LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

April 1996 price £1 conc. 50p

another black death in custody

inside...

- Labour's PTA sellout
- Irish peace in jeopardy
- Liverpool dockers
- Socialist Labour Party
- Cricket World Cup

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Labour Left Briefing

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It's worse than bipartisan

In December 1974, when the Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced in the wake of the Birmingham pub bombings, even its chief proposer, then Home Secretary Roy Jenkins, described its provisions as "draconian" and expressed the hope that they would be lifted within a few months.

Yet over two decades later, those provisions still remain on the statute book, despite the fact that they have only too clearly failed to serve the purpose for which they were intended, and have led to a situation where all Irish people are regarded as potential criminals and treated accordingly.

The decision of the Labour front bench to recommend a policy of abstention rather than outright opposition to the provisions when they came up for renewal before the House of Commons on 14th March was shameful even by its own debased standards. Fortunately, 25 Labour MPs, not all by any means supporters of the Socialist Campaign Group, retained sufficient principles to defy such guidelines and register continued opposition.

The latest policy shift by Tony Blair and Jack Straw has caused widespread outrage among a large section of Party members and supporters. Labour's promises to defend and enhance basic civil liberties have been seriously undermined and further damage has been caused to its reputation within the Irish community. This was already under strain as a result of the ending of the IRA ceasefire and a reassessment of the Party's role in the events which preceded this. Now a heated debate is taking place in the letters columns of the *Irish Post* and other community publications about whether Labour can continue to command the allegiances of the majority of the Irish community resident in Britain. If the our leadership believed that it could take this section of the Party's vote for granted, it was guilty of a serious miscalculation.

Many commentators, including some *LLB* correspondents, have described these recent developments as a return to the politics of bipartisanship between Labour and the Tories on Ireland. In fact, the present position is even worse than this. The term "bipartisanship" implies an equal relationship - the reality is that on this issue, as on others, the position of Blair and Straw has been one of craven subservience, as they have given backing to Major at every twist and turn.

Yet again our leadership is seeking to appease the tabloid press in a vain attempt to court establishment "respectability" and for fear of being perceived as "soft on terrorism". But in the process another part of Labour's distinct identity is being destroyed, with the result that our appeal to voters as an alternative and thus our chance of being elected are being damaged.

The policy of "me-tooism" is not only morally and ideologically repugnant, but also illogical and self-defeating. Attempts to articulate it have only served to highlight its inherent weakness.

The recent appearance of Clive Soley MP on Channel 4's *A Week in Politics* was a case in point. During debate on Labour's Ireland policy he made a bizarre statement suggesting that Labour should not criticise Major in case he responded by taking the Tories even further to the right. When will our elected representatives seek to shape public opinion instead of pandering to it? And when will they make the distinction between "public opinion", as defined by the media, and the actual views of the public at large? The effect of the present malaise can only damage still further the confidence in Labour's ability to present a radical alternative to the current mishmash of sleaze and bigotry being peddled in Whitehall.



With a general election looming, the temptation for the labour movement to remain passive in the face of another Blair onslaught may appear overwhelming. Nevertheless, it has to be resisted more strongly than ever, not least because the present circumstances demand a debate now rather than after the election.

The unease at the current direction of policy regarding Ireland is not confined to the left. In addition, the influence of the Irish community, while sadly limited at present, should ensure that enough CLPs and other labour movement bodies table resolutions to this year's Party Conference for a significant debate to take place on this issue. Furthermore, when Ireland is discussed at the forthcoming round of trade union conferences, *LLB* readers should seek clear commitments of continuing opposition to the PTA and support for all-party peace talks without preconditions.

Despite the attitude of both the Labour and Tory leaderships, any peace talks which exclude one of the parties currently engaged in war will be doomed to failure. Major has consistently failed to seize the initiative. If we cannot exert sufficient pressure on Blair to do so, then the price to be paid could be the blood that is spilled in London, Belfast and elsewhere for many years to come. ❑

The PTA: an outrage to civil liberties

Frances Rogers writes: The PTA is defended as a regrettable but necessary exception to Britain's normal standards of civil liberties. This argument ignores the fact that Britain's supposedly good civil liberties record has frequently been criticised by the European Court of Human Rights and Amnesty International and that the existence of the PTA has not prevented successive IRA bombing campaigns. So why is keeping the PTA so important? It may not have prevented "terrorism", but it has been successful in its undeclared aims: giving the police the right to ignore suspects' civil rights, allowing widespread intelligence-gathering in the Irish community, and intimidating people who disagree with British policy in Ireland.

The British Parliament has traditionally been easily persuaded of the need for "special" laws such as the Emergency Powers Act, brought in during the General Strike, but then incorporated into common law. The PTA has already been amended to cover cases not connected with Ireland. The loss of the right to silence started with the PTA. There is a real danger of the PTA, or similar, being extended as part of the Tories' attempts to look tough on law and order. If Labour is less than enthusiastic it will be denounced as soft on crime and/or terrorism. Once we go down that road, the return of internment and the abolition of juries may be next.

Exact figures are not available, but it is known that tens of thousands of Irish people have been stopped and questioned under the PTA at ports and airports, often just for an hour or two. Questions asked concentrate on who they know and what their movements are; general information gathering and surveillance.

The right to detain suspects for up to seven days without access to a lawyer has led to numerous miscarriages of justice. Paul Hill was only the first. Others are released without charge but with mental scars which are exacerbated by the inability to discuss the ordeal with others for fear of being perceived as guilty. There is no evidence to show the PTA has deterred the "terrorists" but it has criminalised a whole community. The PTA was successful at silencing the Irish in Britain; before the PTA, demonstrations against British policy in Ireland attracted thousands of Irish people.

Many senior police officers attribute their appalling crime clear-up rates, not to incompetence or failure to inspire public co-operation, but to excessive interference from the civil liberties lobby. They have already used the PTA against animal rights activists and Welsh and Scottish nationalists. No doubt they would welcome similar powers to deal with anti-roads protesters and other 'awkward' minority groups.

The PTA is not a regrettable but necessary exception to Britain's normal standard of civil liberties - it is a continuing outrage and a serious threat to the labour movement and to all those struggling for social change. Labour's abdication of its responsibility to defend the rights of Irish people poses worrying questions about civil liberties under a Blair Government.

Roll of honour -
MPs who voted against the PTA

Diane Abbott, John Austin Walker, Harry Barnes, Tony Benn, Andrew Bennett, Dennis Canavan, Harry Cohen, Jeremy Corbyn, Terry Davis, Bill Etherington, Maria Fyfe, Bernie Grant, Joe Hendron, Helen Jackson, Lynne Jones, Ken Livingstone, Eddie Loyden, Max Madden, Eddie McGrady, Kevin McNamara, Seamus Mallon, John Marek, Bill Michie, Chris Mullin, Brian Sedgemore, Alan Simpson, Dennis Skinner, Roger Stott.

Fine Gael Deputies visit Republican prisoners in Britain

"SERIOUSLY INADEQUATE" was how the delegation of Fine Gael Deputies described the British prison service's post-ceasefire response to the situation regarding Irish Republican prisoners in British jails. The issue of Irish prisoners has long been seen as central to the peace process and the poor response on this issue - especially compared to the US and Irish Republic's attitude - must be seen as part of the reason for the overall collapse of the process.

The delegation reported "only minor progress" since their visit in September 1995 and pointed to the fundamental need to advance the "3Rs" - Review, Repatriation and Recategorisation - for the 27 Republican prisoners left in mainland jails. "It is with regret" that the delegation noted "a marked deterioration in the condition of those held in Special Secure Units." Harassment of prisoners has continued and family visits are made as difficult as possible. One prisoner had not seen his children for eighteen months.

The prisoners in Full Sutton stressed the need for positive moves by the Home Office, who were also visited by the delegation, and believed that "the British Labour Party and its spokesperson, Mo Mowlam MP, should do more for the prisoners."

The delegation concludes "The resolution of all major world conflicts has shown that progress on prisoners' issues is essential to underpin progress in the larger agenda. The prisoners' issue must be central to the peace process." It is a further area where the British politicians have been found lacking and any resumption of the ceasefire must be matched with positive moves on behalf of the Republican prisoners.

LLB page 4

McNamara: class hero

"IT IS MY considered judgement that John Major's successive errors of judgement explain, although they do not excuse, the scenes of devastation in London. My judgement is not party political. Each of Mr Major's errors of judgement has been uncritically supported by Mr Blair.

Nine months before the IRA ceasefire the British and Irish prime ministers released the Downing Street Declaration. The Declaration had not used the word 'permanent'. Nevertheless, John Major spent much time after the IRA ceasefire demanding that the word be used, despite Albert Reynolds' indication that he would not have signed the declaration had that demand been included.

Mr Major did, eventually, make the 'working assumption' that the IRA's cessation of violence was permanent, but then did not act speedily upon the assumption...He impaired the possibility that rapid momentum on negotiations might build confidence about his intentions within the northern nationalist community. Instead Mr Major chose to fiddle.

His Government equivocated upon necessary reforms in Northern Ireland in policing and emergency legislation.

Worse, against the advice of some of his own security experts, Mr Major insisted that the IRA and, in a quieter tone, the loyalists, decommission some of their weapons.

Mr Major did not accept the Mitchell Commission. Instead he appeared to come up with a forked formula. To Sinn Fein and the IRA he said: decommission something now



and we'll let Sinn Fein into all-party talks or let's have elections in Northern Ireland, after which parties with mandates can negotiate. It's not exactly clear that's what he intended to do, but that's how he was understood. That didn't stop Mr Blair from following him into the big hole which he had dug for himself.

