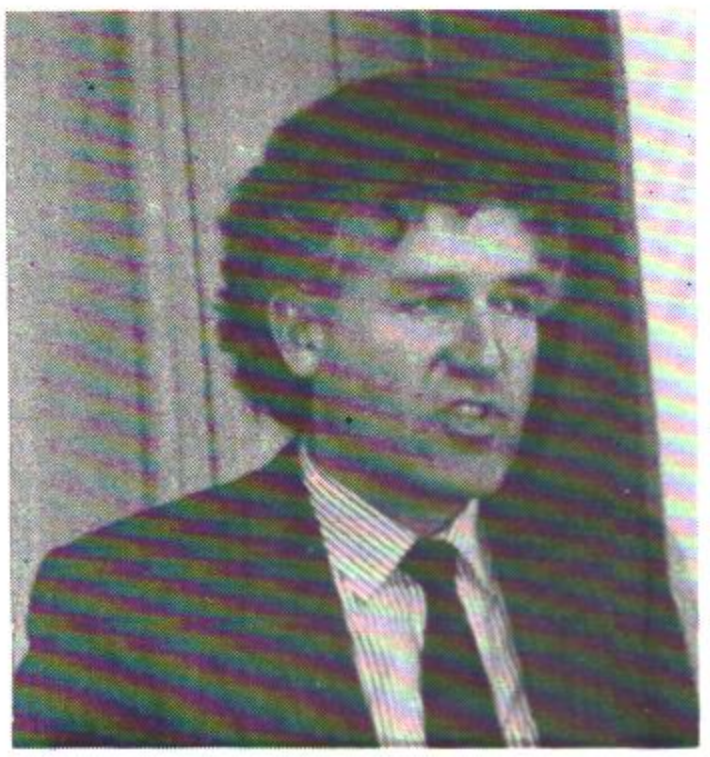
"The core of my argument is that socialists lost support and the left went into crisis not because we were too radical but because of a failure to break with statist socialism. My book is partly an attempt to retrieve a neglected tradition of libertarian socialism and apply it in a modern context.

"It also has a more immediate message: Labour cannot win by shedding its clothes and trimming to the right's agenda. The fierce anti-Toryism gripping the country may get us into office but the victory could be short-lived. We need power for a generation if we are to institute the kind of changes we need.

"I'm not making an argument for socialist purity. A radical alternative is necessary because our society is in a deep mess. What we have to deal with is not a temporary crisis but a remorseless, long term decline that is producing an ugly society."

The core argument of Hain's book is a moral critique of contemporary capitalism. To many in the labour movement it will seem simple common sense. But can such voices be heard in today's Labour Party?

"I hope the book will be seen as a serious contribution to policy making. If people reject the arguments, they should say why. I don't see how the analysis of the global



Peter Hain Photo: Bryn Griffiths

economy in the book can be challenged. It is a matter of fact that global capitalism is now generating greater poverty and inequalities than ever before. Labour has to face up to that reality.

"We also have to face up to the need to control finance. 80 per cent of all the City's capital is controlled by pension funds and insurance companies. At the moment, the law requires them to invest only where they can secure the 'best return'. That has to be changed and other requirements have to be placed on them. The Government has got to say to financial institutions that a proper share of resources must go into new public investment."

Hain's book also sets out the case for an activist Labour Party.

"The influx of new members is exciting and the left should welcome it. But there is as yet no sign that the new members are becoming active. Centralising policy-making may have its advantages. It's more professional, it's easier to avoid hostages to fortune. But if members don't feel they own the policies, they can't argue for them effectively.

"To get a majority for socialist ideas in this society you need to have people arguing the case in workplaces and among friends, winning the battle of ideas in civil society. The spin doctors always underestimate that battle and overestimate the importance of the media. There is a deep popular cynicism out there and the Labour leadership underestimates the degree to which it now spreads to them."

Hain is aware that many on the left will view his model of 'direct democracy' (all-membership policy-making meetings) with suspicion, but is adamant that the left must have its own programme for Party reform.

"The objective of the modernisers is to create an SDP-type policy making structure. In recent years, we on the left have just reacted to proposals from the leadership and not put forward our own agenda. The GCs are now being bypassed. That is the reality. OMOV is here to stay and no one is going to reverse it. We have to confront the movement towards centralisation with our own democratic claims. My proposal would engage the whole Constituency Labour Party in debate and allow people to learn from each other. The blunt choice is that we look to the future or we will find the modernisers' agenda imposed on us."

Is there a future for the left in the Labour Party? "The extent of our influence depends on whether we get our act together. The left has been all over the place for years. The divisions between the Socialist Campaign Group and those of us who have left the Tribune Group are historic and personal, not real. We all have hard lessons to learn and we must all recognise that compromises have to be made." ❑

"There is an argument that the new financial instruments and the millions of financial and currency transactions which streak across the world each day have become a law unto themselves, defying regulation. But that is both illogical and defeatist. If modern information technology can facilitate such a system, then it can also monitor and police it. The real obstacle to regulation is not technological. It is political.

Without such regulation, without taming the private power of global capital and socialising it to the greatest extent possible, without managed trade which enhances employment and protects the environment, without a fairer aid and trade deal for the South which promotes self-sufficiency rather than dependence, there is no possibility of security and prosperity across the world. Not just command economics but also international capitalism has failed. A socialist alternative beckons."

- from *Ayes to the Left: A Future for Socialism* by Peter Hain, published by Lawrence and Wishart, paperback, £10.95.

LLB page 11

New Labour, old dogma

Ian Murch, NUT Executive member, accuses New Labour of tailing the Tories on education.

MANY ACTIVE Labour Party members are teachers, lecturers or other workers in education. One of the things that motivates them to be active is undoubtedly the desperate state that the education system has been reduced to by the Tories.

They have had to cope with a deliberate assault not only on the level of resources available to pupils receiving state education, but also a range of measures designed to bring market forces into the system. The effect of marketisation has been what any socialist would expect. Measures and mechanisms for redressing disadvantage have been swept away, while the children of parents who know their way round the system and enjoy various advantages have been rewarded with more resources and better provision. Opting out, formula funding, City Technology Colleges, open enrolment, SATs and league tables - all are mechanisms designed to redistribute the reduced cake available for state education to those families whose votes the Tories depend on to retain power.

Up to a couple of years ago, many of us clung to a belief that a Labour Government would reverse this strategy of increasing inequality, as well as putting more investment into everyone's future. Unfortunately, most people involved in education now believe that Labour is approaching the service in the same cynical way as the Tories - seeing not the needs of society as a whole but the interests of a targeted group of voters.

Even though we would prefer a firmer commitment on reducing cuts, we are used now to the message that there can be no guarantee of extra resources. What has taken us all aback, is Labour's abandonment of its opposition to major aspects of the inequitable structure for education created by the Tories and its decision to focus on schools and teachers themselves as the failing elements in the system.

All parents have a right to expect that their local school will provide their children with as good an educational opportunity as any other school. Because schools have to deal with vastly different social and economic situations, because from school to school the experience and expertise of staff will inevitably vary, and because existing levels of resources and qualities of buildings differ tremendously, we need strong, democratically accountable bodies - i.e. local education authorities (LEAs) - with the power to deploy adequate resources and the ability to offer support where it is needed.

Grant maintained schools, excessive use of centrally devised formulae for funding and the devolution of ever larger percentages of resources to schools have already dramatically reduced the capacity of LEAs to guarantee standards. New Labour proposals to reduce LEA resources even further, to retain formula funding, and to retain a kind of opted out status - and allow further schools to go down that road whenever they wish - will mean that the corner shop approach to education continues under Labour, preventing the work needed to ensure quality in every school.

If there is no LEA capable of guaranteeing equality of standards between schools by appropriate deployment of resources, we are left with the approach pioneered by the Tories of leaving it to knowledgeable parents to find a good school somewhere (clearly, there won't be one for everybody).

Sadly, this is the Blair-Blunkett approach. "Diversity" is now the key Labour word for how the system will be structured. This just means that schools will keep many of the advantages or disadvantages that they acquired under the Tories. Teachers in those schools with accumulated disadvantages are now feeling that they have more to fear from Labour than from the Tories. This follows Labour's decision to join in the war of rhetoric about standards by promising to be even harder on tackling failing schools than the Tories, by having even better league tables and by paying teachers on some measure of performance.

Variants of these ideas have been peppered across front bench speeches and newspaper articles all year. All promise to deliver better performance without extra resources by using direct or implied threats to force the people who work in the system to do their jobs better. Anyone with involvement in schools knows that teachers have had ten years and more of struggling to maintain standards with fewer resources, greater inequality and monstrous bureaucracy. This is not the message to give them.

There is a tremendous feeling abroad in the country that education needs more resources and more fairness in the allocation of those resources. Labour needs to respond to this feeling with clear unequivocal commitments on issues that everyone understands to be related to good quality education - guaranteed maximum class sizes, guaranteed nursery education, good quality training for teachers and strong local authorities with the power and the resources to support schools, not distant quangos with only the power to criticise them. ❑

Demonstration against cuts in education!

Saturday, September 30th.
Assemble 12.30, Embankment.
March to Hyde Park

Defend free education!

NUS demonstration
Thursday 23rd November
12 noon
Kennington Park
Contact: Allison Brown
0171-272-8900

LLB page 12

Leading with the left

Beginning a monthly column in which Geoff Martin, chair of Unison London's Affiliated Political Fund, takes a lefty look at life.

I DON'T KNOW whether you got drawn into the recent "Battle of the Bands" in which Blur and Oasis fought for the number one slot but the whole business presented me with a bit of a dilemma.

On the one hand, Blur are Chelsea-supporting, London-sounding cheeky chappies but the permanent smile and the name remind me a bit too much of you-know-who. Whereas Oasis, Man. City supporting, working-class Northern lads, have the sort of track record that would get them locked up by a Labour Government under Jack Straw's "grass up your neighbour" scheme. Oasis for me, then, by an eyebrow.

● While we're on the music theme I thought I'd give you my tip for the best single of the year. I know there's a few months to go but forget Oasis and Blur. My money's on Pulp's "Common People", with its thinly-veiled attack on the Blair Babies in the chorus:

"You'll never live like common people
You'll never do whatever common people do
You'll never fail like common people
You'll never watch your life slide out of view..."

This is cracking stuff, pitched at the kind of people who think that the battle for a restaurant table in Islington's Upper Street two weeks ago is a more significant moment in the history of the labour movement than the battle against fascism in Cable Street 60 years ago.

● WITH MY Fantasy Football team, Wild Red Rovers, about to kick off the new season, I've been putting the finishing touches to a new game that I've invented, "Fantasy Front Bench". Basically the rules are that you pick your own front bench team from among the Party's "beautiful people" and then rack up points (allotted under a highly sophisticated system) for such elements as sucking up to the leader, nicking Tory ideas, waffling like mad on the Today programme, and mentioning "New Labour" loads of times.

I hope to have the final format copy-righted and ready for action by next month, so get ready to pick your Dream Team.

● EXCUSE ME for not falling about the place when Gordon Taylor, top banana at the Professional Footballers' Association, jokingly suggested at the TUC that the minimum wage should be set at the level of Alan Shearer's salary - about 15 grand a week.