Mr Major.... appeared to back away from a principled stance to decommissioning only to make elections a new hurdle to all-party talks. Later he told us he had been misunderstood. He was, and by then it was too late.

Mr Blair was also presumably misunderstood - assuming that he understood what Mr Major thought he was doing.

Mr Major's last and worst error of judgement cumulated a succession of, at worst, broken promises and, at best, gauche political ploys. The precondition of elections was not mentioned in the Downing Street Declaration - just as decommissioning had not been. Elections risk the possibility that the parties will lay out their 'non-negotiable demands', thus making peace-making even more difficult.

I think Mr Blair has repeated Mr Major's errors of judgement, but compounded them with one of his own. By reassuring Ulster unionists Mr Blair has made them less fearful of a Labour Government, but at the price of making them less willing to negotiate under a Conservative Government. The result was predictable."

McNamara speaking to Oxford University Labour Club.

"Throughout the past wasted 18 months, the argument for the IRA to decommission some of its arms before they took part in inter-party talks was, that if they did not do so, the Ulster Unionist Party would not sit down and talk with them. It was a choice between two different sets of empty chairs and that is how the Northern Ireland Secretary has justified the British Government's support for the Unionist position.

The underlying premise has been that if the IRA agreed to decommission, David Trimble would willingly discuss the future of Northern Ireland on the basis of the Framework Document. That has never been the case. No such undertaking has ever been given by any of the leaders of Ulster Unionism.

Their policy has been for the integration of Northern Ireland into Great Britain. However, they could not allow the principles upon which they were operating to make them appear unreasonable in the face of efforts to discuss the Peace Process. They therefore accepted, with reluctance, the three strand approach towards all-party talks, initiated by Peter Brooke - and then did their best to delay the talks - endeavouring to separate an internal settlement for Northern Ireland from North-South relations and Dublin-Westminster relations. "

Kevin McNamara, Irish Reporter

"It is standing logic on its head to say that the Labour Party reverses its position because of a Government decision based on a proposition which, sadly, has not become a reality. Like everyone else, I hope that there will be an unconditional ceasefire today, but that has not yet happened. Therefore, the premise on which the Labour Party has decided to abstain tonight does not exist. I say to my hon. Friends on the Front Bench that they cannot run before this particular Home Secretary, because he will get them every time. The logic is that, by abstaining, we are in effect voting for these provisions. There is no choice; there is no question of abstention - we are either for the provisions, or we are against them."

McNamara leading the 28 Labour and SDLP MPs who voted against the renewal of the PTA, House of Commons, 14th March 1996.

There can be no military victory... for either side

John Austin-Walker MP assesses the latest situation surrounding the Irish peace process.

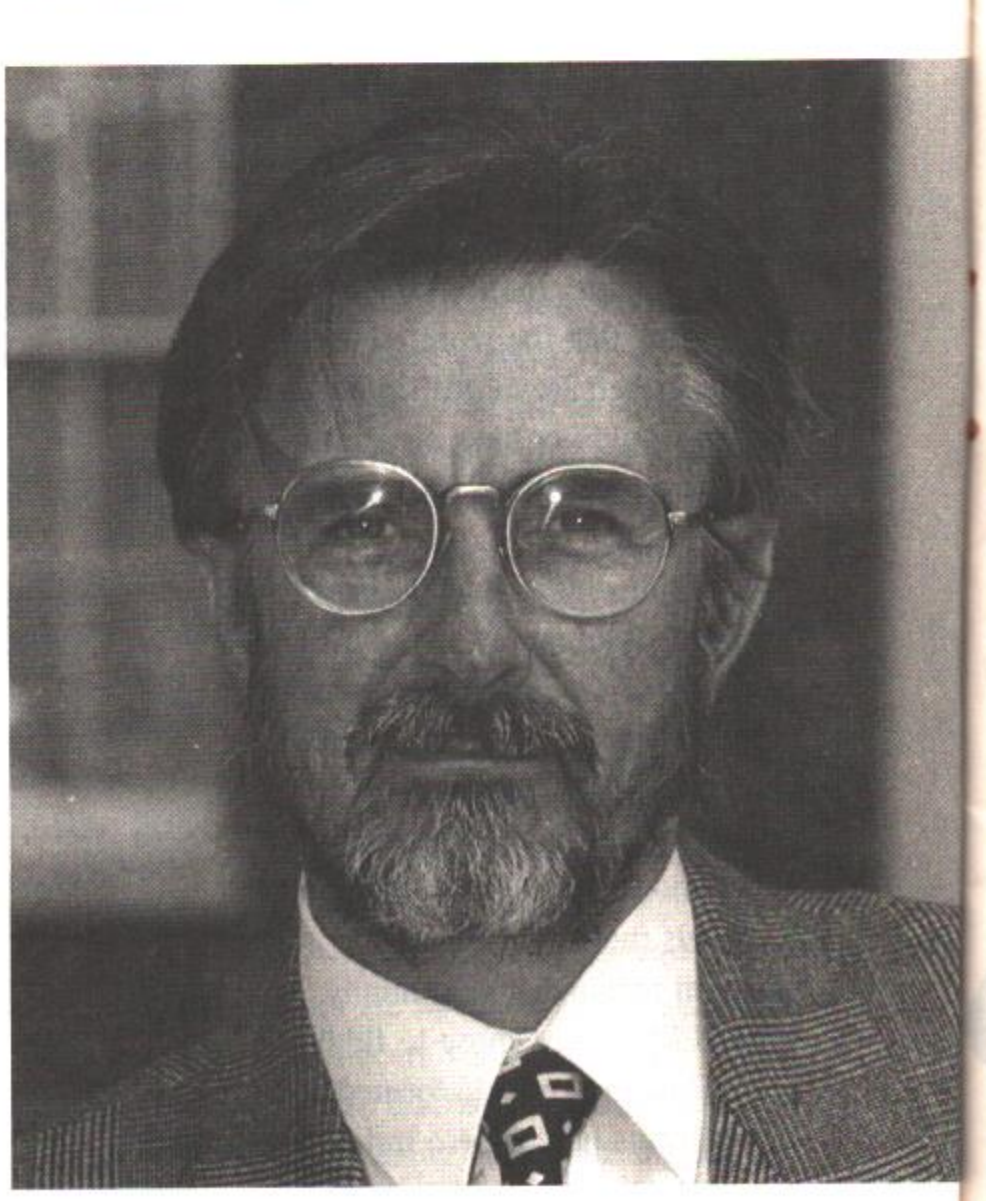
A FORMER Tory Minister for Northern Ireland, Nicholas Scott admitted recently that there could be no military solution to the conflict in Ireland. The left have been saying this for years in seeking to bring Sinn Fein into talks with the British and Irish Governments. We have consistently been rebuffed, abused and vilified by the Tories for our pains.

Some years ago Gerry Adams and the Sinn Fein leadership began that process of dialogue with the aid of John Hume and the then Taoiseach, Albert Reynolds. In this Adams and Hume took real risks with their lives. At the time, the Press and Tory MPs heaped scorn on Hume for talking with Sinn Fein. But Hume and Adams persevered and succeeded in uniting the nationalist community in Ireland, with the result that Gerry Adams was able to secure an IRA ceasefire (followed by a ceasefire from the loyalist paramilitaries) in return for an agreement by John Major to all-party talks.

Regrettably, John Major failed to keep his part of the bargain which led to the resumption of a bombing campaign by the IRA in Britain. I condemn, unequivocally, the bombing of Canary Wharf and urge the IRA to reinstate the ceasefire immediately. I do understand, however, the frustration felt by the nationalist community in the face of delay after delay as a weak British Prime Minister prevaricated and placed obstacles in the way of talks whilst pandering to the Unionists to keep his Westminster majority.

After a series of initial delays, Major created the final impasse, long after the original promise of all-party talks, by surrendering to Unionist demands and insisting on decommissioning before talks. Last November, after a flurry of international activity, Major and Bruton announced the "twin track" process - "intensive preparatory talks" and the decommissioning of arms. The two premiers agreed to establish an International Body - the Mitchell Commission - to provide an independent assessment of decommissioning.

The Mitchell Report could not have been clearer in its recommendations suggesting "an approach under which some decommissioning would take place during all-party negotiations, rather than before or after". In rejecting that compromise, Major gave an effective veto to the Unionists which led to the cessation of the ceasefire.



Major's insistence that elections would give parties to the talks a democratic mandate may appear superficially attractive but elections in the six counties have only hardened the sectarian divide. The politicians already have a mandate, and an election prior to talks has great dangers. What happens if Trimble or Paisley appeal to their voters on a platform of "no surrender"?

Major also tried to create the impression that Mitchell had proposed elections. He had not. What Mitchell had suggested was that, "an elective process could contribute to the building of confidence" but only "if it were broadly acceptable" (and Major's electoral plan clearly isn't). Seamus Mallon describes the plan as an "insult" and it should not be a precondition to talks. There can be no military victory for either side. But as there has been no defeat there can be no surrender. 'Mitchell' recognised that the peace process was the product of a willingness to address differences through political means and that the decommissioning process "should not require that any party be seen to surrender".