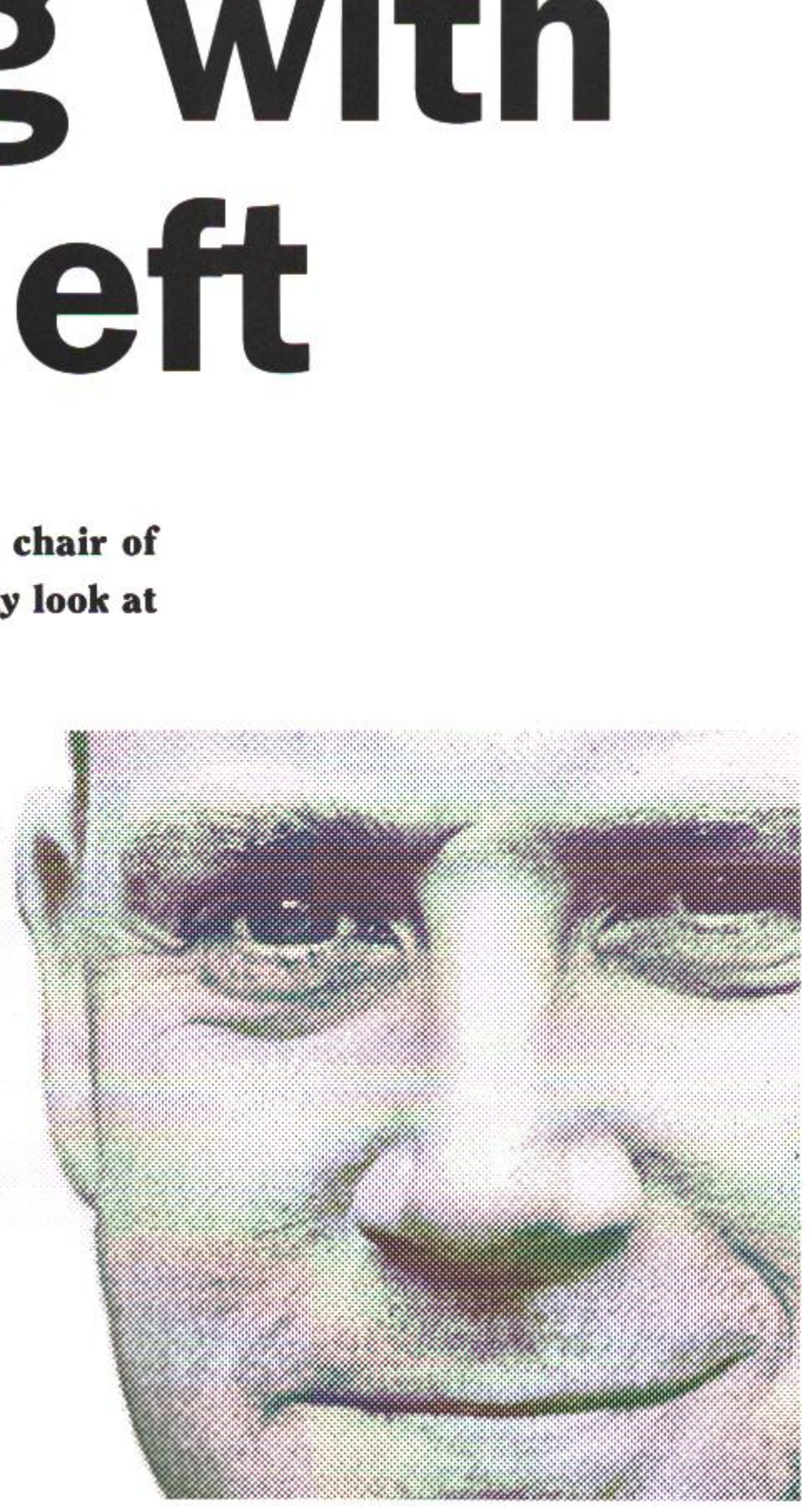
I bet that members of my union, Unison, who work as domestics for Welhall Ltd for the princely sum of £1.75 an hour, were splitting their sides.

On the first day of this football season I paid twenty quid to watch Ruud Gullitt pull on a Chelsea shirt for his first competitive game. Delighted as I was to see the guy grace the hallowed Stamford Bridge turf, it's a reflection of our values that he earns more in a week than a nurse working on a London intensive care unit earns in a year.

It won't stop me watching Chelsea, but it will give me all the incentive I need to keep up the battle against low pay.

● TOP MARKS to Margaret Beckett for having the guts to tell the fat cats who make up the ranks of the NHS Trust Federation a few home truths at their annual beano.

Rather than following the standard New Labour line of trying to be all things to all people, Margaret made it clear that she would have no truck with people directly involved in the creeping privatisation of the



NHS - i.e. the members of the NHS Trust Federation.

Suddenly realising that their telephone number salaries could be on the line, some Trust bosses started heckling, others got on the blower to the nearest BUPA hospital checking job vacancies and the rest slipped off to the bar for a bottle of Bolly.

If a few more front-benchers were prepared to make it clear that the spivs, rip-off merchants and hangers-on who make up the ruling class should be scared of a Labour Government rather than waiting for the invite to Number 10, I'd be happy.

End the US blockade!
Hands off Cuba!

National Demonstration
Saturday 14th October
12 noon from Marble Arch
Contact: Cuba Solidarity Campaign, 0171-263 6452

LLB page 13

Winning with the minimum wage

In one of the richest countries in the world, millions of workers do not earn enough to support themselves. Maria Iacovou, Islington North CLP, answers objections to a national minimum wage.

● The national minimum wage (NMW) will increase unemployment:

Many economists base their theoretical models on the classical labour market theory that higher wages always increase the supply of and decrease the demand for labour. Investigators who use a more flexible theoretical framework, which takes labour market imperfections into account, have often found that an NMW has no adverse effect on employment. A number of studies have even found that employment may increase in certain sectors if an NMW is introduced or increased.

● The NMW is 'expensive':

In fact it is the Tories free-market ideology which is expensive. Employers can get away with paying peanuts in the knowledge that taxpayers pick up the bill. Top-up benefits like Family Credit are a subsidy to low-paying exploitative employers - costing nearly £2.5 billion a year.

● An NMW will cause inflation:

This claim is based on the assumption that when the lowest wages rise, workers earning slightly more than the minimum will demand that their wages rise too and this knock-on effect will continue to the top of the wage scale, resulting in inflation, which would leave low-paid workers no better off.

However, studies in France and Britain show that a wage floor tends to compress wage distribution, leading to greater equality.

● Employers would cut back on training:

In fact, employers currently have little incentive to invest in training. They don't need a productive workforce because they have to pay workers so little. An NMW would help the economy break out of the low wage/low skills cycle: if employers had to pay decent wages, they would have more incentive to increase workers' productivity by training them.

● What level should be set?

Conference has voted for an NMW of half male median earnings, rising to two-thirds over time. This continues to be the position of most unions and works out around £4.15 today. The Commission on Social Justice recommended £3.50. Labour Party publications focus entirely on workers paid less than £2.50 an hour!

Of course, £2.50 is still poverty pay. After a 37-hour week, a worker would go home with less than £83. A £3 minimum gives a weekly net wage of £96. At these rates, most people entitled to benefits will be better off on the dole and many of those who do work will still be claiming in-work benefits. Only at £4 per hour (£120 per week) and £4.15 (£124 per week) do take-home earnings begin to resemble a living wage.

● A special rate for youth?

The Commission on Social Justice recommends a trainee wage for 16 and 17 year olds of two thirds of the NMW. This system is open to abuse; young workers would end up doing the same work as adult workers - but on the cheap. It is said that young people would have no incentive to stay on in full-time education if they were paid decent wages. Rather than beating them with the stick of poverty, however, we should create a favourable incentive structure by paying benefits to 16 and 17-year-olds who stay on in education.

● Should Labour be committed to a specific level?

Those who are against making a commitment are committing a tactical error. By treating the NMW as a 'spending' commitment they are adopting the ideology of the Tories. We should be promoting the NMW as a key ingredient in a vibrant new economy. The Tories will attack us whether we spell out our commitment or not. If we leave a blank, they will fill it in. The NMW is a vote-winner. The more positive we are about it - and that must involve specifying a level - the more positive the public will be.

Wage inequality in Britain today is at its highest level since 1886 and growing faster than anywhere else in Europe. One in five workers earns less than £4 an hour; one in ten earns less than £3 an hour. More than a million workers earn less than £2.50 an hour and almost a third of those earn less than £1.50 an hour.

Defying General Secretary Alan Johnson, the Communication Workers' Union Executive has voted to support a £4.15 minimum wage. The lowest-paid workers represented by the CWU, cleaners in the Post Office, are paid £3.57 an hour on recruitment grade. The basic postal recruitment grade is £4.08 an hour.

Unemployed adults are being told to take jobs at £3 an hour or lose their benefit.

Southampton JobCentre has disclosed that it uses a list of 45 minimum hourly rates - wage levels at which claimants must accept the jobs on offer.

These include £1.50 an hour for junior clerks, £3 an hour for book-keepers, case assistants and chefs, £3.50 for cashiers, labourers, nannies and typists and £4 for HGV drivers.

John Denham, Labour MP for Southampton Itchen, commented: "Why should any employer offer decent wages when the JobCentres will force people to work for them for less?"

LLB page 14

Life on low pay



A former Dunkin Donuts employee speaks out:

"WORKING AT Dunkin Donuts was one of the most unpleasant things I have ever had to do in my life. I worked there for about four months in 1993 and it seemed like a century.

The hours were bad and the workers were treated appallingly. The pay was £2.75 per hour before deductions. The logic of this was that everyone who worked there would work all the hours they possibly could just to make a bit more money. Even if you worked a 60 hour week you still took home only a pittance.

Managers took liberties with all the workers because they could get away with it. There was no union organisation and most people worked there only a short time until they could find something better. This meant that in practice most of the workforce had no employment rights whatsoever. If they did not like you for whatever reason then you could simply be sacked, or they could just cut your hours down and force you to leave because you could not afford to live on what you were earning. There was also sexism in promotion. I trained a man up to work in the shop and less than a month later he was in charge of me!

There were no women managers and only one female shift supervisor. I ended up losing my job because I made a fuss about the conditions we were expected to work under."

● The Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network will be as active as ever at this year's Labour Party Conference. We will produce a daily delegates' bulletin and support public meetings each night of the conference week. If you can help please call 0171-582-2955.

The fight to win Labour to socialist policies will be top of our agenda and we will be campaigning against Blair's moves to weaken our trade union link and participatory democracy.

Over the last year, the Network has grown in numbers. We now have nearly 50 local supporters groups. If your Labour left caucus is not yet linked up with the Network - get affiliated by sending £10 to SCGN, 3 Blades House, London, SE11 5TW. If you wish to join as an individual, please send £5/£2 to the same address.

● "It is one thing to support the broad thrust of the present Government's Irish policy whilst constructively proving and examining its implications. It is another to follow slavishly its many twists, turns and contradictions where there has been no direct Labour input and for which we have no responsibility ... The role of democratic socialism is not to be an ambulanceman to capitalism." - Kevin McNamara, resigning from Labour's front bench.

The Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network

Fourth Annual Meeting
Fight for socialist policies
Build the Network

18th November
Manchester Town Hall

Labour Party Conference: Fringe Meetings

Brighton October 1st - 5th

- **Sunday, CLPD rally, Corn Exchange, 10am**
- **Sunday, *Labour Left Briefing* launch, Royal Albion Hotel, 7pm with Tony Benn, Alan Simpson, Maria Exall**
- **Monday, Socialist Policies for a Labour Government - Rally for a decent minimum wage, Royal Albion Hotel, 7pm**
- **Tuesday, Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights, Brighthelm Centre, 6pm**
- **Tuesday, Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs - Rally for Socialist Policies, Brighthelm Centre, 7pm**
- **Wednesday, Justice for Mineworkers, 7pm, Concorde bar, Marine Parade**
- **Thursday, Campaign Group Network meeting with Tony Benn, 6-30pm, Royal Albion Hotel**
- **Thursday, *Labour Left Briefing* Quiz, 8.30pm, Royal Albion Hotel**

LLB page 15

Defend common ownership

Arthur Scargill explains why and how the NUM forced Labour's NEC to adhere to the Party rules and re-open the debate on Clause IV.

TWO PRINCIPLES will be at stake in the Clause IV debate at the Labour Party annual conference. First is Labour's commitment to common ownership, upon which every socialist policy depends - whether it be full employment, industrial regeneration, the environment, the NHS, housing or education.

The second concerns the conduct of the Party leadership - which has now in effect accepted that it acted unconstitutionally in seeking to amend the constitution at the Special Conference on 29th April.

Prior to the 29th April, the Bakers' Union and the NUM obtained legal advice that it was unconstitutional for the NEC, CLPs or affiliated organisations to amend the constitution at a special conference - and that an amendment from any section of the Party must be put to the annual conference in October. The unions' legal advice also made clear that the NEC could not exclude CLPs or affiliated organisations from submitting constitutional amendments.

On the morning of 29th April the Conference Arrangements Committee told the NUM the Party had obtained legal advice (never produced) that the NEC did have a right to amend the constitution at a special conference. In spite of the unions' legal advice and our clear warning to the Special Conference, the Party purported that day to amend Clause IV.

Faced with this disregard, the Bakers' Union and NUM knew that we could not meekly accept an unconstitutional amendment passed on 29th April. The trade union movement gave birth to a socialist Labour Party - it was essential that we defend socialist principles and oppose what was a blatant violation of the Party's constitution by the NEC.

In accordance with the constitution, we wrote to the Party's General Secretary, Tom Sawyer, in May, submitting an amendment to Clause IV for this year's annual conference agenda, incorporating the central concerns cited by the Party leadership and its supporters as being essential to an "updated presentation" of the Party's objects, aims and policies.

Racial and gender equality, sexuality rights, nurturing of the old and the young, protection of the Earth and all its life-forms - the need for these and other commitments is spelled out in our enhanced Clause IV. We insisted that the Party must act in accordance with its own rules, and that the NEC's amendment to Clause IV as well as ours must be debated and voted upon at the annual Party conference.



Photo: Bryn Griffiths

The Party's General Secretary informed us in writing that our amendment was not acceptable, pointing out that the constitution could not be re-amended for three years following an amendment by annual Party conference.

We responded by asking Tom Sawyer to explain which annual Party conference had amended Clause IV, thus precluding any further amendments to Clause IV for three years: a question which, not surprisingly, he could not answer.

Confronted by the NEC's refusal to act in accordance with its own constitution, we had no alternative but to commence legal proceedings and on 28th July won a High Court application to have the case heard prior to annual conference in October.

At the beginning of September the Labour Party NEC, obviously realising it would lose in the High Court, proposed a settlement which accepted that the NEC's purported amendment to Clause IV would be debated and voted upon at the annual conference together with the Baker's Union/NUM amendment. Most important of all, they agreed that if the unions' amendment to Clause IV was accepted by annual conference then it and not that of the NEC would be adopted as part of the Party's rules and constitution.