We now have the situation in the Dayton-style proximity talks, where Sinn Fein wishes to attend but is kept out whilst Trimble and his Unionists are invited but refuse to sit down with the Irish Government. Without talks involving the Republican movement, what can Gerry Adams offer to the IRA to persuade them once again to lay down their arms? And whatever decision the IRA may take, it remains a fact that Sinn Fein does have a democratic mandate. It represents over one third of the nationalist community in the north of Ireland. Those citizens who voted for Sinn Fein had no part in Canary Wharf and yet they are disenfranchised.

The *Guardian* was right to accuse the Government of having "misjudged the Northern Ireland process over the past six months" (29/2/96) but it was also right to comment that they had been "encouraged in their misjudgment" by the lack of criticism from the Labour Party. It astonishes me that the Labour Party identifies itself more closely with the Tories on this issue than with either of our sister parties in Ireland - the Irish Labour Party in the Republic and the SDLP in the north.

But I have a message for the IRA too. It is John Major and David Trimble who have benefitted from the Canary Wharf bomb. The main victims of the bomb were those killed and injured and their relatives and friends. But the Republican Movement is a victim too. The former *An Phoblacht/Republican News* journalist, Ronan Brady, argues that Canary Wharf "disabled the Sinn Fein leadership and strengthened partition". It also gave heart to the unionists within the Labour Party. ❑

LLB page 6

REVIEW

Irish reporter asks 'What peace process?'

Where are we now in the peace process?

Mike Phipps writes: Celebrating its fifth anniversary, *The Irish Reporter* has been relaunched as an 80 page paperback. The current issue, entitled 'What Peace Process? is devoted to the problems involved in the search for a peace settlement. It contains a dozen articles, including pieces by Gerry Adams, Bernadette McAliskey (sections of which we reproduce on this page) and former Labour spokesperson on Northern Ireland Kevin MacNamera MP.

The issue is edited by human rights' campaigner Paddy Kelly, who underlines republican exasperation at the lack of progress in the peace process by highlighting the hypocritical treatment of nationalist prisoners. Whereas British soldier Lee Clegg was released after serving less than four years of a life sentence for murder and then promoted to lance corporal, Paul Norney has not been so lucky. Sentenced in 1975 for attempted, not actual, murder at age 17, with a recommendation that he serve up to 14 years, he is now in his 21st year in prison. This is not an isolated case.

Human rights abuses by the British state in Northern Ireland continued throughout the ceasefire, often unreported. 100 plastic bullets were fired on one day alone in Belfast. Complaints continue to pour in about the notorious Castleregh interrogation centre. No jury courts continue to produce miscarriages of justice.

The issue includes pieces from leaders of Fianna Fail, the Irish Labour Party and controversially the Ulster Unionists. But the sharpest tone is struck by Bernadette McAliskey who savagely derides British duplicity - and those who fell for it.

The Irish Reporter is available from PO Box 3195, Dublin 6, Ireland, Price £3.50.

● Sean Farren, SDLP Economics spokesperson, told *LLB:* "Talks with Sinn Fein should have taken place immediately after the IRA ceasefire. The Governments have now asked Sinn Fein to go through more hoops. All those in and outside the labour movement who desire the peace process to succeed have got to be far more critical in their approach to the delays."

Bernadette McAliskey

WHERE ARE we now in the process of demilitarising, demobilising and demoralising the republican community? Certainly not at the table where stands the Holy Grail of freedom, self-determination and separation from British rule. Not even at the hypnotic 'All-Party Talks'.

Why not? Because the British didn't play fair! What a surprise! Believe it or not, John Major and his Government, and worse still Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition and Government-in-waiting, Tony Blair & Co, have turned out to be pro-British unionists! The Ard Comhairle and the Army Council, separately and independently, both knew the score. They didn't get to where they are today by believing British governments.



The peace process has from its embryonic stages in the original Dublin Forum, created by CJ Haughey, and the resulting Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, been a process whose aim is to eradicate republicanism, not violence. I reject this process, because it cannot and will not lead towards the achievement of any of the noble, just, democratic ideals for which people gave their liberty and their lives, and took other people's lives. Nor will it lead to the peaceful resolution of the historic conflict on this island, or between these islands.

This process is nothing more than a realignment of the interface of the two power blocs in Northern Ireland, unionism and nationalism, within the United Kingdom. The end of this process is a 'power-sharing' assembly, several cross-border boards and a referendum every ten years, or every twenty. Does the republican leadership have an alternative strategy to the unpublished Hume-Adams strategy? If they do not, they have led the republican community to defeat.

Strategy for a lasting settlement

ALL-PARTY peace talks should be initiated as a matter of urgency and within an agreed timeframe. The nature and structure of those talks should ensure the efficient and urgent examination of all those issues required to move the process forward. The three broad areas which need to be addressed are:

- political and constitutional change;
- democratisation of the situation;
- demilitarisation of the situation.

The forum for dealing with all of these issues is of course inclusive and comprehensive negotiations. All-party peace talks should therefore commence without delay.

It was the efforts of nationalist Ireland which created the peace process and brought about the enormous opportunity which we now have. The Sinn Fein peace strategy, the Hume/Adams dialogue, the Irish Peace Initiative and the IRA cessation generated a new political climate in which, for the first time since Partition, there was a real prospect of a negotiated settlement and a lasting peace. The peace talks necessary to realise this potential have, however, not yet begun. The entire logic of a peace process is that through substantive all-party peace talks we arrive at a peace settlement which removes the causes of the conflict and takes the guns, forever, from Irish politics.

Gerry Adams
Sinn Fein President

"No peace without Sinn Fein"

Sinn Fein 90th Ard Fheis

The ANC delegate queued up with the representative of the French Communist Party, South American liberation movements and others to convey their good wishes to the conference. Despite the current uncertainty that was the backdrop of the conference, comment on a number of issues was clear. Mitchel McLaughlin in the morning session spoke with passion about the present impasse. On the question of a new IRA ceasefire he asked "just as Sinn Fein is totally prepared to make our individual and unique influence available to a renewed Irish peace process, can we assume from now on that the British Government and opposition parties at Westminster will use their undoubted influence with the Unionist Parties to bring forward immediate all party negotiations without preconditions?"

Martin McGuinness rounded on John Major and particularly the PM's supporters in the British Labour Party. "The political cowardice of the leader of the British Labour Party...was undoubtedly a contributory factor in the breakdown."

On the question of the 10th June talks Mr. McGuiness noted the "hollow ring" of the talks announcement given the "obstacles and preconditions littering the road to nowhere."

Away from the conference floor Cllr. Francie Malloy (SF Executive) spoke with *LLB* and was asked for his view of the British Labour Party's most recent contribution to peace. "The decision by the PLP to withdraw its opposition to repressive legislation, signalled by the abstention of the Party over the vote for renewing the PTA, is to be deeply regretted. At a time when we are attempting to realise peace and resolve conflict, the British Labour Party supports the continuation of coercive, and what is recognised internationally as a piece of very unsafe, legislation. The Labour MPs who voted against are to be congratulated. The Labour Party must remain committed to the defence of civil liberties.."

At the close of his Presidential address, Gerry Adams confirmed the signs of an increasingly sophisticated political party. On the question of the recently announced May Northern Ireland elections. Adams did raise the question of a boycott only to qualify the tactic. "...We live in the real world and we have a responsibility to protect the interests of our electorate."

Speaking directly to his own constituency on the very live issue of the hurt and injury felt by the nationalist community of the six counties he raised the question of revenge for past injustice. Quoting from former hunger striker and Westminster MP Bobby Sands, he said "Let revenge be the laughter of your children."

On the future of the peace process, Adams said, "John Major says the peace process will go ahead without Sinn Fein, John Major is kidding no one. John Major knows that the peace process is going nowhere without Sinn Fein."



LLB page 8

The redundancy of the Royals

Llew Smith MP speaks up for republicanism against Labour's lurch to monarchism.



TONY BENN often points out that the Royal Prerogative means that our elected Parliament of the people is held hostage by the historic powers inherited by the Royal Family.

My objections to royalty have nothing to do with their personal lives, much of which we can all sympathise with, but with an institution which is based on privilege and which is neither elected nor accountable to the people.

The Royal Family is a quango and I am opposed to rule by quango, whether it be the thousands which have sprung up (particularly under the Tories) or the most powerful of them all, the European Central Bank.

Some argue that while they are opposed to royalty, it would have to be replaced by a President - why? We do not need either, merely the power to elect a government and for it to be accountable to the electorate. If that government lost the support of the people, we have the right to say, "on your bike", and off they will go.

My objection is also because of the privilege which is reflected in so many ways in the lives of the Royals.

According to a series of Ministers' answers in Parliament, we can piece together an interesting picture of some of the finances of this pampered 'First Family'. For example, the Central Office of Information provided publicity for 420 official visits by Royal members in 1994-95, at a cost to the taxpayer of £354,051.

> "You may remember at our last meeting we sanctioned a letter to Her Majesty explaining our brave stand against the monarchy. I`m now delighted to say we have received a hand-written reply from Buckingham Palace thanking us on behalf of the Queen, no less, for our kind letter, confirming she read it with the very greatest of interest and wishing us all the very best of luck with our project."
>
> *- Tony Benn speaking to the anti-monarchy, 'Common Sense Club'.*

The cost to the taxpayer for the upkeep of seven of the Royal Palaces over the same period was £9,277,000. On top of this, a further £10,800,000 of public funds has been paid to subsidise the restoration of Windsor Castle's fire damage - necessary because the Royal Palaces are not insured.