If the Bakers' Union and NUM had not initiated legal proceedings the Labour Party's NEC would have continued to argue that its purported "amendment" to Clause IV was valid - and would have ruled out of order for a period of three years any attempt by CLPs and affiliated organisations to amend it.

Since the decision taken on 29th April was unconstitutional, all trade unions and CLPs which voted that day in defence of Clause IV and common ownership should as a matter of principle vote for the Bakers' Union/NUM amendment to Clause IV at annual conference - where there will now be a clear choice in line with the constitution.

If annual conference adopts the NEC's amendment (unconstitutionally pushed through on 29th April) it will be accepting the principle of the free market and capitalism. On the other hand, if annual conference adopts the Bakers' Union/NUM amendment it will reaffirm Labour's commitment to common ownership, a planned economy and socialism.

The choice is a simple one and we urge all CLPs and affiliated trade unions to vote for the Bakers' Union/NUM amendment. ❑

LLB page 16

Labour Left Briefing interviews Ken Coates MEP on his support for a federal united Europe - and the steps needed to realise that dream.

Rebuilding Europe

***LLB*: Many have argued that a federal Europe would crush diversity and make for a remote, bureaucratic system of government.**

KC: It might. But it might not. That will depend on the institutions that develop. It will depend most of all on the degree of advance of a federal united labour movement.

***LLB*: On paper, at least, there is a Europe-wide trade union campaign for a 35-hour week.**

KC: To create real Europe-wide campaigns is difficult, but once you get people together, the will to work is strong. Over the last six years that I've been in the European Parliament I have tried to link not only labour movement institutions but also pressure groups, the components of civil society.

The first experiment was the Pensioners' Parliament. We assembled representatives of pensioners' organisations on a European scale, on the basis of one representative for each elected member of the European Parliament. The first time we did it under the auspices of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament and it was a considerable success. There was a repeat the following year, with the European Parliament itself convening the Pensioners' Parliament, but that wasn't so successful.

The same thing was done by disabled people, who funded and organised the initiative themselves and insisted that they be invited to meet in the European Parliament building in Brussels. After being turned down by the Parliament authorities, they organised a rebellion among MEPs and were invited in.

The missing component so far is the labour movement, whose initiatives so far have been dominated entirely by the formal structures, above all the European Trade Union Confederation and the Party of European Socialists.

The Party of European Socialists could come alive if the socialist parties found a way to solve their own separate national problems but it would need to extend itself to a level which brought active people into working relations with one another. I'll believe in it in earnest when it is able to deal with specific problems in joint action, by bringing together the different party members in different countries who are attacking the same problem - they might be teachers or workers in public services.

Although it is much better to have a federation of TUCs than not to have one, it is not likely to be a ball of initiative and activity. When we get European works councils, the conferences that will then follow will be more interesting.

The priority is effective unification of European labour movements. Maastricht should have focussed everybody's mind on this. The figures that I have published show beyond any doubt that unless Europe-wide counter-action is taken urgently, then unemployment will be increased by the effort to meet the Maastricht criteria.

***LLB*: There is a body of opinion in the labour movement that argues that the only united Europe we should be interested in is a socialist united Europe, and that any initiatives that relate to the European Union are going along with a capitalist enterprise.**

KC: If we were in a position to envisage decisive advances to socialism in one country, these arguments might merit some attention. But no one is envisaging that at present. The logjam is comprehensive. We can envisage socialist parties taking office in one or two European countries but not the kind of fundamental reforms that would enable us to talk about socialism in those countries.

In fact the struggle today is the struggle for democracy in the economies. We have had a momentous loss of national democracy, not because of the encroachment of Brussels institutions but because of the extension of global capitalism, which has annulled a whole series of democratic mechanisms, the most important of which is the post-war Keynesian structure which gave social-democratic governments the initiative and enabled them to control the level of employment.

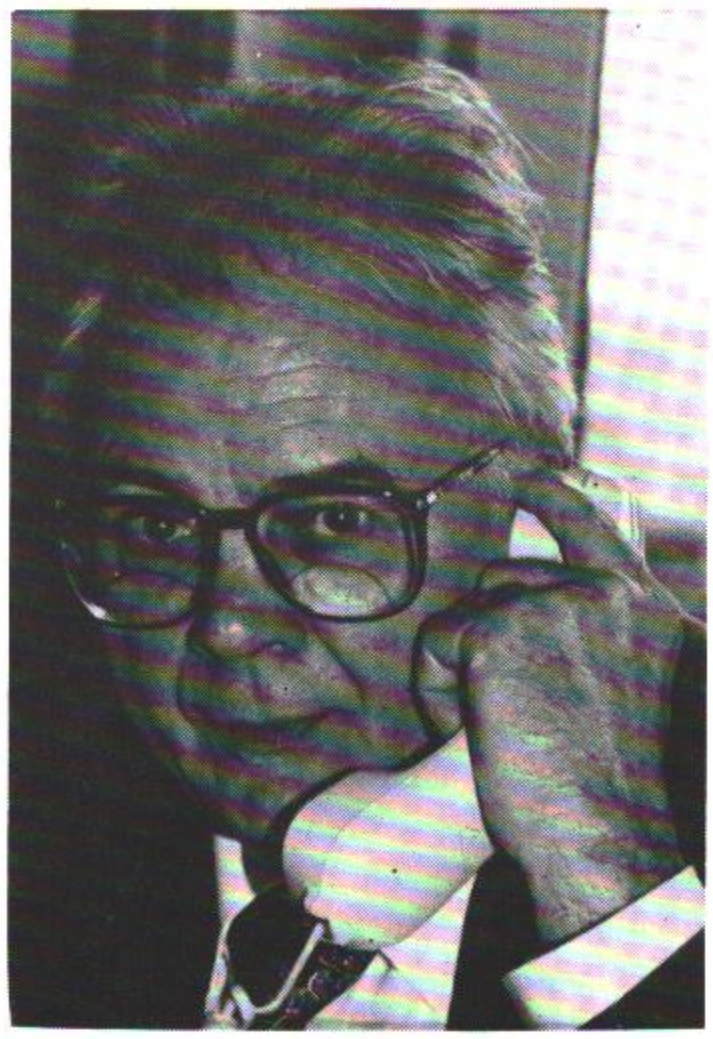
Today, restoring full employment has got to be done jointly. If we talk about the establishment of socialism anywhere, we have got to talk about it at the level of global or regional blocs. That is the minimum area in which movement is possible.

The national governments are capable of consummating certain reforms, but not of the sort of structural shift which we could call a socialist transformation.

We need a Europe-wide campaign on the organisation of work and working time. As well as the 35 or 32 hour week, we need a huge increase in flexibility. We need sabbatical leave for education or family purposes or agreed social purposes. In Denmark you can get a sabbatical year to go to college or to look after young children, drawing unemployment compensation which gives you something like 80% of your basic wage.

Unemployment will not yield only to investment and growth. The increase in productivity in the leading-edge industries is so phenomenal that there has to be structural change. This is a shift comparable to the last big upsurge, when we got electric power and the internal combustion engine, which made the 48 hour week and then the 40 hour week not only possible but necessary.

The restoration of public services must also play a vast role. Because of the pressure of multi-national capital, we all live in societies where large sectors of public services have been annulled. We have a public-service slum. Go into the bus stations in big cities today, and you find that they are filthy, there are no staff there, people are scared to use them, the amenities are crumbling. Time was when you could go to the bus station to get a late cup of tea or a bun. There would be a waiting room that was fit to sit in. Now all that is gone. ❑



LLB page 17

Union turns job-slasher

Hugh MacGrillen, secretary of MSF London Region, reports on the union's move to sack a large chunk of its staff.

Trade Unions

ON WEDNESDAY 20th September, MSF General Secretary Roger Lyons proposed the closure of 14 MSF regional offices. Around 50 support staff, members of APEX and mainly women, have been issued with notices of redundancy. They have been given only 30 days' notice, not the usual 90.

Both staff and union members are angry about the crisis, provoked more by mismanagement of the union's property deals than by falling membership. The union's National Executive has decided to cut 103 jobs, but its final decision will not be taken until its October meeting. When it last met, on 12th September, Lyons made no mention of the redundancy notices.

It seems he has picked on smaller offices. Maybe they were considered a softer option. APEX has delayed balloting for industrial action, pending negotiations.

The union officers - as distinct from support staff - do not yet know where they stand. They are on different contracts, and can technically be redeployed. There is some talk about all the officers being made to reapply for their jobs. The officers are MSF members, not APEX.

Some MSF members suspect that Lyons is using the restructuring to rid himself of left opposition. He has already targeted a number of left-wing officials.

● MSF members should phone union leaders Roger Lyons and John Chowcat at HQ (0171-505 3000) to express their opinion. For up-to-date information, phone Hugh MacGrillen on 0171-226 5436.

Mersey firefighters keep up the pressure

Chris Jones, FBU (Out of Trade), ex-Brigade Chair Merseyside, reports on a dispute about jobs and services.

FOLLOWING INTERVENTION by the Government arbitration service ACAS and a partial climbdown by the employers, Merseyside firefighters have suspended their industrial action but they are going ahead with a ballot for 24 hour strikes.

In August over 10,000 firefighters and control room workers marched through Liverpool to public applause, on the same day as the first of a series of nine hour strikes. The action was the outcome of years of struggle against a Chief Officer who is one of the most aggressive in a new breed of fire brigade managers. 'New Labour' councillors have allowed this officer to try to break the union - using a concocted financial crisis as the excuse.

81% of Merseyside's 1,300 FBU members voted for the strikes, against plans to cut three days annual leave, chop 20 jobs, and leave Merseyside with the worst leave allocation in the country. Already staff shortages have left Merseyside failing to meet Home Office standards in ten of its 27 stations. A 'phone poll' in the local paper has shown 93.2% support for the union action.

The FBU found evidence that the Merseyside Authority was holding over £500,000 in balances, even though it had claimed that the cuts were forced on it by financial crisis. The Authority 'set aside' its plans to cut the 20 posts and the three days' annual leave. Now it may reverse its climbdown - or try to insist on new conditions for a settlement. Union officials are aware of this danger and are pressing ahead with the new ballot to authorise 24-hour strikes.

The climbdown is a defeat for the employers, but victory is not yet secure, and the deal is likely to allow the employers to claim some comfort. Throughout the dispute, despite solid support from FBU members, activity and leadership has come overwhelmingly from the officials, giving them considerable room for manoeuvre and compromise. Despite this, other workers should take note: determined and successful strikes can still be fought despite anti-union legislation.

LLB page 18

NHS unionists rally against local pay

Richard Bayley (North Riding Health UNISON) reports that after six months of campaigning against local pay deals, NHS workers have finished up with an offer of... local pay!

THE DEAL on which UNISON members are to be balloted institutionalises local pay bargaining, with the sweetener of any 'losers' in bargaining getting their pay topped up at the end of the year to a 'going rate'. It was offered by NHS bosses only on condition that the staff side recommend acceptance - which they have done.

The basic effect of the deal will be to formalise the drawn-out bargaining structure that appeared accidentally this year; unions submit claims to national machinery, which then produces an offer that requires union members to go to their local employer for a local offer... and so on, and so on. There will be an extra round a year later, as unions and management decide what the "going rate" for the past year was.

The main beneficiary of the deal is UNISON's Head of Health, Bob Abberley, who now basks in the reputation of the man that NHS bosses can "do business" with. Our Bob will be able to get his feet under the table at NHS HQ, discussing such things as "going rates", while local employers make worthless offers.

It is very important that resistance to the deal is organised swiftly, before local union activists think that nothing more can be done. UNISON's national health sector conference on 28/29th September provides an excellent opportunity, with at least one branch submitting an emergency motion calling for a full account of how UNISON officers and executive members came out for local pay.

Tube dispute could be a turning point

A tube worker reports on the increasingly bitter dispute between the RMT and London Underground Ltd (LUL).

THE UNION'S claim was for a six per cent pay increase, a cut in hours, and job guarantees for areas which LUL wants to contract out.

Initially, unity between RMT and ASLEF, which has - or had - most of the drivers, played a big part in delivering three-to-one majorities for action in both unions' ballots. Then, ASLEF's dispute with British Rail was still running.

ASLEF General Secretary Lew Adams sabotaged joint action by settling the BR dispute for a 'promise' of a cut in hours in a year's time, maybe. Now an action replay of the BR sell-out is being perpetrated on tube workers.

As the first date for joint RMT/ASLEF tube action drew near, management were clearly worried. They increased their 'final' offer several times. Then, in an abrupt about-face, they presented a new deal - an hour off next year, tied into a whole package of productivity measures and the introduction of part-time drivers. It was far worse than anything on offer before but Adams went on TV and said: "It's a very good deal. I recommend it strongly."

So the action was off and a referendum was on. Again, Adams had sabotaged unity for a deal that was worse than worthless. On the ground no one could believe that this deal could be 'recommended'. When ASLEF Executive members went to branches to sell the deal, they were given a roasting. Many ASLEF members joined the RMT in disgust.