We have heard of the poor judgement of the Duchess of York taking Concorde flights to America; at the same time she was being ostracised by her mother-in-law, the Queen, for running up over £3m debts. Other members of the Royal family also like to get airborne at taxpayers' expense. In 1995 alone, the Princess of Wales made six flights, to Brazil, Zimbabwe, Los Angeles, Hong Kong, Japan and Geneva on commercial aircraft at a total cost of £160,000.

Meanwhile, the Royal Yacht Britannia was used for only 36 days of official duties last year. The MOD admit that private companies are not charged any fee when using the yacht at commercial events to promote British exports. Yet former trade minister John Redwood, the Tory right's savager of the Euroquangos, made one of his leadership election pledges last summer to keep this great floating anachronism at taxpayers' expense.

Last year the Royal Train travelled 14,246 track miles on official visits. As the Tories are so keen on privatising the railways, you might think this elite train service was ripe for cherry picking. Not a bit of it. And there are no plans to seek private sponsorship either. A suitable slogan along the train might well read, "*The Windsors - putting themselves first*".

Finally, support for rule by royalty always seems to me to reflect a people lacking in confidence in their own ability to determine their destiny. It's about time we got up off our knees and asserted our authority.

Don't do it Arthur!

An Open Letter from the Socialist Campaign Group (Supporters Network) appeals to Arthur Scargill not to establish the SLP, due to take place on May Day.

"IT WAS AGREED at our Annual Conference to write to you, giving our response to the idea of a new "Socialist Labour Party". Following the Hemsworth by-election result, it has become even more important that you consider the opinion of those on the left of the Labour Party who have fought with you for socialism over many years.

We consider it vital that, in a discussion about an issue of this importance, every voice on the left has an opportunity to be heard. It would be folly in the extreme to think that one section of the left could decide to launch a new party and hope for it to succeed.

We believe the place for socialists in Britain today is inside the Labour Party, fighting for socialism against the Blairite anti-socialist project. We believe that this is still the case despite the removal of Clause IV, despite the refusal to endorse Liz Davies, and despite the acceptance of Alan Howarth into the PLP. It is clear that the mass of working people in the country are absolutely desperate to get rid of the Tory Government. In the past seventeen years, we have seen brutal attacks on all sections of the working class, and there is an overwhelming feeling of despair and defeat.

It is crucial in this climate that those who would be at the forefront of any struggle for socialism help the class as a whole take the first necessary step in regaining their strength - we must help in kicking the Tory Government out of office. Without this first step, we can do nothing.

In the document *Future Strategy for the Left* you say: "Labour is now almost indistinguishable from the "Democratic Party in the United States, Germany's Social Democrats, or, nearer home, the Liberal Democrats. It has changed its policies on all the fundamental issues which have been determined by the Party Conference over many years".

Well, looking at the policies of all the parties mentioned, you would appear to be correct: indeed there is no longer much to choose between the Labour Party's policies and those of the Tory Government. But by looking only a little further back in history, we can see that this is hardly a new situation. All the policies you mention in your document - privatisation, National Minimum Wage, unemployment, pensions, health, education, Europe, anti-trade union laws - are issues which have always been bitterly contested between right and left. The idea that they have been cast in stone since time immemorial and are only now being crushed by Blair is a nonsense.

The fundamental difference between the Labour Party, however right wing its policies are, and the Tories, or the Liberal Democrats, is its link with the working class. And that link was not forged by, nor is it dependent on, the Party passing some good policies, or even having Clause IV in its constitution. It is true that the link with the trade unions has been under serious attack over recent years but it is not yet broken, and while that fact remains true, we would be conceding defeat before the battle is over, if we left the Party.

In such a situation, the launching of a new party is both premature and a distraction. As was shown by the result in the Hemsworth by-election, such an approach will not reach out to the mass of working people. If an SLP candidate cannot gain more votes than the Tory or Liberal Democrat candidates even in a place like Hemsworth, surely you must see the folly of standing candidates against the Labour Party in less favourable places.

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

What about the dock dispute in Liverpool? The Scottish postal workers' strike? The JJ Fast Foods campaign? Trade union disputes may be at a low ebb, that is only to be expected given seventeen years of continual defeats, but it is not extinct. You also appear to forget the fact that large numbers of Labour Party members, and trade unionists, are involved in, and central to, the campaigns that you cite. You seem to be forgetting the history of struggle in this country when you imply that these campaigns are somehow separate from the labour and trade union movement.

Ordinary trade unionists and Labour Party members have always been at the forefront of struggles, but other parts of the movement - its leadership - have always sought to hold back and to check such struggles. The situation today is no different inside the Labour Party, but only another stage in the continuing battle between those of us who genuinely want to see socialism and those who mislead the working class through their bureaucratic manoeuvring.

If you truly wish to improve the lives of working class people, then you must agree that the first and most necessary steps to take right now are to get rid of the Tory Government and to put concerted and united pressure on the incoming Labour Government to implement real change.

In the first instance, that means uniting together people from the labour and trade union movement and fighting for those issues where we already have mass support: for a minimum wage - determined by the workers themselves - for renationalisation of the railways, for extra spending to rebuild the welfare state. These are areas where we can win only if we stick together in the fight for them.

Comrade Scargill, you say that the case for a Socialist Labour Party is overwhelming. But it is the case for socialism that is overwhelming. We are deluding ourselves if we think that we can achieve it without the organised political activity of the working class itself. That will come, and the next stages of it will come with the dispatching of the rotten and corrupt Tory Government and its replacement with a Labour Government, a government at least partially linked to our class.

Please don't distance yourself from this tentative step forward, by pursuing a path away from the Labour Party and the fight which will continue inside it. It is not too late for you and your supporters in the SLP to pull back from this mistaken venture and join with us in our fight inside the Labour Party and the trade union movement.

Oppose the Blairite project for the labour movement, of course, but don't oppose the labour movement itself. "

Prisoner of history?

Tony Dale (Manchester Central CLP) examines the history of left splits from Labour and how it applies to Scargill's SLP.

TODAY'S SHIFT to the right by Labour may tempt some to join the SLP, but a look at Labour's history and its left splits does not bode well for such a move.

The biggest such split was the Independent Labour Party (ILP) in 1932. To understand this episode it is important to examine the Labour Party's early years, and the attitude of early British Marxists to Labour.

The ILP, formed in 1893, predates the Labour Party itself. It was one of the organisations which combined with the unions to form the Labour Representation Committee (LRC) in 1900. The aim was to elect labour movement representatives to form a "distinct Labour Group in Parliament". The secretary was the ILP's Ramsey MacDonald.

The LRC became the Labour Party in 1906 with immediate success, increasing from two MPs to 29. In 1910 the Lib-Labs, who had previously sat with the Liberals, joined Labour and the number rose to 42.

The ILP worked mainly to achieve Labour representation in Parliament; its role changed as it became a voice for labour movement disquiet at the peaceful coexistence between Labour and Liberals. Some ILP members split away with the Marxist and sectarian Social Democratic Party to form the British Socialist Party (BSP) with a claimed membership in 1911 of 15,000.

The Social Democratic Party had, as the Social Democratic Federation (SDF), briefly been part of the LRC but departed in 1901 after Labour had not proved revolutionary enough. Engels was very critical of the SDF tradition, and its attitude to Labour was the grandparent of many of the sectarian so-called Marxist tendencies today. The BSP soon declined and reaffiliated to Labour.

The ILP was developing a left-wing socialist identity and the majority of Labour MPs were ILP members. One, Keir Hardie, was elected Chair of the PLP and helped draft the Socialist International's policy for a general strike if war broke out. In August 1914 the Socialist International's anti-war policy collapsed, as most national sections (including the Labour Party) backed the war, whilst the ILP maintained its opposition. The Russian Revolution sparked the creation of the Communist Party of Great Britain



(CPGB), including the BSP, in 1920. The creation of a united Communist Party and the inspiration of the revolution obviously attracted some Labour and ILP members. Many CPGB members saw Labour as a spent force and were not convinced of the case for affiliating to a reformist party. Pressured by Lenin and the Communist International, they applied for affiliation, but in a fashion which encouraged rejection. The CPGB never attained the importance of some continental CPs that emerged out of the struggle to transform existing socialist parties.

The ILP faced a new challenge in 1918 when Labour adopted Clause IV and invited individual membership. Before 1918, Party involvement was through an affiliated organisation - either a trade union or a socialist society such as the ILP. Faced with a new identity crisis and radicalised by the Russian Revolution, the ILP was gradually reborn as a Labour left tendency under James Maxton's leadership.

The first Labour Government was elected in 1924. Dissatisfaction with Labour in office pushed the ILP further left, and it campaigned in the labour movement for a minimum wage. Battles over policy and whether ILP MPs should be accountable to the ILP or the Labour Party continued into the second Labour Government when MacDonald's minority Government announced cuts in unemployment benefits. The ILP played a central role in the widespread Party and union opposition. MacDonald split from Labour, joining a Tory-Liberal coalition. Lack of radical policies, attacks on workers and attempts to remove its control over its MPs resulted in the ILP disaffiliating, with 17,000 members, in 1932. It had a long history and a certain moral authority in the movement from its leading role in founding the Labour Party. It organised opposition to MacDonald's attacks on the meagre welfare system and tapped into the discontent and disillusion fostered by the experience of Labour in government. If you had to bet on a left split succeeding in creating a mass socialist party, the money would have been on the ILP.

Its energy and profile suggested it would become a pole of attraction to thousands of militant socialists and workers. Yet by 1935 membership slumped to 4,400 and by the end of the 1930s it had effectively collapsed.