The first day of action shocked management. There were far fewer trains than they had hoped for. The next two days' action saw support building. Management turned on the heat. Letters threatening dismissal were sent to everyone taking action. Managers called us in for 'interviews'. At the same time, ASLEF lay reps were given two weeks' paid release to help sell the deal. The RMT was attacked in the media as a dinosaur, etc. etc. (pick your own cliche) as opposed to the "reasonable" ASLEF. Ha! It's a pity they didn't ask rank and file tubeworkers what they thought.

The next 48 hour stoppage was set. This was going to be the most effective action yet. LUL had different plans. They got an injunction which declared that the 700 tubeworkers who had joined RMT after the ballot in July were not allowed to strike. I wonder how Blair's spin doctors can explain workers joining a union because it is fighting back - how strange! Reluctantly, the RMT EC called off the 48 hour strike in favour of a short, sharp extra recruitment campaign and a ballot of all members, new and old. Meanwhile the ASLEF referendum rejected the deal two-to-one - naturally, the ASLEF leadership then went straight into talks, saying that there was a good chance of a settlement. Both unions are now reballotting, though in ASLEF's case this is purely window-dressing.

Class traitor of the month? Lew Adams by a mile. This is a vital dispute. In it we have seen the best and worst of the labour movement: on the one hand, tube workers standing together on the picket lines in the face of a vicious management, and on the other poisonous union leaders doing management's work for them.

The labour movement should get firmly behind the tube workers. We want and need solidarity, not fence-sitting and weasel words from "New Labour" as in the signal workers' dispute.

A strike fund has been set up, and speakers are ready and willing to address meetings. A victory in this dispute could be a turning point. A defeat would give the green light to privatisation. That is how important it is. ❑

Bobby Owens

George Whettling reports: Bobby Owens, who died aged 48 last month, was for many years a leading figure on the left of the TGWU. Since 1984 he had been regional secretary of the traditionally militant North West region (Region Six) and although some of his comrades became disillusioned with his gradual drift into bureaucratism, everyone who knew Bobby will remember him as a committed trade unionist and a warm human being.

Bobby's finest days were as an unemployed activist. He'd joined the TGWU when he started work at the British Leyland Triumph Plant in Speke, Merseyside in 1971 and was soon a shop steward. When BL transferred production to Coventry a few years later, Bobby was thrown onto the dole, along with several thousand others. But he was determined to stay active and effectively transformed the Speke branch of the union (6/612) into an unemployed branch.

The 6/612 became a focal point of unemployed organisation on Merseyside and as more plants closed the best unemployed militants joined. It should be noted, incidentally, that while signing up existing TGWU members wasn't too difficult, recruiting previously unorganised unemployed people required a somewhat creative interpretation of the union's rule book. Bobby and his comrades didn't let this stop them organising a series of highly effective recruitment drives on Community Programme and ET Schemes.

Bobby's other great achievement was the creation of the Unemployed Resource Centre in Hardman Street, Liverpool - still the biggest and most effective centre of its kind anywhere in the UK.

Bobby Owens never sold out or defected to the right. But his period as regional secretary was characterised by a series of compromises and a gradual drift into the role of a TGWU bureaucrat. As bureaucrats go, he was a lot better than most and much of the disappointment with his later career can be attributed to the very high expectations that so many left-wingers had of him.

For ourselves, we prefer to remember and honour the young rank and file militant who did so much for the unemployed in Merseyside in the 1970s and early 80s. ❑

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Can "Big Metal" boost US labour?

Trade Unions

Kim Moody of *Labor Notes* reports on moves to create a giant metalworkers' super-union in the USA.

ON 27TH JULY, the presidents of the US United Auto Workers (UAW), United Steel Workers (USW), and International Association of Machinists (IAM) announced that the three unions would merge by the year 2000 to create one giant union. The three US unions together represent almost two million workers, many of them in the metal industry. In some cases, the three bargain with the same employers.

Will this merger be a new start or just one more retrenchment? It all depends. The leaders of the three unions have said that they will use this as a base to organise the unorganised in metal-working and other industries. The new union could double or even triple its current combined membership in the metal-working industries alone. Recent leadership records, however, do not indicate that these lofty goals will be met.

All three unions have a history of concessions, co-operation programmes, and heavy job losses. None of them has much to brag about in organizing the growing non-union sectors of their own core industries. There is already confusion about how the new union will choose their leaders. Steelworkers' president George Becker says they have agreed to the direct election of top officers. But a letter sent by Steve Yokich, the Autoworkers' new president, to local union officers shortly after the merger announcement defends selecting officers at union conventions.

Dave Yettaw, President of UAW Local 599 in Flint, Michigan and a co-chair of the UAW New Directions Movement, proposes a "one member, one vote referendum on the merger". R. Keith Thomas, a leader of *Unionists for Democratic Change*, a reform group in the IAM, expressed the same idea. But for the new metal union to achieve real unity and allow the members to feel what Jerry Tucker, a leader of UAW New Directions, calls "ownership", it will take more than the right to vote on the final product. There needs to be debate over the structure and direction of "Big Metal", as one UAW staffer dubbed the new union.

The top leaders will be concerned with staffing levels, salaries, golden parachutes, headquarters location and the like. If this unique merger is to fulfil its promise, the active rank and file will have to intervene to broaden and deepen the entire planning process. One thing activists from the three unions agree on is the need to get together across old union lines to discuss their common future.

For further information, contact *Labor Notes* at 7435 Michigan Avenue, Detroit, Michigan, 48210.

Public service, not private sleaze

Dave Anderson, Unison NEC reports: UNISON is organising events up and down the country, leading up to a demonstration in London on 21st October, in order to spotlight the effects of privatisation of health and local government, give-aways in the energy and water sector, and unremitting attacks on public sector workers.

We are building links with voluntary organisations, community groups and other unions to encourage a wide range of people to march with us. 21st October will culminate in a festival in Burgess Park with bands, children's entertainment and short speeches. This will not be the end of Unison's campaign. We must support all or any of our members who are prepared to fight.

A sledgehammer council

A Liverpool UNISON member writes: Over 300 residential social workers in Liverpool have been on strike throughout September against the plans to bring casual staff into homes for young people and people with learning disabilities. The city's Labour council is also seeking to cut residential workers' wages by up to £2,400 a year.

At the same time councillors have voted themselves a 33% increase in expenses and bought two new official limousines. The council has employed agency staff, refused to negotiate, sent managers with sledgehammers to children's homes, and used theTory anti-union laws.

● Contact Liverpool UNISON, 4th Floor, Produce Exchange, 8 Victoria St, Liverpool L2 (0151-236 1944).

A message to Labour Party conference delegates

Lambeth's "hung" council has launched proposals to devastate Advice Services in the voluntary and statutory sectors. UNISON has called a meeting of advice workers and supporters for Wednesday 4th October.

Telephone 0171-737 2134 for details. UNISON calls upon Labour Party Conference delegates to support the struggle to defend jobs and services in Lambeth.

UNISON A branch,
6a Acre Lane, SW2 5SG.

Pepsico Walkers boycott

PEPSICO IS ONE of the world's largest food companies and includes Pepsi, 7-up, Walkers and Smiths crisps, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Pizza Hut.

Recently it has derecognised GMB at its Peterlee factory and has given six months' notice on the TGWU/GMB Trucker Drivers Agreement. The GMB are calling for a boycott of goods produced by Pepsico.

National Day of Solidarity with McDonald's Workers

12th October
Contact: McLibel on 0181-533-7111

LLB page 20

West drives to carve up Bosnia

John Turkie
Member, Alliance to Defend Bosnia-Herzegovina

THE AMERICANS and NATO have taken control of the west's strategy in Bosnia, which is now 'bomb and talk'. After four years of appeasing Serb aggression, does the NATO attack on the Bosnian Serb war machine represent a U-turn in western strategy?

During the late 1980s, the world's powers were in disarray as they watched Milosevic unleash the Greater Serbia project in his attempt to dominate the old Yugoslav state. In the most influential camp, Britain and France (the main powers that created Yugoslavia) have promoted the myth that the Balkans is a powderkeg of rival nationalisms, which has only achieved peace and stability under a strongman - first, the Ottomans; then the Habsburgs; and finally the communists and Titoists - concluding that the region needed a new master, the Serbs, led by the strongman Milosevic.

In another, initially less influential camp, the Germans (historically supporters of Croatia) and the Americans also saw the value of a Balkan strongman, Tudjman, who would act as a counterweight of Milosevic. In a third camp are the Russians, supporters of the Serbs for historical, political and religious reasons. All three camps have shared the illusion that stability can be gained through ethnic division.

Accordingly, all the various peace proposals that have been touted over the years reward ethnic cleansing by carving up Bosnia along ethnic lines and by not establishing a right of return to the millions of refugees. Although 'the maps' have yet to be negotiated, or fought over (possibly with active NATO participation), the latest variant proposes to divide Bosnia into a 'Serbia-Bosnian Serb confederation' and a 'Croat-Muslim confederation', in which the hapless 'Muslims' (the majority before the war) will have junior status in what amounts to an enlarged Croatian state.

For all the international talk of preserving the integrity of Bosnia, the plan spells the end of an integral, multi-ethnic Bosnia. The key factors in inspiring the west's new tougher response revolve around Milosevic, who wants to do a deal with the Americans. But if NATO does manage to bomb the Bosnian Serbs to the negotiating table, this latest plan will not bring peace, for at least four reasons.

First, because of the bitter legacy left to the millions of refugees, which promises decades of instability in the region. Secondly, because the position of the Bosnian Government is far from clear; significant political and military elements do not accept the current proposals and could well continue their fight for an integral Bosnia in which refugees have the right to return.



Thirdly, because of the instability of the alliance between the Bosnian Government and Croatia and the enmity between Muslims and Croats in some parts of Bosnia, due mainly to the aspiration of arch-nationalist Tudjman. And fourthly, because the 'strongman' (both Serbian and Croatian) is still crucial to the west's strategy, and appeasement, as we have seen over the last four years, is not something the west can turn on and off.

Milosevic has merely shelved the Greater Serbia project, to be picked up at a more opportune moment. He could once again turn to Kosovo (which has an Albanian majority), where he first unleashed the tide of Serbian nationalism that led to war. If a serious conflagration arose in Kosovo, Albania could well be dragged in, provoking a wider regional war. Likewise, it is equally possible that Tudjman, against the wishes of the US, will squeeze the Bosnians further or even go to war with Serbia over eastern Slavonia.

The relief of Sarajevo, whilst welcome, is a by-product in the west's strategy of negotiating any settlement, no matter how unjust to victims of aggression, and getting Bosnia off the foreign policy agenda as quickly as possible. Western strategy is no less muddled than it was in the late 1980s when the West sealed the Balkans' fate by choosing not to block Milosevic's expansionist drive.

Since then the west has consistently appeased aggression. It is instructive for those who believe that the west has performed a U-turn to bear in mind that, simultaneous to the NATO attack on Bosnian Serb positions, western governments destroyed evidence of UN complicity in Mladic's execution of at least 3,000 Muslim prisoners in Srebrenica. Western strategy is still based on appeasement. ❑

LLB page 21

Bosnia: should we take sides?

"Take sides: support Bosnia" declared September's *Labour Briefing*. Its coverage has brought us a full postbag, from which we print seven contributions (all cut for space). Our columns will remain open for debate.

Baseline: self-determination

Dave Barter
Manchester Central CLP

MANY ON THE left define "imperialism" in ex-Yugoslavia as the UN and NATO and conclude that to be anti-imperialist we must lean towards Serbia. It was good to see September's *Briefing* rejecting such knee-jerk politics. The main engine of war in ex-Yugoslavia has been Milosevic's drive for a Greater Serbia - Serbian imperialism. In Bosnia, the Serbian army, backed up by fascistic militias, has sought to pulverise the Bosnian-Muslim nation and the multi-ethnic cities.

Probably the majority of the Bosnian Muslims have become refugees. About one in ten of them have been killed. Hundreds of mosques have been razed. The Bosnian Government has tried to get support from the UN and NATO. Landlocked, surrounded by enemies open or hypocritical, and receiving only flickers of support from the international labour movement, what else would it do? Should we then refuse to side with it? Only if it were functioning as a catspaw for oppression of Serbia.

But socialist analysis should be different from conspiracy-theory paranoia. NATO is imperialist, but its attacks on Mladic's siege guns do not make the Serbs an oppressed nation. No big power wants to conquer Serbia. Our baseline should be: self-determination for the smaller nations of ex-Yugoslavia; full rights for the minorities in every area, including the Serb minorities in Bosnia and Croatia.

Briefing lines up with the right

Ron Huzzard
Labour Action for Peace

WHAT A PITY *Labour Briefing*'s final issue pushed a line on Bosnia with which I and many on the left totally disagree. It is the right-wing US Congress that is pushing to lift the arms embargo. The main beneficiaries would be those who profit out of arms sales. The victims would be ordinary people in Bosnia. Why a socialist paper wants to line up with the right in the US (which has no ground troops in Bosnia) I do not know.