Many socialists put this failure down to the absence of a revolutionary programme. Political weaknesses helped the ILP's decline - a softness to Stalinism lost it members and its youth section. But one of the central and most consistent points Trotsky made of the ILP was criticism of its sectarian attitude to Labour. The ILP failed because it underestimated the allegiance of the mass of workers to the Labour Party. That same mistake has dominated the far left before and since. It would appear Scargill and the SLP are set to repeat the same failed experiment on a much smaller scale.

After the ILP split from Labour in 1932, a minority of ILP members linked up with other sections of the Labour left to launch the Socialist League within the Party. That is the task facing Labour Party socialists today. ❑

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Socialist policies for a Labour Government

Tony Dale
Manchester Central CLP

SEVENTEEN YEARS of Tory policies have left Britain suffering from low pay, a welfare state under attack, mass unemployment, and a loss of trade union rights; a country where the rich have got richer and the poor have got poorer. Since 1979 the richest 10% have received tax cuts to the value of £15 billion while schools and hospitals are in crisis.

It now looks likely that we will soon see the election of a Labour Government. Whatever our differences with Labour's front bench, the responsibility of every socialist is to campaign for a Labour victory. But we cannot and must not abandon the cause of campaigning for socialist policies. What is needed is a socialist campaign for a Labour victory which must be broad and non-sectarian. This could be a united front of all those who oppose Labour's rightward drift. *Tribune*, the Socialist Campaign Group and journals such as *LLB* should work together to build this unity.

LLB welcomes contributions to the debate.

Model resolution

We believe that the following policies should be adopted across the labour movement and implemented by an incoming Labour Government:

1. A minimum wage of at least half of the male median earnings, at present £4.26 per hour.
2. Full employment - with an immediate aim of 1 million jobs to be created in the first two years of a Labour Government.
3. Reducing working hours to 35 hours without reducing pay.
4. Bringing BT, rail, water, gas and electricity back into public ownership. For an end to privatisation programmes including the abolition of CCT and internal markets in the public services.
5. The right to retire at 60. Universal pension rights at a decent standard.
6. The right to longer periods in education and training.
7. No pay restraint.
8. A comprehensive and properly funded welfare state. Immediate action to address the crisis in schools and hospitals. Maintainance and improvement of universal benefits.
9. Extending trade union rights, including rights for trade unions to organise, rights for workers to join a trade union and the right to strike.
10. Positive action to challenge racism, sexism and all discrimination. Repeal of racist immigration legislation.
11. No VAT on fuel.
12. No pacts with the Liberal Democrats.
13. Abolition of the House of Lords and the monarchy.

Such a programme can be funded by measures such as cutting military expenditure to the EU average and creating a more progressive taxation system. This would include a major increase in taxation on salaries over £50,000.

If Britain cut its military spending to the same proportion of its income as Italy, £8 billion would be saved over five years. If it was reduced to Germany's level of military spending, over £13 billion would be saved. If unemployment fell to 1m in five years, spending on unemployment related benefits would be cut by two thirds while tax income would increase to the extent that the present budget deficit would become a surplus.

We call for the establishment of a national organisation to campaign for these policies.

Another open conflict with "Wally" Road

Colin Hall reports: Leicester West CLP is one of the more unlikely hotbeds of hostility to "New Labour". A bastion of the Labour right, it has displayed unyielding loyalty for decades to the Party leadership. However, this may be about to change.

Although in July 1995 sitting MP Greville Janner announced his intention to retire at the next general election, eight months later the Regional Office has still not begun the process of selecting his successor. In January it emerged that Leicester West was being considered for an all-woman shortlist, despite the CLP's hostility. This plan was scuppered by the notorious industrial tribunal judgement.

Another intriguing factor has been the intervention of leadership aide Patricia Hewitt, who transferred her membership into the Leicester West constituency in late 1995 hoping to gain selection. However, she is still heavily distrusted by local CLP officers, many of whom remember all too vividly her unsuccessful campaign for Leicester East in 1983, and in particular the left-wing sentiments she espoused at that time.

Other activists have threatened "civil war" if the Party attempts to impose a candidate on the CLP. With a majority of only 4,000 and strong campaigns by the Tories and Liberal Democrats already under way, this may be an occasion where the NEC could be forced to reconsider its approach. But don't bank on it.

Defend Exeter CLP's choice

Steve Thorpe writes: The NEC has established yet another panel to interview John Lloyd, PPC for Exeter before endorsing his selection. Thirty years ago, Lloyd betrayed fellow African Resistance Movement comrades in South Africa, leading to John Harries being hanged.

Exeter CLP is strongly behind John Lloyd. Even reactionaries are supporting the right of the local Party to select its own candidate. Some are even reassessing their position on the Liz Davies affair. There are strong left-wing arguments against John Lloyd. The Blairites are using these as a cover to get what they want. They are terrified of the media using Lloyd's past against the national Party in the general election campaign. It is clear that anyone who has been involved in a liberation struggle is unsuitable to be a PPC in the eyes of the NEC. Issues of Lloyd deceiving the CLP and betraying his ARM comrades do not concern the NEC. Everyone in Exeter knew Lloyd's record. Lloyd is not an electoral liability locally, where he is popular. The NEC's action is having a radicalising effect in Exeter CLP. Even right-wingers are realising that the Party is shamelessly adapting to the Tories' agenda.

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Spin-drivel

Bob Spooner, Leeds North East CLP, reviews
The Blair Revolution: Can New Labour Deliver?
by Peter Mandelson and Roger Liddle.

THE MANDELSON/LIDDLE book has one great virtue; it is in effect a primer in spin drivel, which is the language ultimately employed by spin-doctors when they wish to sound significant and capable of doing more than manipulate the news. Spin-drivel purports to be a political philosophy but is in reality a bromide designed to discourage thought. Each hifalutin sentiment should be read in isolation to accommodate its glaring contradictions. For example, New Labour wants "special privileges for none" but has a commitment to the "rigour of the dynamic market", which is "the only way to stop capitalists opting for a quiet life". If this provokes the mental headline "Big Noises Denied Quiet Life", it fails in its prime purpose, which is to numb the mind.

Spin-drivel states Old Labour argued for "rights without responsibilities", the Tories believed "that one has a responsibility for oneself alone", but New Labour stresses "mutual obligations". In Mandelson's cosy world, the poor toe the line without protest and the rich make charitable donations. That rights involve responsibility is a feudal concept which came in time to mean keeping tied cottages in good repair; it now implies that state benefits are a form of charity, for which the recipients should be duly grateful.

Spin-drivel resolves age-old conflicts with meaningless formulae. So, Old Labour "represented trade unions, pressure groups and the working classes", the Tories believed in "protecting the rich and corporate interests", but New Labour "stands for the ordinary families who work hard and play by the rules". Don't enquire whether ordinary families join trade unions or are working class; it's more comfortable to think of them never striking nor cheating at darts. Elsewhere, New Labour stands for freedom for the entrepreneur and profit is the only motivator; this gives a more sinister slant to "playing the rules"; it means bending the law without breaking it.

Spin-drivel, like New Labour, is long on sentiment and short on policy. "Special privileges for none" sounds a safe sentiment. Logically it involves the abolition of public schools, a swingeing wealth tax and high rates of direct taxation, but not in spin-drivel logic. It deals in decencies forever, so "profits are the motor of private enterprise" and the bad old days of Labour Government, when



"penal taxation meant poor rewards for top-salaried management" are gone for good. Similarly "real equal opportunity" is a cosy sentiment, which means for Mandelson, the right to earn an unlimited income. Spin-drivel prefers language from which meaning has been sucked.

Spin-drivel abhors serious policy proposals, but may float a rare 'idea', as long as it costs little and sounds unthreatening. For example, families are a jolly institution but, believe it or not, some poor couples don't have benevolent parents or grandparents to set them up, so giving them "access to a lump sum of say £5000" as a "medium term, interest free loan" should help them to stay together long enough to teach their children "the difference between right and wrong", which, of course, single parents, by definition, know nothing about! Spin-drivel is gossamer thin, and to suggest that debts make a poor cement for a lasting relationship is to take the 'idea' too seriously.

Spin-drivel believes idealism can be made profitable. Conflict between capital and labour can be resolved by "companies accepting responsibility for all their stakeholders - workers, shareholders, bankers and customers." This is a variant of the old SDP "partnership" idea, which was designed to con workers into accepting low wages, while customers were charged as much as the market would stand, in order to pay shareholders tidy dividends. The word 'stakeholder' is itself a spin-drivel word that means anything and preferably nothing. Taken literally, a visit to a supermarket would make us "stakeholders" in all the multinationals that are busy destroying the world - but don't get alarmed, spin-drivel shrivels to nothing in the face of analysis.

Spin-drivel can be highly dangerous. It is designed to attract the non-political floating voter and to lull aggrieved Tory voters into a sense of security. It has no message designed to stir the 20% of non-voters into life, nor is it a cover for secret socialist policies. Indeed the spin-thesis is that New Labour will have to spend so much time clearing up Tory chaos that its programme will perforce be limited to six vague priorities. This is a spin-drivel excuse for leaving Tory policies in place. In *Animal Farm*, when the pigs model themselves on humans, they rewrite history. Our New Napoleon forgets that Attlee was successful because departmental ministers had a free hand to pursue agreed policies simultaneously, and the Government advanced on a huge front, inspired by what Mandelson now calls "the infamous Clause IV". Those who remember those halcyon days will keep the Mandelson/Liddle hogwash by our bedsides as a handy emetic. ❑

Where there's a Wills, there's a Way

Dan Carter writes: Tony Blair experienced the first votes against him by his supporters at a National Executive Committee meeting over the parliamentary selection in marginal Swindon North. John Prescott abandoned his usual lapdog role and, along with nine others including arch-hitman John Evans, a stranger to reselection meetings himself, nearly achieved a re-run of the selection process.