Geoff Ryan is selective with his history. He could have mentioned the moves by Slovenia, Croatia and then Bosnia to break away from the Yugoslavia federation which Tito created to prevent ethnic and nationalist feelings predominating. It was not Serbia who broke away. There has been US/German pressure to break-up the former Yugoslavia and to encourage Croatia's war. From where has Croatia been getting arms to launch offensives? It is a three-sided civil war. To depict the Serbs as the 'baddies' is too simple.

The UN's role must be a neutral one so that it can facilitate relief to all the war's victims and hold itself ready to encourage a settlement. For it to go into combat action against the Serbs is a disaster. I find it sad that *Briefing*, which opposed the Falklands war and Gulf war, is pro-war over Bosnia.

Return to Tito's tradition

Pat Byrne
Streatham CLP

RELUCTANTLY I have to take issue with the "Take Sides: Support Bosnia!" position taken by *Labour Briefing* in its September issue. Although the Bosnian Muslims are at a disadvantage because of the heavy weapons inherited by the Serbs, and have been on the losing side of most of the atrocities and landgrabbing, that doesn't mean that the answer is further conflict.

If it was always a case of being on the side of those who have been invaded, presumably the comrades would have supported the French socialists when they voted for war credits in 1914 as German troops marched towards Paris. In fact the supply of more heavy weapons and the escalation of the war won't improve the lives of most Muslims. On the contrary, the ordinary people will pay the price. We should be for the withdrawal of all UN military personnel, who at best prolong the conflict and at worse confuse it.

If I may quote Lenin, "For the Balkan peasants and workers, any intervention by the European powers, whether hostile or would-be-friendly, means only adding all sorts of fetters and hindrances to free progress" (*Pravda*, 16th October, 1912). Rather than lift the boycott of Bosnia, I would favour its intensification and extension to the whole region - Serbia, Croatia and Bosnia - including any countries that then allowed breaches of sanctions. Only the rich and power-hungry can gain from this conflict. We must hit these people, and the only way to do so is to hit them in the pocket through effective sanctions.

Although the right rubbish the whole idea of sanctions, I note that the limited sanctions against South Africa forced them to end apartheid. Also, that the present disintegration of the Iraqi regime is entirely due to the continuing sanctions, despite their many evasions. Of course, such measures take time, but this war is not exactly sorting things out quickly!

The left has been willing to abandon the sanctions/boycott issue too easily. Really effective sanctions have never been imposed in international disputes. Although we don't control the monitoring and enforcement machinery, we can place effective demands on it that they can't brush aside. At the very least this would allow us to expose more clearly the real actions and intentions of those in power.

The present conflict is essentially a civil war rather than one between nations. We have to return to the traditions of unity established in Tito's Yugoslavia. In contrast to the emphasis on ethnic groups and nations, we should revive the old language of class, helping the progressive forces in each camp to cut across chauvinism and begin to undermine their reactionary leaders.

The introduction of capitalism to the region has brought nothing but conflict and misery to the vast majority. We should demand a democratic socialist federation of Yugoslavia - a federation that genuinely respects the various cultural and religious differences, and enables free movement and intercourse.

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West fostered the split-up

Vic Jones
Sutton and Cheam CLP

'BALKANISATION' has always been considered an unmitigated curse - little statelets in perpetual conflict. It ceased in the Balkans themselves with the formation of a unified Yugoslav state, which lasted - apart from Hitler's intervention - from 1918 to the 1990s. But local power-hungry politicians in Yugoslavia took what were formerly just internal administrative boundaries and declared them inviolable international frontiers.

First to go was Slovenia. It now has a President of the Republic, a national flag, a national anthem, a seat at UNO and an army bristling with bayonets. It has a population less than that of Yorkshire. Then Croatia, then Bosnia. Instead of using their overwhelming influence to crush this thing in the shell, the western powers went to Yugoslavia and did exactly the opposite of what they deemed right and proper for themselves, i.e., greater federalisation, ever greater unity, both political and economic.

They supported the forces of fragmentation, of petty nationalism, and applied sanctions against those who wished to oppose this, to maintain the Federation. If they'd done otherwise and applied sanctions against those local warlords who wanted their own fiefdoms there's not the slightest doubt that the rivers of blood that now flow in the Balkans would never have happened.

To justify themselves they demonise the Serbs - the main group that has opposed fragmentation. True enough, the Serbs are demons. At least, their warlords are. But so are the other war lords. Tudjman of Croatia, for example, recently carried out 'ethnic cleansing' which made the Serbs look like amateurs. He launched an unprovoked attack against Krajina whose only crime was that it wanted to stay in Yugoslavia and not join Tudjman's sub-state.

Day by day we are given false pictures. The politicians in Sarajevo, for example, are described as 'democratic'. But the truth is that the majority of people in their concept of 'Bosnia' - Serbs and Croats - do not wish to be citizens of that state. The solution to this sorry mess is already known - federation. It worked from 1918 to 1990 - no kids shelled in the streets, no ethnic cleansing. Some way or other it's got to be brought back. Supplying this side or that can do nothing but delay the day.

A war about lines of partition

Dave Holland
Hackney South CLP

I WAS SORRY to see *Briefing* calling for the lifting of the arms embargo against Bosnia (but not presumably against other combatants) and giving space to John Strawson's call for an offensive military alliance by the UN with the Bosnian Government against the Serbs. Strawson's piece makes clear what is only implied in the call for selective lifting of the embargo.

The only purpose of undertaking large-scale arms supplies to the Bosnian Government would be to equip it to launch a major offensive to gain control of territory currently held by Serb forces. Martin Thomas regrets the recent ousting of more than a hundred thousand Serbs by Croatian forces from the Krajina. I cannot see how the exodus of more than half a million Serbs from Bosnia - the likely consequence of a successful offensive by Bosnian Government forces - will be any more constructive.

If it was possible to save Bosnia-Herzegovina, then it would have been possible to save Yugoslavia. Unfortunately, neither is possible. In a war to decide the partition between Serb territory and that controlled by a 'Croat-Muslim Federation,' dominated by Croatia, I will not take sides. John Turkie refers to the "genocidal attack on Srebrenica" as "breaking the camel's back" and sure to drive even the reluctant into the Bosnian Government's camp.

If this horrific event is to be seen in context, however, it is worth recalling that in excess of 40,000 Serbs were expelled from central Bosnia by the Bosnian army and from western Slavonia by the Croats in the weeks immediately preceding the Serb attacks on the enclaves (*Economist* 15.7.95). According to Colonel Karremans, commander of a Dutch UN battalion based in Srebrenica, the Bosnian Muslims had burned around 200 Serb villages in the area surrounding the city (*Economist* 5.8.95).

Martin Thomas refers to "Serb imperialism" as "the driving force behind the wars in ex-Yugoslavia." The conduct of the various Serb leaderships has been disgusting. However, the use of the term imperialism in this context is at best confusing and misleading. In the socialist tradition, imperialism is a term used to describe the economic power backed by diplomacy and on occasion by force, wielded by the major capitalist powers over the rest of the world.

In this sense, the USA, Germany, Britain, France and Japan are imperialist powers. None of the weak Balkan statelets can usefully be described in this way. The distinction is important because it raises the whole question of the impact of outside interests in this strategically important region. Unlike John Strawson, I do not believe that NATO armies are likely to have any progressive role in military intervention abroad. Acting as cheerleaders for a war alliance by the imperialist states against Serbia will not enhance the independence or sovereignty of anyone in the Balkans.

Serbs for Bosnia

Mike Phipps
Brent South CLP

"I AM A Montenegrin. I have lived in Sarajevo for thirty years. I could have left for Montenegro when the shelling started but I stayed. It has been my most precious experience. In Sarajevo in the last three and a half years I have learned the meaning of humanity. The most harmful thing would be for Bosnia to disappear." So spoke a member of the Serb Civic Forum at the recent Bosnia Forum in London.

The Serb Civic Forum is living proof of Bosnia's multi-ethnic, pluralist nature. These are Serbs who have chosen to remain in Bosnia despite the war. The 12-strong delegation included academics, the President of the Bosnian Lawyers' Federation and a leading general in the Bosnian army.

The Bosnia Forum was called by the Bosnia Solidarity Campaign. There were reports from the campaign's non-stop picket outside Downing Street, as well as delegates from France, Spain and Ireland.

Local campaign groups have sprung up and delegates reported from Oxford, Powys, Teesside, Leicester and Brighton. Many speakers called for a proper democratic structure for the campaign. The organisers became defensive about this, a pity given the urgency of solidarity.

Contact: Bosnia Solidarity Campaign, 12 Flitcroft Street, London WC2 8DJ (0171-240 7992).

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Nigeria: securing a democratic society

Sean Coyne interviews a comrade in the forefront of the struggle for a democratic socialist Nigeria. For personal security reasons we have omitted his name; we do however send him our warmest solidarity greetings and gratitude.

Q. How would you assess the present situation in Nigeria?

A. I think it is quite hard for people outside to appreciate the complexities of the Nigerian situation.

First, we have a ruthless military regime which until very recently has enjoyed the support of the great western powers.

Secondly, the long-term impact of military rule under one junta or another since independence has seriously demobilised political activity.

Thirdly, Nigeria is not a poor country in terms of national resources. It still stands at number six among the oil-producing states. This has provided successive military regimes with massive buying power. They have bought the so-called political elite, the local agents of the multi-nationals and the banks, both domestic and international. They have bought many of those who started their political careers as democrats and radicals and who are now lap dogs. The military has created almost a parallel state for itself, comprising schools, hospitals, university places and access to foreign travel. They are experts in seduction.

Fourthly, Nigeria is a large country with many deeply entrenched traditions. The regime has played one tradition off against another. North against South; Christian against Muslim. All of these factors are at work, and they interact continuously.

Q. We have had reports that the Abacha regime has been executing rivals in the military, and imprisoning without charging and trying a large number of human rights activists and trade unionists.

A. This is true and it is happening at all levels. It's a tragedy that only the big names receive international attention. The former head of state, General Obasanjo...is a case in point. But there are many many more who have been working away quietly at local level, trying to popularise the need for democratic government and for grass-roots organisations. Recently, for example, Chima Ubani was arrested without charge and is being held secretly by the military. We are gravely concerned about him. Chima was a well-known student activist and democratic socialist who has been in the forefront of the democracy campaign. He is widely respected for his principled stand and because he is known to be absolutely incorruptible. There are many others.

Q. That brings us to the question of an organised opposition. How do you assess the major players?

A. Clearly the trade union movement has a central role to play in securing a democratic society but there is a lot of work to be done in the movement also. There is a need to ensure that there is an accountable and dynamic leadership. So many opportunities have been lost because of the buying power of the regime and a tendency towards incorporation, instead of resolutely defending the right of workers' organisations to be independent of the state. However, to ignore the potential of the Nigerian working class despite a few corrupt leaders is a grave error of judgement.

On the political front there is a range of organisations which have focused on the democratic struggle and some of them undertake useful work. But there is still a lack of trust and this leads to back-room manoeuvring which ultimately undermines the growth of open and democratic political discussion and united action. Politically these organisations could be described loosely as social democratic in character. There are groups who take a more radical position and call for socialist transformation, but these organisations are small and starved of resources although they do represent an important layer of activists. They operate virtually clandestinely at the moment, which is understandable given the situation but it does impede their ability to reach wider layers. But only a fool would ignore them or deny them respect for their courage. They themselves have undergone something of a reappraisal following the collapse of eastern Europe but they have been stirred by events in South Africa and elsewhere.

Q. You do not sound too pessimistic?

A. Of course not. The regime is crumbling, the trade unions have not been smashed, we have not had a bloody civil or ethnic war and there are thousands of young activists who are prepared to act, prepared to study the situation and join the fight against corruption and tyranny. There is much to be hopeful about.

Q. But it's not going to be easy?

A. No one ever said it would be. We have to simply keep struggling to lay the foundations for a new society. There will be new challenges every single day. There will be betrayals, there will be small steps forward and there will be times when we scratch our heads and ask ourselves what is to be done. But the struggle for socialism is like that. It ebbs and flows.

Q.And a message for *Briefing* readers?

A. Keep buying *Briefing* for a start. The world is a small place, and news of struggles elsewhere, not just the heroic victories but also the problematical areas, is indispensable to all of us.

It is likely that Nigeria will become the target for democratic activists all over the world, which is really marvellous and encouraging, especially if it helps to expose the hypocrisy of the western powers who sell arms to the regime and extend them credit. *Briefing* readers can help to ensure that the workers of Nigeria are also provided with a platform, that the real democrats, those with an accountable base, not just those with an accountant's base, also get a hearing. They are the ones who really count. Thank you, comrades.

Greetings to conference delegates from Stan Newens MEP

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ANC says no to bigots



Gay Pride Festival, Brockwell Park. PHOTO: Paul Mattsson

Gerald Kraak, a member of the fundraising forum for the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality in South Africa, interviews Cheryl Carolus, the ANC's Deputy General Secretary, on South Africa's new commitment to equality.