A friend of Gordon Brown, TV producer Michael Wills had surprisingly defeated local AEEU convenor Jim d'Avila by a narrow majority. It appears that "allegedly" the winning margin was created by a high number of bogus postal votes. When Labour's National Executive refused to investigate the contest, the AEEU took the matter to court, which ruled in d'Avila's favour. Now the AEEU have had to go to the High Court to block the NEC's decision to select by an NEC panel rather than re-run the contest. While giving evidence, John Evans accused the NEC of being unfair and prejudiced, and breaking its own rules. At the heart of the matter is the fundamental right of a CLP to select a candidate of its own choice - which in this case looks increasingly like Jim d'Avila.

The High Court's latest ruling is a moral victory for D'Avila. The judge recommended that the NEC reconsider its decision to impose a candidate, but stopped short of actually ordering a new ballot.

He found that Peter Coleman, the Party's Organisation Director had made "misleading and unfounded allegations" in his report on the original selection procedure.

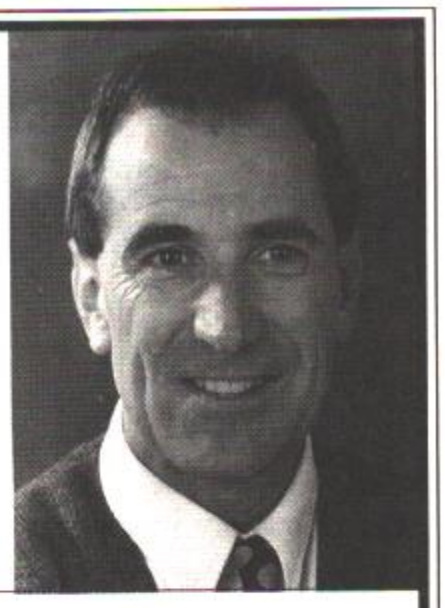
Banner exhibition

In conjunction with Berwick Museum, Berwick upon Tweed Trades Council is holding a banner exhibition in Berwick on 25th and 26th May.

There will be banners from trade unions, women's groups, unemployed groups, trade councils, political parties etc. There will also be a social on the Saturday night in Berwick Town Hall. Contact: Moira Kay, Whitecroft, Berwick, TD15 2XN.

Tory gunrunners get off Scott free

by Alan Simpson MP



HERE'S A PUZZLE for you. Suppose you were fiddling social security, making declarations that you knew to be untrue. And suppose this all came out in an investigation a few years later and you were hauled up before a court. What would you expect to happen?

If you stood up in court and said that you knew you had deceived the Social, but hadn't conspired with anyone to do it or intended to mislead the agency, would the judge buy the story? If you went a step further and explained that you hadn't exactly lied about changes in your circumstances, but merely interpreted them flexibly, would the court have understood and let you go scot-free?

Your best bet would be to explain that you are a Government minister - capable of misleading (in good faith) but never of lying - and you could literally be let off Scott-free. Ironically, the Scott Report and yet another benefits clamp-down came in the same week. The Scott Report is hard enough to carry, let alone read. It suffers from having been 'consulted upon' by the same ministers who were investigated and criticised. Imagine a court giving the Great Train Robbers the chance to rewrite the jury's verdict.

Our public courts would be log-jammed with offers from the accused to act in such a constructive, public-spirited manner. In the court that is Parliament we are being treated to a series of claims and counter-claims, at the end of which no one will resign and little will change. It is a measure of how distant Parliament has become from the public it claims to represent.

Scott helped spread confusion by making clear points and then contradicting them. But on some issues he was unambiguous, not least on the responsibilities of being a Government minister, who he said had a duty 'not to mislead Parliament and the public'. He specified seven separate occasions on which ministers had failed to discharge that obligation:

1. When parliamentary questions were asked about guidelines for policy on arms sales to Iran and Iraq in May 1985, 'the existence of the Guidelines was deliberately not disclosed'.

2. The Government allowed defence sales to Iraq between 1983 and 1988, but concealed from Parliament the fact that it also gave credit cover to the sales out of the UK's defence allowance.

3. Ministers refused to give any details of export credit cover for defence sales to specific countries on the grounds of 'commercial confidentiality'.

4. The Government denied changing guidelines for arms sales to Iraq, although it had done so.

5. The Government lied about the attendance of Ministry of Defence officials at the Baghdad Military Exhibition in 1989.

6. Ministers evaded answering questions about their knowledge of the military use of pipeline equipment being built for Iraq in the UK.

7. The Government blocked evidence from retired civil servants from reaching the Select Committee looking into the arms trade with Iraq.

At one time ministers would have resigned automatically when faced with this evidence, but the culture has changed. Political corruption and self-indulgence have sunk deep into the way the system works. Clever ministers and cleverer civil servants use evasiveness and non-accountability to ensure that Parliament and the public do not know what they are up to.

For many older, 'one nation' Tories this is a deep embarrassment, offending their sense of ethics. But they are not today's Tories: the ones who will simply brazen it out.

I don't care whether or not two ministers resign. All that happens is that two scallies go and another two take their places in a system that has become corrupt. This is not an issue about individual ministers but about whether Britain should sell arms to tyrants; about whether 'business interests' override all other moral issues in trade with those who commit acts of genocide against their own or neighbouring peoples. The Government hid its dirty washing because it knew the public would be appalled to see how grubby our trading interests have become.

It is as though society had already moved towards a new sense of ethics which the Government could neither sell nor subscribe to. The real question now is whether we get a genuine Freedom of Information Act that delivers public access to the truth, rather than a 'flexible' interpretation of its opposite.

We won't be criminalised

The grassroots campaigns against the Asylum and Immigration Bill and the denial of benefit to asylum seekers continue. Adil Rehman and Sajda Malik of Newham Monitoring Project put this in the context of campaigns against racism.

THE ASYLUM and Immigration Bill is not only an attack on the most vulnerable sections of the black communities in Britain, it is an attack on all black people. It formalises and legalises state racism, showing the Government in its true colours. It seeks to marginalise, criminalise and dehumanise thousands of people.

The build-up to this Bill and the benefits cuts has been a series of scaremongering stories in the national press, talking about "welfare scroungers" and "bogus refugees" enjoying the high life at the taxpayers' expense. There were articles about refugee families renting large homes in the most expensive areas of London and families of ten and more being allocated large properties while white families waited for years on waiting lists. All of this was a lethal cocktail created by the Government and whipped up by the right wing media.

The word 'refugee' used to conjure up images of people fleeing horrific situations, people needing help, support and compassion. But the Government has destroyed this image. The most vulnerable section of the black community are now seen as parasites eating away at our resources, diminishing the economic and social fabric of Britain. They have become scapegoats in a political agenda, where race is the winning card. The Government has made no efforts to address the concerns the black community have about the Bill. Its confidence is bolstered by the fact that even the opposition leadership have not come out and condemned the Bill too loudly. They have been cautious not to be identified with minorities of any kind.

Two clauses in the Bill illustrate this. Clause eight proposes penalties for employers who take on people who do not have the right immigration status. This will have a huge impact. It aims to guarantee that asylum seekers on appeal have no access to any means of sustaining themselves and their families by taking the poorly paid and often dangerous jobs that many refugees are forced to take, thus keeping a stranglehold on the most vulnerable and defeating the right to appeal against a Home Office decision.

It also has disastrous implications for established black communities. Employers will use it as an excuse to reject any applicant with a "black face" or foreign sounding name as a potential employment problem. Black people will constantly have to prove their right to live and work in this country. It will create second class citizenship, with black people seen as potential "illegal immigrants".

Clause twelve of the Bill underlines this: it creates a new legal status of "immigrant". People here on British Commonwealth passports, or with indefinite leave to remain are defined as immigrants by this. These are people who have settled in this country, who have lived and worked here, often for most of their lives. People who have been paying national insurance contributions and tax, and who have the right to vote are being told they are "immigrants" and will enjoy only certain rights. For example, under clause ten, "immigrants" can be denied Child Benefit and under clause nine they can be excluded from access to housing. This undermines the position of people with Commonwealth passports or indefinite leave to remain who have long been settled here.

So the Bill is much more than an attack on refugees and asylum rights. The Government's message is clear: they do not want any black person to feel comfortable in this country. So we will be forced to produce our passport and our papers to get access to the most basic things: schooling, jobs, housing...and maybe we will get fed up and leave. It is a bad joke that the Government have attempted to sell this law as one that can improve race relations.

The black community is organising around the principles of our right to be here: Here to Stay, Here to Fight has been a major plank of the anti-racist struggle. We must respond on a massive scale to this unprecedented attack on us now. Refugee groups, community groups, churches, mosques, gurdwaras, synagogues, the trade union movement, must all work together to make the bill unworkable. We must challenge it in the courts. Public sector workers must develop a policy of non-implementation. We have to build a broad grass-roots' opposition to the bill. As a black community we must be clear that any piece of legislation, even one which claims to target only certain sections of the black community, is an attack on us all. Our response must be a united fight back. ❑



Marching against the Asylum Bill, 24th February. Photo: Colin Hayward.

March against the Asylum Bill, Saturday 20th April, 11am. Embankment.

Campaign against

International condemnation

Helen Shaw and Deborah Coles of Inquest report: As a result of a detailed submission from INQUEST, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) has delivered a sharp rebuke to the UK Government on its response to black and minority deaths in custody. INQUEST's detailed submission and lobbying of the Committee in Geneva on March 4/5th was based on 15 years of extensive casework and monitoring of deaths in custody. As a result, CERD's voice was added to an already significant lobby of MP's, civil rights organisations, coroners, anti-racist organisations and families.

"...allegations of police brutality and harassment are reportedly not vigorously investigated..."

The committee said:

"It is noted with serious concern that among the victims of death in custody are a disproportionate number of members of minority groups, that police brutality appears to affect members of minority groups disproportionately, that allegations of police brutality and harassment are reportedly not vigorously investigated and perpetrators, once guilt is established, not appropriately punished."

CERD recommended that:

"...all complaints of police brutality be vigorously and independently investigated and the perpetrators punished. It recommends that investigations into deaths in custody be carried our expeditiously through independent inquiry mechanisms."

The UK Government must not be allowed to ignore the injustices families face after a death in custody. INQUEST is campaigning for the Government to lift the veil of secrecy and silence surrounding controversial deaths and the subsequent investigatory process to ensure public accountability and justice.

INQUEST's report asked CERD to consider the UK government's failure to: (1) monitor deaths in custody by ethnicity and make this information public; (2) investigate thoroughly, fully and independently deaths in custody; (3) bring perpetrators of human rights violations/racial violence within the police, prison and immigration service to justice to ensure public accountability; (4) provide adequate training for law enforcement officials particularly in the permissible methods of restraint and the authorisation of such methods.

An updated version of the report is available from INQUEST (£5.00).

Justice for Amer Rafiq

Sarah Cotterill (Manchester Central CLP) writes: Two thousand people demonstrated in Manchester on 9th March in anger at the blinding of Amer Rafiq by Manchester police.

21 year-old Amer Rafiq was arrested in the early hours of 21st February in Rusholme, Manchester. It was the Muslim festival of Eid. After his arrest Amer Rafiq was assaulted with such brutality by the police that he lost one of his eyes and is in danger of being blinded in the other.

Rusholme is the focus of Eid celebrations in Manchester, attracting people from throughout the north-west. Over the past few years, police harassment of Eid celebrations has become a regular feature in Rusholme. Police dogs, horses and riot squads have been used to disperse crowds. A police helicopter constantly whirs overhead. The tragedy for Amer Rafiq and his family was a disaster waiting to happen - the result of heavy handedness by the police. To date no police officer has been suspended or charged.

Contact: Amer Rafiq Defence Campaign, c/o Pakistani Community Centre, Stockport Road, Manchester. Tel: 0831 366051 or 0402 124805.

Family win right to new inquest

THE O'REILLY family won a High Court ruling on March 8th quashing the inquest verdict and the ordering of a new inquest into the death of 64 year old Irishman John Leo O'Reilly who died in police custody in July 1994. This important judgement will give the family an opportunity to question thoroughly those police officers responsible for his care in Little Park police station in Coventry.

Mr O'Reilly was held in the police station for over 13 hours after being arrested on suspicion of being drunk and disorderly when he fell near his home. On admission to Walsgrave hospital he was deemed to be deeply unconscious. He subsequently died from a serious head injury sustained before he was brought into police custody. His family believe the police were negligent in failing to spot his injury and that their behaviour was motivated by anti-Irish prejudice in assuming his condition was due to drunkenness.

Under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act code of practice standards of care of those in custody are lower when the detained person is thought to be drunk, leading to a disturbingly high number of deaths in such cases. Normally, if a detainee 'does not show signs of awareness or fails to respond normally to questions or conversation', the police are required to call a doctor immediately - unless this condition is 'through drunkenness alone'.

INQUEST has frequently expressed concern about these deaths which are due to inadequate training of police officers and surgeons; failure by officers to summon medical help promptly and to give adequate information to doctors when they are called; and failure by police surgeons to recognise existing medical conditions or injuries. As a result, lives are needlessly lost.

The new inquest on Mr O'Reilly is an opportunity for his family to learn the truth and for lessons to be learnt which may avert future tragedies.

police violence



Another black death in custody

Steve Thorpe reports:

Ibrahim Sey was arrested in the early morning of Saturday, 16th March. Forest Gate police were called following a 'disturbance' at his home. Ibrahim displayed no violence to the police and he volunteered to go with them after giving his two children - a five week old baby and a girl of five - into the care of family friends. Accompanied by a friend, Mr Sey was taken to Ilford Police Station (the Forest Gate cells were being refurbished). On his arrival at Ilford Police Station, a dozen police were waiting for him. They man-handled him to the floor, knelt on him, handcuffed his hands behind his back, applying a neckhold. Mr Sey, a devout Muslim, recited verses from the Koran. He was forcibly split apart from his friend. The last words his friend heard Ibrahim say (in Gambian) were: "See what they're doing to me" which he repeated three times.

Mr Sey's friend was detained in an interrogation room for five hours before a detective from Scotland Yard told him that Ibrahim had died moments after he had last seen him. The media were told that Ibrahim had died in police custody before the family knew, via an anonymous call to the London News Network from Ilford Police Station. The British High Commission in Gambia issued a statement confirming CS spray was used, although denying it was the cause of death.

Ibrahim's body was taken to the local hospital, where family and friends were kept waiting. It was only because of the persistence of Ibrahim's wife that the police eventually told her that Ibrahim was dead on arrival. The family's appalling treatment included being told that the post-mortem would take place on the Monday or Tuesday, when in fact it was done on the Saturday night. Therefore the family were not informed of their right to have a representative present during the post-mortem. However, a Police Federation representative was present!

The police say that Ibrahim died of heart failure and that the CS gas spraying did not contribute to his death. Sey was a healthy 29 year old. The police's assertion of death by heart failure will require extensive toxological tests which have yet to be completed. The family will be getting an independent post mortem.

One irony is that Mr Sey's father was a police officer in The Gambia, as indeed Ibrahim himself had been.

The family demands that officers concerned be immediately suspended (the police have merely taken one officer off street duty onto desk duty), an immediate public enquiry and the ending of the use of CS spray.

Two days after Sey's death there was a spontaneous demonstration by 250 members of the Gambian community. There has been a meeting with a number of MPs, including Tony Banks and Bernie Grant. Another very successful demonstration on Saturday, 23rd March was called at a few days notice. It was a very angry but disciplined demonstration. Local youth shouted: "No justice, no peace!". The police clearly wanted to provoke a confrontation - they were present in huge numbers in the back street - but there was not a single arrest. One thousand people - mostly from the Gambian and other African communities in London - together with local people angry after a history of problems with Forest Gate Police, marched from Forest Gate to Ilford Police Station.

The Chairman of the Armed Forces Ruling Council in The Gambia, Captain Yaya Jammeh, has called for information about exactly what happened. The British Government has recently been lecturing him on human rights in The Gambia.

The campaign needs funds and other support. Please get your union or Labour Party to pass resolutions supporting the family's demands. For speakers and further information contact the Newham Monitoring Project at PO Box 273, London E7 (0181 555 8151).



Lessons from Liverpool dockers

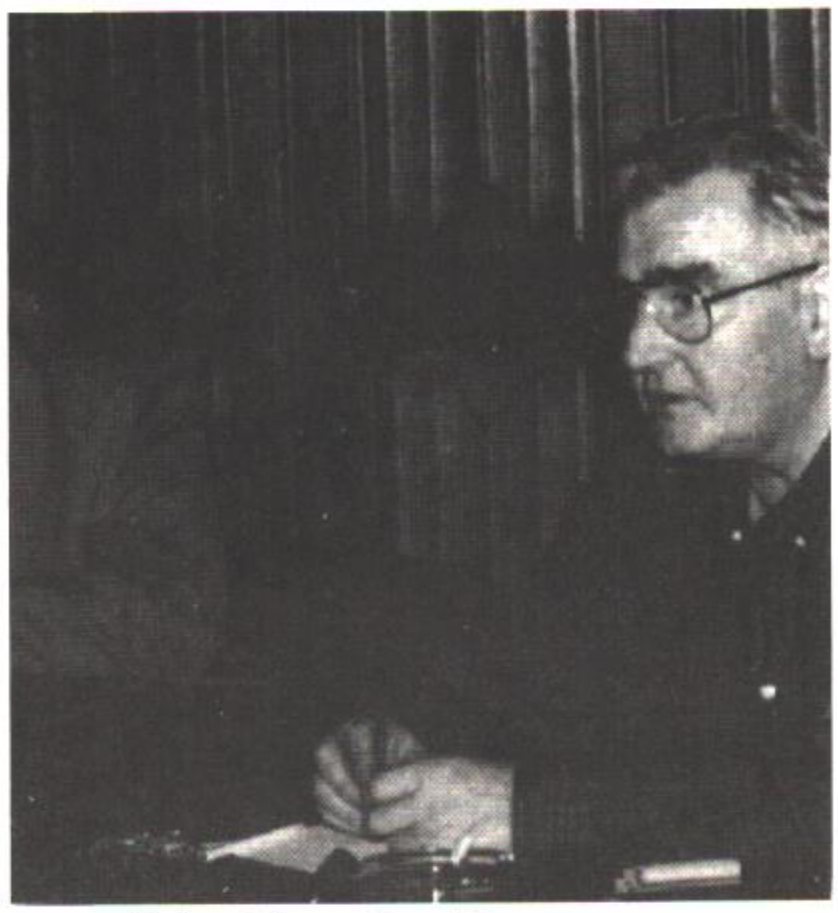
John Perry, Branch Secretary T&G 1/1148 reports on a dispute that can be won with solidarity home and abroad.