SOUTH AFRICA'S interim constitution is currently the only one in the world which outlaws discrimination on the basis of sexuality. Last year 33 organisations formed the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality to lobby for the retention of the equality clause in the final constitution currently being drafted by the Constituent Assembly.

In June the Theme Committee on Fundamental Rights of the Constituent Assembly endorsed the retention of the clause with the support of all the major political parties. Even the National Party, which in the past sent hundreds of men to prison on sodomy charges and actively harassed the gay and lesbian community, came on board.

The Coalition counts on the support of the ANC. But how far has it come since 1987 when Ruth Momphati and Solly Smith - senior officials in the movement's London office - caused a storm of protest in the anti-apartheid movement when they criticised the gay liberation movement? Momphati said that homosexuality was "not normal" and was confined to the wealthier sections of the white community. Smith, for his part, felt that gay rights were a diversion from the struggle for national liberation. More recently supporters of Winnie Mandela, demonstrating outside her trial, carried placards declaring that homosexuality is 'un-African'.

Cheryl Carolus, the ANC's leading advocate of gay and lesbian rights, says that her views reflect the party's official position. "The ANC championed the inclusion of the equality clause in the interim constitution. Other parties supported us but we were the ones to put it on the table. The ANC's support is also going to be crucial because we constitute more than 60% of the Constituent Assembly. We believe in equality and the right of people to choose how they conduct their lives."

But Carolus concedes that the position articulated by the ANC leadership is probably not reflected among its rank and file. "The ANC is made up of very ordinary South Africans who bring with them many of the prejudices that exist in society as a whole. Those of us who support the equality clause need to take cognisance of this fact." Ordinary people still need to be won over.

She emphatically rejects the notion that homosexuality is un-African. "We have to start working to explode the myth that there are no black homosexuals or lesbians. The debate has never been picked up in a substantive way in the black community. Our struggle must be won through large-scale engagement with our communities and not just with the politicians in the Constituent Assembly".

Clearly the ANC has moved on from 1987. But does Carolus think that it would be possible for an openly gay person to hold high office in the ANC - the acid test? "I would say unequivocally yes. A gay person could hold senior office in the ANC. It would be tough because there will be people who will oppose and snipe, especially where there is competition for leadership. Edwin Cameron had very strong backing from the ANC when he was nominated for the Constitutional Court and he is a gay activist. There are others like Sheila Lapinsky, an ANC member, who was appointed to the strategic management team of the Health Ministry in the Western Cape - she has always represented the Organisation for Gay and Lesbians Action."

How does Carolus rate the Coalition's chances of success in the Constituent Assembly? "Notice has already been given that the equality cause will be hotly contested. There could be attempts to horse-trade and that's why I think that we need to make sure that we fight for the listing of specific rights. The ANC's position has been to oppose those who felt that we should go for generalities in the constitution. Precisely because we have dealt with a past of oppression and exploitation we feel the need to list the areas where there is still oppression.

"The people who are anti the equality clause are the same people who are anti the right to abortion and pro-capital punishment. They are bigots and anti-democrats. That's another reason why we need to fight this as a broad human rights approach rather than as a gay-rights-only issue. It will be hard then for any political party of substance to oppose it."

In Cheryl Carolus the Coalition has a staunch and valued ally. But as Carolus has been at pains to stress, the clause will constitute only a formal legal victory. If we rely solely on legislative fiat to unearth the roots of homophobia we risk a backlash. In Carolus's parting words we need to engage with the communities. There is work to be done.❑

● A support committee for the National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality has been set up in London.If you would like more information, please write to: National Coalition for Gay and Lesbian Equality - South Africa, 2nd Floor, Canon Collins House, 64 Essex Road, London N1 8LR.

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Beijing: a forward step for women?

Leonora Lloyd assesses the UN Women's Conference.

THE LARGEST ever UN Women's Conference is over. What has been achieved?

It started with considerable doubts. Was China, with its anti-women policies, lack of democracy and attacks on Tibet the right place to hold the conference? Would real Chinese women get anything from the conference being held in their midst? Most important of all, could any sort of meaningful agreement be reached on the final text for the proposed Platform of Action, which women's groups and governments around the world had been working on for the last two years or so?

The NGO conference was all that everyone feared: inadequately housed and resourced, with threatening security ever present.

But it was also a giant get-together of women from around the world, coming from all kinds of activist and grass roots movements, representing every major feminist (and often anti-feminist) concern. It was a great cultural event, but above all it was about politics and it got things done, concentrating on influencing the official conference going on ten miles away.

I spoke to Annette Lawson, chair of the Fawcett Society, who took part as a delegate from the international charity Womenkind. She stressed that some positive things have come out of Beijing. The Final Platform contains for the first time a commitment from governments to implement pledges rather than just 'work towards' goals. It includes a commitment to find additional resources from governments and private sources.

The UN has agreed to a high-level appointment of a woman to monitor the implementation of the platform. The concern is that this woman should be truly independent and not simply a supporter of the present leadership.

The attendance of the Vatican was questioned. Before the conference started, the Pope issued a statement 'apologising' to the women of the world - for not taking seriously enough their god-given role as mothers and wives! His decision to have the 20 strong Vatican delegation headed by a US woman was seen as a master stroke, but it was a man in the delegation who condemned the European Union as being 'anti-family' and protested about the wording of the Final Platform.

Overall, it was a positive conference, one of the most important ever held, with many of the themes of earlier conferences on women and on issues such as population and development coming together in the Final Platform.

South Africa: the inequalities remain

Alan Simpson MP has just returned from a tour of South Africa, having spent the summer raising cash to take cricket kit out to children in the townships.

THE SPIRIT of forgiveness and reconciliation among black communities sits inexplicably alongside huge unmoving inequalities. Private schools in Johannesburg had lavish cricket facilities whilst the kids in Alexandra and Soweto had only the cricket kit we took out and donated to them.

In Alexandra, communal evening fires reminded you of the lack of gas or electricity in the townships, while men and women wandered round with mobile phones - the only telephone system that worked for them. Some of the hospital workers were on strike for better pay. In the wards, women were five to a bed, with six sharing a mattress underneath. Outside in Soweto, Sister Eva ran the health centre with no medicines or dressings. The owner of one of the private cricket pitches we played on had a photo of his private helicopter hovering over the wicket to dry it out in order that the arranged match could take place. At a cost of some £10,000, it was the sort of magnanimous gesture which never reached the townships.

Nelson Mandela's bodyguards find him a nightmare because he just wanders off to talk to people. He may be the only national leader who had a greater risk of being hugged to death than being assassinated. But all his patience and humility can't paper over the cynical response of the old white establishment. When the ANC announced a major housebuilding programme, the monopoly owners of building supplies doubled the price of bricks.

Seven major conglomerates dominate the South African economy. Their power is awesome, their interest in redistributive policies - which would deliver stability and opportunity during the transition - is almost negligible.

Worse than this, the outgoing National Party saddled the ANC with huge debts - not just from the war, but from a lavish pension scheme that they financed by forcing bonds onto the pension funds before the election. This is the millstone which must be moved if the ANC is to deliver, for their society as well as their communities.

When we met Mandela, he talked in humble terms about reconciliation and redistribution. He talked of patience and the huge steps already being taken along the road to a genuinely fair and open democracy. In the townships and rural areas, where poverty is endemic and crime becoming epidemic, the demand for signs of tangible change are likely to be more short-term. Whether this is a message which the corporate owners of capital in South Africa either hear or care about, is another matter.

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River out of Eden

Our Science correspondent, Les Hearn, reports: Richard (Selfish Gene) Dawkins' latest book is a fascinating account of evolution. Dawkins shows how natural selection, beautiful in its simplicity, has given rise to a vast complexity of living forms, without the aid of any supernatural force. Dawkins is one scientist willing to state that there is no need for a god in the natural world.

Dawkins' 'river' is a river of information through time, of genes, made of the DNA found in living cells. They flow along, passed from parents to children. Within each branch (species), the genes mix with each other through the process of sex.

Going forward in time, branches split in two as new species form. Others dry out and disappear as species become extinct. Going back from any individual, there is an unbroken river of genes: every one of our ancestors successfully produced at least one offspring, unlike many of their fellows.

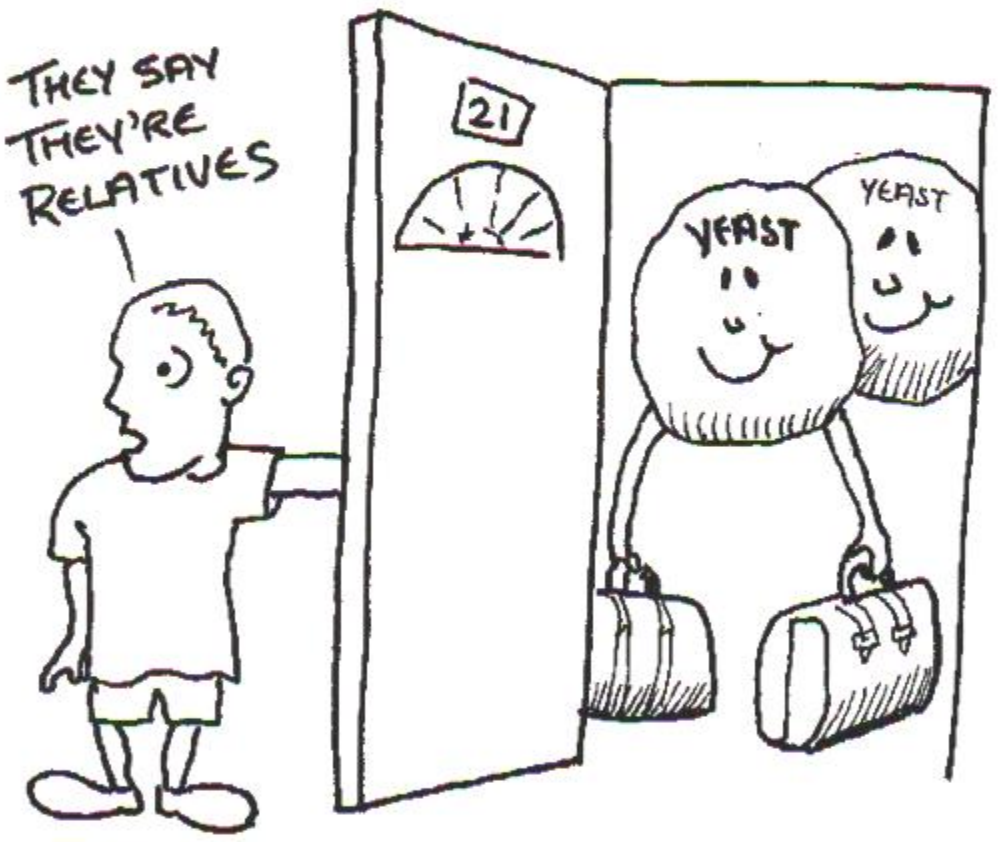
What was special about ancestors was their genes. Ancestors tend to possess more successful genes, non-ancestors less successful. And what makes a successful gene? Dawkins puts it simply: "Genes survive down the ages only if they are good at building bodies that are good at living and reproducing."

The other part of the evolution story explains how new genes can come into being. Darwin had no idea how evolution operated, though the evidence was overwhelming that it did. 42 years ago, Watson and Crick discovered the structure of DNA and instantly saw that this explained the facts of inheritance.

The DNA information is digital and can be copied extremely reliably but, even so, mistakes or damage can occur. Hence different genes may arise, usually to the detriment of the organism's reproductive capability, but sometimes to its benefit. In that case, the new gene will tend to be passed on more successfully.

Mutations tend to arise fairly regularly through time so genes in different branches of the river differ more and more in make-up, allowing 'family trees' of species to be constructed. This tells us our last ancestor in common with yeast lived over one billion years ago, but that monkeys lived about 25 million years ago.

A particular part of our DNA is found in tiny cells within cells, or the mitochondria. Herds of tiny work-horses descended from bacteria captured perhaps 3 billion years ago. These pass to us in our mother's egg and are the legacy of a distant ancestor in the purely female line. Comparing mitochondrial DNA in people from all parts of the world shows the last common female ancestor of all humans probably lived in Africa some 200 thousand years ago. Dubbed the 'Mitochondrial Eve', her story, argues Dawkins, is more intriguing than that of the biblical Eve.



Seen as a threat to faith, Darwin's theory is often attacked by 'creationists'. Even some scientists cannot see how evolution by natural selection can explain the existence of, for example, the eye or of an orchid flower that resembles so closely a female wasp that a male tries to mate with it and carries its pollen to others like it. This was the subject of a letter to Dawkins from a former atheist, now a Christian minister after deciding that such mimicry could not have come into existence by gradual steps.

Dawkins calls this 'Argument from Personal Incredulity' and shows that there are many examples where animals with far bigger brains are fooled by the most feeble resemblances. Male sticklebacks have red bellies and threaten other males and crude dummies with red bellies. Females with swollen egg-filled bellies elicit a mating display from male sticklebacks, but so does anything with a well-rounded appearance, including a pear.

What about the evolution of the eye? Evolution requires each step to be an improvement. Faced with the creationist's question, "What is the use of half an eye?", Dawkins replies that it is 1% better than 49% of an eye, and so on. The eye has evolved some 45 separate times in nine basic patterns. Computer simulations show that eyes can evolve quite easily from light-sensitive skin and there has been enough time for them to evolve many more than 45 times.

Dawkins lays out his materialist and atheist stall with a discussion of "God's Utility Function" (GUF). A utility function (UF) is something which is maximised. Dawkins looks at a cheetah's body and decides that, if designed by God, the purpose was to maximise the death of antelopes and produce more cheetahs. Looking at an antelope's body, he finds the opposite UF, survival of antelopes and starvation of cheetahs. These are contradictory UFs, unless God is "a sadist who enjoys spectator blood sports". Dawkins replaces GUF with the true UF of life, to maximise DNA survival. This explains why cheetahs are driven to kill antelopes and antelopes to try to starve cheetahs.

Theologians debate the problem of suffering. Dawkins argues we should expect "meaningless tragedies" and "equally meaningless good fortune" in a world of "electrons and selfish genes". The universe is as we would expect if there were "no design, no purpose, no evil and no good, nothing but blind, pitiless indifference ... DNA neither knows or cares. DNA just is. And we dance to its music."

River out of Eden, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1995. £9.99.

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Zapatistas speak!

Mike Phipps reviews *Zapatistas in their own words*, £1.50 from DS4A, Box 8, 82 Coulston Street, Bristol BS1 5BB.

THIS booklet reproduces an interview with Comandante Marcos of the Mexican EZLN (Zapatista Liberation Army), taken from the Internet. Its interest lies in the light it throws on the ideology of the Zapatistas who first came to world attention with their uprising on 1st January 1994.

According to Marcos, the Zapatistas do not see themselves as guerrillas in the tradition of authoritarian Leninism. They reject the idea of a centralised command structure in favour of decision-making by consensus and consultation. They query the idea of seizing state power, preferring to open up a democratic space where ideas and discussions, parties and groups, can flourish.

Above all, they question the vanguard role of the working class and instead claim to have fused the Marxist approach with other traditions. As Marcos says: "If we had been orthodox leftists, we would never have worked with indigenous peoples. Now, today, I believe there are many theories in crisis. Who would have thought that it would be the indigenous peoples who would provoke all of this? Not even in the Leninist conception of the weakest link was it thought that it might be the indigenous peoples."

Another departure from guerrilla traditions in Latin America is the high level of participation of women in the Zapatista army. About one-third of the EZLN are women, and in many of its units the only woman is the commander. The interview explores some of the problems this has raised.

Coates on unemployment

Mike Phipps reviews Ken Coates's *The Right to Work*, published by Spokesman Books, £6.99.

Fewer than 600,000 workers under the age of 21 now have a full-time job. The amount they earn has also fallen dramatically over the last 17 years, a new book by Labour MEP Ken Coates reveals.

The Right to Work is a scholarly overview of recent trends in unemployment in both Britain and the European Union. It shows how the Government fiddles the figures, and how unemployment increases crime.

The concluding section charts how attempts by Labour spokespersons to commit the Party to concrete measures of job creation were undermined by the 'modernising' wing, including Kinnock, from 1987 onwards. It cites Blair's "fury" at former leader John Smith's speech committing Labour to full employment in 1993.

Coates calls for EU-wide action to achieve full employment and has written a companion volume on "Putting Europe Back to Work".

The Pall-Bearers

By Kathleen McPhilemy

Four women in black with beautiful faces
shoulder the coffin that holds their brother
the second they've buried. Perfectly
choreographed
with faultless timing they reach the grave.

Who can touch them now or remember
their little fat legs in wrinkled knee-socks?
Who can imagine them now in the office
drinking coffee out of plastic cups?

They have wrapped themselves in the sound
of the sea
as it breaks all winter on barren coasts;
they ghost by night through the roads of
the hinterland
fourfold rendering of an ancient mirage.

Did you know what you did when you
dropped your poison
as they sat on your knee or drowsed before
sleep?
Did you count the cost in lovers and
brothers
as you reared them up to the art of sorrow?

● Kathleen McPhilemy was brought up in Northern Ireland. Katabasis has just published her second book of poems, *A Tented Peace*.

Any other business

"Labour's promises to run the economy better and differently mean little. An election win on such terms would not be a victory, but a surrender." - Bryan Gould

"I'm a politician, not a psychiatrist, but if people seriously think that by going back to where we were 10 or 12 years ago we are going to win power, then they require not leadership, but therapy. We've got to smash that complacency out of the system." - Tony Blair

"The role of democratic socialism is not to be an ambulanceman to capitalism." - Kevin McNamara

"They should attack me, not the people working for me." - Tony Blair

"Tony Blair made a fresh grab for Tory clothes yesterday, saying that only a Labour Government could complete the social and economic revolution begun by Margaret Thatcher in the 1980s". - *The Times*

"Some of the speeches sound more like a Tory conference than the TUC." - Equity delegate to the TUC (and Blair's father-in-law), Tony Booth

"Labour played fast and loose with the truth in [the Littleborough and Saddleworth] byelection campaign. It fought a dirty campaign. It didn't deserve to win that way, and frankly I'm glad that it didn't" - Martin Kettle, *The Guardian*

"Major has climbed into the gutter alongside the unfortunate beggars themselves. It is simply outrageous that he should attack the victims of his party's divisive social policies over the last 15 years ... There are no depths to which they will not sink in their search for votes." - Jack Straw, October 1994.

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Farringdon Road follies

What's afoot at the ***Guardian***? The erstwhile modernisers' mouthpiece has become a hotbed of ani-Blairite intrigue - at least that's how it's seen in the leader's office.

Policy editor **Martin Kettle**, not so long ago Blair's most ardent champion, has been using his column and *Guardian* editorials to warn the leader that he is pissing off a lot of important people. Caustic commentary on the modernisers has also appeared in the *Guardian*'s pages under the by-lines of David McKie, Matthew Norman, Roy Hattersley, Paul Foot and others.

The exposure of the Philip Gould memorandum was the final straw. Blair's office briefed journalists from other papers to the effect that "a hard left clique" had taken over news coverage at the *Guardian*.

In the *Observer*, Andy McSmith highlighted the sinister fact that the Gould document had been leaked to **Seumas Milne**, whose associates, McSmith reported, included people on the extreme left of the Party. Mc Smith is known as one of the country's most gullible hacks, regularly reproducing Blair's briefings verbatim without even bothering to note any response from the Leader's critics. (And never mind that McSmith's biography of John Smith was published by Verso, which also published The Enemy Within, Milne's book on Maxwell, MI5 and the miners.) Stephen Castle in the *Independent on Sunday* took the same line.

It seems that Milne is guilty of the twin sins of 1) not covering up the Gould leak and 2) reporting its contents accurately in the *Guardian*.

Blair's counter-attack on the *Guardian* - aided from within by Patrick Wintour - was badly misjudged. Certainly an attempt to confront senior *Guardian* staff mob handed backfired badly, doing the leader more harm than good. Another blunder born of Blairite arrogance.

Unlike his predecessor Peter Preston, the new *Guardian* editor Alan Rusbridger has no political agenda of his own. Preoccupied with stuffing his paper with celebrity interviews and post-modernist drivel about fashion, sex, football and pop music, Rusbridger was unimpressed by hectoring phone calls from the Leader of the Opposition or threats from his press secretary, Alastair Campbell.

There is a simple explanation for the cracks in the Blairite monolith at Farringdon Road. It is, in the words of Labour's new Clause IV, "the rigour of competition and the enterprise of the market". There are a lot of people out there who think the Labour leader is a glib poseur. And they buy newspapers.

Spin doctors out of synch

Watching the modernisers desperately trying to impart a favourable spin to the leaked Gould document was sheer delight.

Among those shamelessly hustling to limit the damage to Blair was **Peter Kellner**, who made a fool of himself on Newsnight.

Kellner's problem was he couldn't decide whether to attack the *Guardian* account as inaccurate (and he had been assured it was so by a "source very close to the document", i.e. its author) or to dismiss it as a perfectly sensible restatement of Mr Blair's perfectly sensible ideas for modernising the Party. Kellner's magical talents as a media psephologist (amazingly his figures always prove that his own political prejudices are correct) betrayed him as he sweated to reconcile the conflicting spin put on the Gould story by Alastair Campbell and Peter Mandelson.

Interestingly, Blair's office was keen to make clear that Peter Mandelson had nothing to do with the document. Has the Leader finally twigged that Mandelson is a widely despised figure and that association with him does his image no good at all?

Caught red handed

Press accounts of the battle for the leadership of the **Ulster Unionists** have described **John Taylor** MP as a "moderate". None have yet reported that this "moderate" joined Le Pen's Front National in the Technical Group of the European Right when he was a Euro-MP, giving them additional Euro-dosh for recruiting a member from an extra state.

Betrayal of Trust

It's not just the fat-cat bosses in private business that are getting more rotund under the Tories. Members of Britain's largest charity, the **National Trust**, are up in arms over a whopping 500% pay rise awarded to their chairman, **Lord Chorley**.

His Lordship was appointed to the part-time post on the understanding that he would receive an honorarium of £5,000 a year; this is being upped to £30,000 on the spurious grounds that the post shouldn't just be open to those with private means.

So why not delay the rise until a less wealthy person is appointed? After all, as a former partner with leading accountants Coopers & Lybrand, Chorley must be able to afford his own bus fares to and from Trust functions.

An outcry is expected at the Trust's AGM in Bournemouth in November.

Any Trust members reading this may like to write "He's not worth the dosh" on their AGM ballot forms when they arrive. Alternatively, travel down to Bournemouth for the AGM and claim back the first-class fare.

Enver speaks!

Circle 33, one of Britain's leading housing associations, has decided to refinance its debts through high risk derivatives.

Never mind that Orange County USA went bankrupt through speculating in derivatives, **Margaret Hodge** MP, Circle 33's chair, confidently described the housing association as "a blue chip organisation".

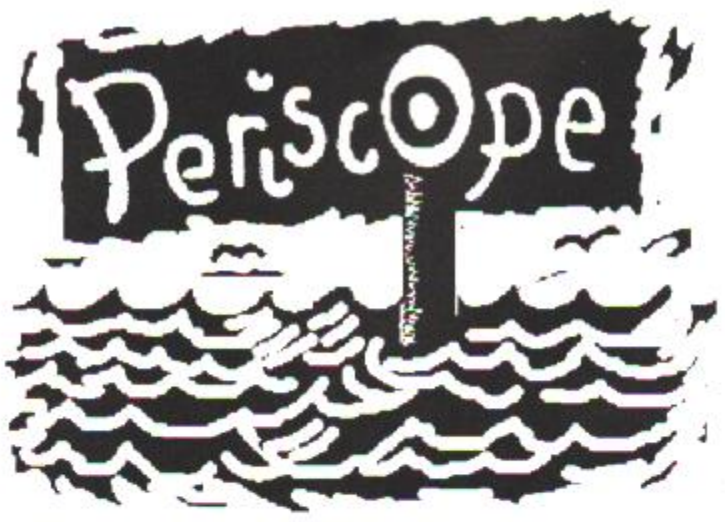
According to the *Independent*, "prior to Mrs Hodge's appointment tenant representatives were elected, but are now 'selected' by Circle 33's management. Mrs Hodge also described a group of aggrieved tenants as 'nobodies'."

For love of Blair

Alan Johnson, General Secretary of the CWU (and Labour NEC member-in-waiting), is setting new standards for Blairite democracy. The CWU has submitted a motion to Labour Party Conference that contradicts its own conference policy!

The very first CWU conference in 1995 called for the total repeal of Tory anti-union laws and their replacement with a framework of collective workers' rights - including rights to solidarity action, urgent defensive action, and civil immunities. The right of trade unionists to determine their own rulebook is also CWU policy.

Yet at the Executive meeting which chose the CWU motions to Labour Party Conference, our Alan produced a motion that does not call for total repeal and contradicts the rights called for by conference. Having convinced the Executive that such a stand is the only reasonable one (Blair is right, my members are wrong), he and joint general secretary Tony Young expressed surprise when branch activists complained that the NEC



has been too creative with union policy.

Clearly, an income of more than £50,000 dulls the political memory.

A right Charley

Not content with persecuting pheasants, **Prince Charles**'s recent shooting party managed to bag a peasant too.

On Earl Peel's moor in North Yorkshire his Private Secretary and Treasurer, Commander Aylard, managed to mistake one of the local beaters (£25 a day, cash-in-hand, no questions asked) for a grouse, and shot him. Lucky he didn't mistake him for a hunt saboteur or a rambler, or the poor unfortunate might never have recovered.

Mad bigot on mad bigots

"I am utterly opposed to ditching the deterrent when so many mad bigots are trying to get hold of nuclear technology," said **Bernard Ingham**, formerly Thatcher's Press Secretary, last month. Now he knows how the Soviet Union felt about his old boss!

MSF London Regional Council

Minimum Wage: No Less than £4.15 per hour

President: Sue Michie

Secretary: Hugh MacGrillen

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Your letters are welcome but please keep them short...

WRITE TO:
Labour Left Briefing
PO Box 2378,
London E5 9QU

AS secretary of a branch that has nominated Roger Bannister for Unison General Secretary, I would like to respond to the many distortions and omissions in Geoff Martin's article in your September issue.

Geoff caricatures the left within the former NALGO component of Unison in a way that I would expect from a former NUPE full timer raised in the politics of the Communist Party, not from somebody who claims to be working to see the false divisions between the former partner unions in Unison overcome.

Geoff fails to mention Roger Bannister's platform. It is the policies he is fighting on, including national action to defend jobs and conditions, support for self organisation and lay member control, that are the reason for our support. The issue of Roger supporting candidates against the Labour Party is irrelevant. The election is for the General Secretary of Unison, not the Labour Party!

Geoff's also falls to mention the political context of Bickerstaffe's campaign. He ignores the open encouragement being given to paid staff to campaign for Bickerstaffe, the clear promotion of Bickerstaffe within Unison's journals and the intimidation that those who support alternative candidates have received from full time officials and leading lay activists. He must be aware that this is part and parcel of Bickerstaffe's campaign. But in his desire to "line up alongside the geezer" he is prepared to ignore all this.



This election is about Unison remaining under the control of its membership. It would have been better if all the left within the union could have agreed on one candidate, standing on an agreed programme. As this was not possible, Roger Bannister's campaign offers the best opportunity for advancing the interests of Unison members in the current election.

No amount of scrappy journalistic phrases, cheap jibes and misrepresentation can avoid that conclusion. It is Geoff and the others on the left who will be looking gormless in the future if Bickerstaffe is elected, not those branches who have supported alternative candidates.

Mike Tucker
Southampton Unison

I LIKE Geoff Martin, I too will be backing Rodney Bickerstaffe in the Unison General Secretary elections. Without any serious female and left candidate for General Secretary of a union with two-thirds female membership, we have little alternative.

However, what Unison could do without in the difficult process of making Unison a reality, are some of Geoff's more arrogant and divisive statements.

First, to still be referring to ex-NALGO, ex-NUPE and ex-COHSE members of Unison, two years into the merger, borders on the sectarian. Geoff should remember that in 1996 many 'ex-NALGO' Labour Party activitists will also become part of the section of Unison affiliated to the Labour Party.

Secondly, Geoff's presumption that all manual workers are classed as 'right wing' by some on the left, does nothing to assist the real efforts being made in the union at all levels to break down artificial barriers i.e. 'single-table bargaining'.

Thirdly, there is no doubt that the Unison APF has a raft of solid and socialist policies - fair play to you, mate! Long may these continue to be our policies.

However, what I want from Bickerstaffe is not just the 'defence' of these policies in the movement at large, but the vigorous pursuit of them at the TUC and Labour Party Conference. Policies are not to be worn like medals - they are tools to build with. Will Bick deliver?

Geoff Lumley
Isle of Wight CLP and Unison

I notice a contradiction, probably dialectical, in your coverage of affairs in Unison. First, you publish an article which quite rightly celebrates the Sheffield library workers victory. Although supported by the union nationally this dispute was won by rank and file solidarity from below.

Then Geoff Martin agonizes over whether it should be Bannister or Bickerstaffe to run the union. I can think of worse Unison leaders. However, what is wrong with the candidate who represents the fighting tradition of struggle from below - Yunus Bakhsh - which you so admire at Sheffield?

Keith Flett
Tottenham

I was flabbergasted by the article on Unison by Geoff Martin. It was factually incorrect, and its political stand was demolished within a couple of weeks of its publication.

The selection by the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison, the main broad left, of Roger Bannister as its candidate for General Secretary was not taken at a meeting which included currents hostile to the CFDU as claimed. It was taken at a subsequent meeting on the basis of one delegate per Unison branch affiliated to the CFDU.

One of the main reasons why the CFDU decided to stand a candidate against Rodney Bickerstaffe was to raise the need for national industrial action against the attacks we face. The recent sell-out in health is a pertinent example. Unison's leaders are recommending acceptance of local pay bargaining, yet the ballot result expected by all was for rejection of local pay and for industrial action to maintain national bargaining.

Another important issue is the defence of Unison's policy of a £4.15p minimum wage. The CFDU did welcome Bickerstaffe's support of the Unison's defence of the old Clause IV. However, Unison's TUC delegation was bullied by Bickerstaffe to withdraw its amendment setting a figure of £4.15p for the sake of pre-election unity with Tony Blair. Union leaders, including Bickerstaffe, are now reported to support the Labour Party's Low Pay Commission where a minimum wage will be set in agreement with employers. On that basis we can kiss goodbye to a decent level for a minimum wage, let alone £4.15p.

Voting for Roger Bannister will be voting for fighting back and for democracy in Unison.

Fred Leplat
Islington Unison
London CFDU Convenor

READERS of this issue will note that Briefing's slogan of many years - 'Labour take the power!' - has vanished from the front page. As part of our relaunch, but against my vote, the EB decided to have no slogan, pending a debate.

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on a possible alternative next month.

As one of these responsible for burdening *Briefing* with an anachronistic, unreconstructedly class struggle slogan over the past fifteen years, let me concede that it no longer resonates in these new and difficult times. I suggest 'Labour - take the piss!' as the most fitting alternative, in line with current trends. There may be comrades who still regret the loss of our old fighting slogan, forged in more optimistic times. Never lose hope. The Blair project will unravel and we'll be back.

Chris Knight
Lewisham

JOHN Selwyn Gummer, no less, has proposed planning targets for the private water companies to reduce leakage. Have the Tories finally realised that the unfettered free market does not work in the public interest?

Planning, taking into account social and ecological concerns, is needed in the water industry as in all utilities. Wouldn't it be infinitely more sensible if utilities were publicly owned and their profits reinvested for the common good, rather than paid as dividends to private shareholders?

Clause IV rests in peace. But the underlying debate must continue. Community ownership is an absolute prerequisite for socialism in the modern age.

Simon Hewitt
Isle of Wight

MAY I correct the information on MSF given in John MCIlroy's article in the September *Briefing*. The situation is exactly the opposite of what he wrote. The MSF leadership was condemned at our last conference for the way in which the delegation to Labour's Special Conference voted to abolish Clause IV contrary to union policy. The resolution strongly called for democratic decisions to be upheld.

Leonora Lloyd
Chair London MSF

I'm off! Littleborough and Saddleworth was my last straw. I enjoyed reading the mag - thanks - and wish you all the best for the future. As one door closes another one opens, and in my case it's coloured Green. I have not been consistently active over my 10 years in the Party but now that I'm going I can afford to remember the times of solidarity and enthusiasm - good times. So I'm leaving with no bitterness and a lot of respect for the 'hackability' of more stoical comrades who are staying in.

Andy White
York

John McIlroy's excellent analysis of what is happening in the unions (*Briefing* September) came as a welcome relief from most of the left's coverage of the trade unions.

McIlroy tells it as it is. I really get worried when I hear people describing all kinds of leading trade unionists as 'lefts' who can be persuaded into struggle against Tony Blair's policies - at least after Labour wins the election. In my view, a close look at the claims quickly dispels such illusions.

We can only consolidate a strong current of opposition to New Labour within the Labour Party and the unions with principled positions, stating clearly what is right and what isn't.

Trudy Saunders
Camberwell

Prize Letter!

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

Alf Lomas, M.E.P.
CAMPAIGNING FOR SOCIALISM IN EUROPE



GROUP OF THE PARTY OF EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS

Labour Left Briefing

— the new monthly magazine by and for socialists in the Labour Party and trade unions

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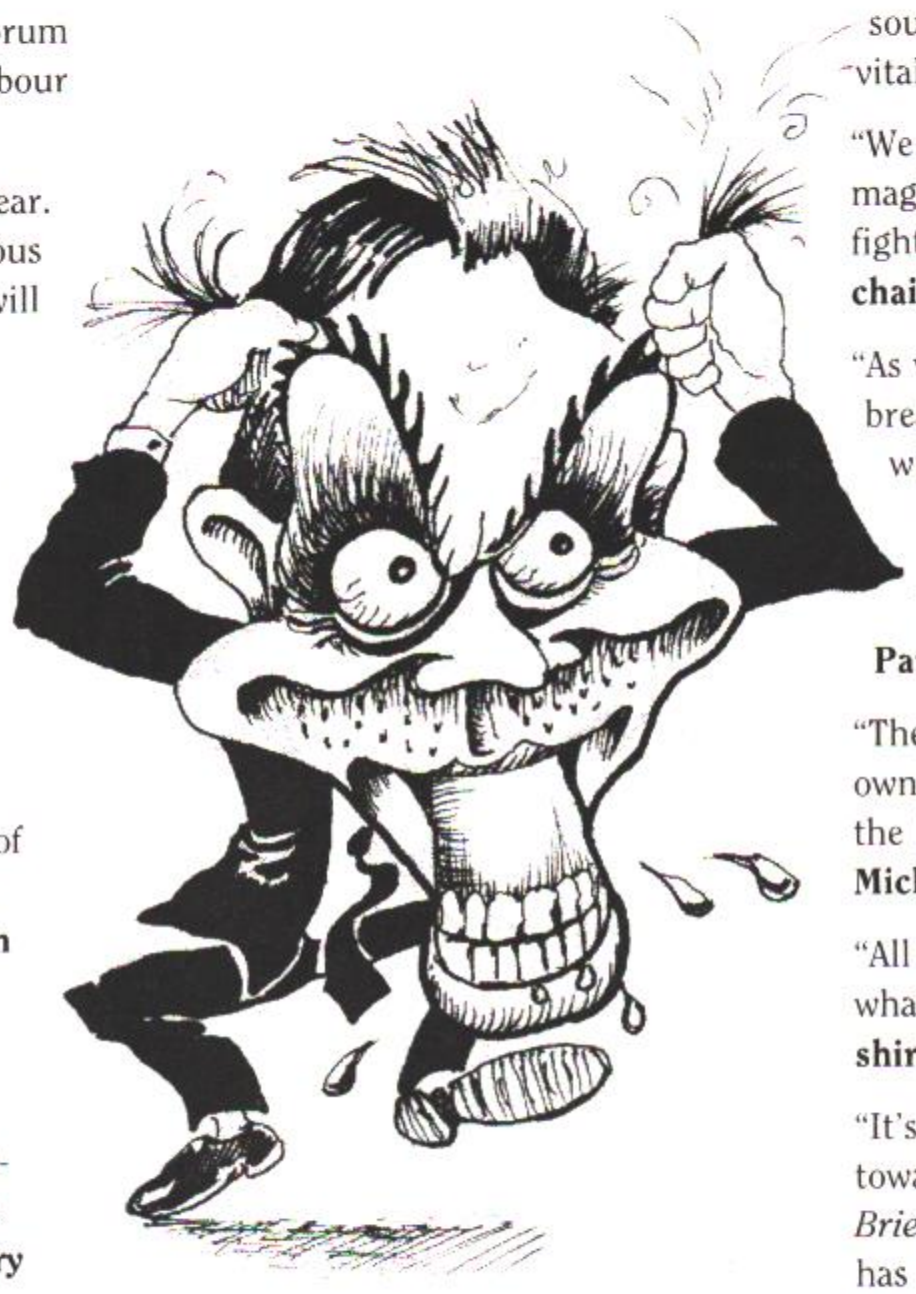
"Capitalism creates poverty, greed and fear. At the end of the 20th century it is obvious we need socialism. I welcome LLB and will be delighted to play my part in it." - **Jeremy Corbyn, MP.**

"This new magazine is a breath of fresh air. It will open up the debate on how we defend and finance the welfare state under a Labour Government" - **Nick Nichols, CWU NEC member**

"I welcome the launch of *Labour Left Briefing* as an absolutely essential voice of free, independent thinking on the left of British politics - congratulations!" - **John Pilger**

"I welcome the launch of *Labour Left Briefing*. I hope the magazine can be a useful resource for Unison branch secretaries and active trade unionists. All the best." - **Francis Lawn, Branch Secretary Wandsworth Unison**

"*Labour Left Briefing* will be a valuable source of new ideas, critical analysis and vital debate." - **Peter Tatchell**



"We look forward to a new Labour left magazine that supports trade unionists fighting for their rights." - **Ian Cuthbert, chair Communication Workers Broad Left**

"As we approach what may be a make-or-break conference for the trade unions, I wish *Labour Left Briefing* the best of luck. I know the magazine will fight to preserve the Labour-trade union link." - **Vladimir Derer, Campaign for Labour Party Democracy**

"The reassertion of the principle of common ownership is given a new lease of life with the launch of *Labour Left Briefing*." - **Michelle Emerson, CWU NEC member**

"All the best to the magazine that prints what we say." - **Berni Kavanagh, Lancashire Women Against Pit Closures**

"It's heartening to see the left moving towards unity with the launch of *Labour Left Briefing*. I hope that this new publication has all the success it deserves." - **Doug Wright, Branch Secretary, Doncaster Unison (personal capacity)**

Each month *Labour Left Briefing* will bring you hot news and controversial views from across the labour movement.

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