THE BITTER dispute between the Mersey Docks & Harbour Company (MDHC) and 500 TGWU dockworkers reached its six-month anniversary, marked with a lively demonstration in Liverpool on Saturday 23rd March, while in London on Friday 22nd March, supporters organised by the Greater London Association of Trades Councils staged an occupation of the London offices of scab labour firm Drake International.

"There is evident pressure on the company to settle the dispute. Action by dockers' unions abroad 'blacking' ships bound for Liverpool is having a sharp effect on the company," claims Jim Nolan, Secretary of Merseyside Port Shop Stewards. "ACL, the biggest shipping company using Liverpool has lost £4 million as a result of the strike here and the solidarity action by the Longshoremen's Union in the United States. ACL is threatening to remove their contracts unless the dispute is settled."

This international commitment from dockers' unions in the USA, Australia and Canada has been fundamental in boosting the cause of the Liverpool strikers. Another example of the success of the dockers' internationalism was their February conference in Liverpool with 53 union representatives from over 15 countries. Their agenda - to resolve a strategy of victory for the Merseyside dockers.

Support from fraternal unions worldwide has sadly not been matched by the union movement in Britain. The Trades Union Congress has yet to issue a statement. The strike is "unofficial" as no "legal" ballot was taken and no strike pay is being issued. Despite a TGWU executive statement, urging financial support for the strikers, money has been disappointingly slow in coming from branches around the country. The one exception has been TGWU Ireland, where the regional leadership urged its branches to support the strike.



Jimmy Nolan. Photo: David Pope.

Bill Morris has addressed mass meetings. "We could not have asked for more in his speeches," Nolan comments. "They [the TGWU leadership] have said all they can bar making the strike official." Support from other Liverpool unions has been good. "Ideally, we would like token stoppages to indicate support, but it is difficult. They [the other unions] recognise the need to fight against the evils of casual labour, but it seems as if they are waiting to see what happens to us. It's a Catch-22 situation. We need outside support to win, but other unions are unwilling to make that commitment unless we achieve victory!"

Solidarity action from other British ports has been token. Tilbury and Felixstowe ports have had union organisation pushed into near extinction with union organisers unable to deliver any concrete action. Frank Shilling, chair of TGWU 1/10 (Tilbury Dock Branch), was sacked for trade union activity after the 1989 dispute and port employers have ensured that he will never work in the industry again.

"After the 1989 dock strike the TGWU at Tilbury was de-recognised even though we conducted a ballot of members with 94% saying they wanted to be represented by their union. Most of these members stayed, but gradually membership has been whittled away by redundancy. Tilbury set up a casual labour system where ex-dockers who had been made redundant were placed on a casuals' list and paid at a lower rate than the 'core' workers. Liverpool remains the only port in Britain that didn't go the same way..."

Frank lives in Kent and I asked him about strike breakers from his locality being used against the union on Merseyside. "The MDHC has associated companies in the Medway area and therefore have a ready-made casual labour force to ship up to Liverpool. The biggest offender however is Drake International which provides agency labour for any job, anywhere in the world. Their whole existence is based on the supply of non-unionised contract workers who are used to break disputes."

The Liverpool dockers rejected a "pay-off" of £25,000 to some dockers in return to accepting casualisation. I asked Jim Nolan how long strikers can continue and he states "Some of the lads have been working on the docks for 30 years. They have lost their pension rights. With unemployment running high on Merseyside we have nowhere else to go. We appeal not to be left on our own, to be battered into submission, we need support. We are shackled by the anti-trade union laws which prevent us from getting solid action."

The Liverpool dockers' strike joins a growing list of disputes such as the Timex strike, the Chelmsford bus strike and the current Hillingdon cleaners' dispute. How much more does the labour movement have to take before we act?

The London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockworkers can be contacted via Dot Gibson, 248 Carey Gardens, SW8 4HW on 0171 627 8666.

News from LabourNet

The Mersey Docks and Harbour Company have filed a charge with the US government's National Labor Relations Board in Newark, New Jersey, against the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards.

It is unclear whether a UK company can bring charges in this way under US law, but it is clear that the employers are running scared of international solidarity action.

The Mersey dockers' World Wide Web page including the whole of their newspaper, "Dockers Charter" is on URL:

http://www.gn.apc.org/labournet/docks/

JJ workers: the fight goes on

The sacked JJ workers have returned to work, but their fight is not over. Liz Knight reports.

THE JJ strikers first returned to work on 26th February, to be told by the boss that, in spite of the Industrial Tribunal ruling in their favour, there was to be no union recognition, and he could make them work from 5am till midnight if he wished. The workers walked out again.

The TGWU District Official referred the issue back to the Tribunal, which recommended involving ACAS. JJ boss Mustafa Kamil was told to reinstate the workers or face further proceedings. The workers were instructed to sign work contracts based on their conditions at the time of the sackings last October. In fact Kamil's solicitor had drafted contracts incorporating the worst practices previously operated at the firm, e.g. no overtime pay and pay differentials particularly penalising some of the workers most active in the dispute.

The TGWU could have challenged Kamil's interpretation, but went along with ACAS in telling the workers to sign.

The workers then met and drew up their own demands, starting with formal recognition of the union, and including holiday pay, overtime pay, and minimum health and safety regulations. The TGWU District Official told the workers to accept Kamil's contract, full stop. The parts of the contract acknowledging a certain degree of union recognition and grievance and disciplinary procedures came within the ACAS code of practice. Sick pay is a legal requirement. All these provisions were in the contract because the Tribunal had so ruled. Nothing not ruled by the Tribunal could be added. The subsequent ACAS decisions had only elaborated on union recognition: Kamil had to accept the union's right to represent the workers and negotiate on their behalf, allowing the workers to elect shop stewards. The question of formal union recognition has been left to "future discussion".

The workers are being forced to return to work under conditions which, apart from union recognition gains, are in some ways worse than before. It was those intolerable and degrading conditions and low pay which provoked their struggle.

They joined the union to resist such things. They were sacked and then beaten up on the picket line by the boss's thugs. Together with the Support Group, they reduced Kamil's business by 30% and sank his reputation across London. They were fighting to win.

For the TGWU bureaucracy, the whole dispute is a different story. They wanted more members but weren't concerned about why



JJ strikers marching in Liverpool for the dockers. Photo: Colin Hayward.

the workers had joined. Their single concern was the reinstatement of the workers on the basis of union recognition. They did not make the dispute official. Legally there are no grounds for a dispute between employer and workers if the workers are not already in the union, and if the union is not already recognised by the employer. This means that strikes for union recognition are always illegal. That was why for the TGWU officials the JJ workers' fight was never a strike or even a dispute, just a "protest". They religiously followed the letter and spirit of anti-union laws. They took little or no part in the fightback organised by the workers and the Support Group; and now they are part of the machinery which has snatched a partial defeat from the jaws of victory.

With a fighting union, the workers could have won decisively. Objectively, they had already won: Kamil was desperate to settle. The workers could have refused any settlement except reinstatement on their own terms. But the court ruling, which seemed like a victory, has actually been used with the agreement of the TGWU (and the stamp of ACAS) to rob the workers of their only weapons - their solidarity and ability to damage Kamil's business materially.

But all is not lost. The workers have retained their fighting spirit. Although not all are accepting reinstatement, their decisions have been made collectively. All remain committed to mutual solidarity and to the continuing fight at JJ's and elsewhere for union recognition and humane working conditions. They have full back pay, and the right to union organisation at the workplace where the boss vowed it would never happen.

For nearly five months, the JJ workers, Turkish, Greek and Russian, have fought a titanic struggle against all the odds. They are still acting in solidarity with other workers - in particular with north and east London textile workers and the Liverpool dockers. Like the Hillingdon women cleaners, the JJ workers have lifted the lid on the super-exploitation of thousands of workers in Britain today. They have inspired workers at Jenny's Textiles in Tottenham where one hundred workers went on strike for union recognition - and won within 24 hours.

Along with the textile workers and in particular the local branch of the TGWU, the JJ workers and the Support Group remain at the forefront of the unionisation campaign in north and east London. Help is needed to fan these flames of solidarity into bush fires!

For information from the JJ workers' Support Group and from the North/East London Textile Branch TGWU, contact: Unwaged Centre, 72 West Green Road, Tottenham N15 5NS (0181 802 9804). The Support Group meets every Wednesday, 7.30 pm at the Unwaged Centre - all welcome.



Local government round-up

Liverpool Labour seek workers cuts

IN AN attempt to meet Tory spending limits Liverpool Council has issued its workforce with an ultimatum: 800 redundancies or a 5% pay cut.

Liverpool UNISON branch condemned the move as "badly thought out and badly formulated".

In the local rank-and file bulletin *UNITY* the branch calls on councillors to join with the community and workforce in a campaign for extra funding.

UNITY is available (price 30p) from Dept 79, 1 Newton Street, Manchester M1 1HW.

Wandsworth Serviceteam

THE TORY leadership of Wandsworth Council has wasted no time in exploiting the anti-union activities of its refuse collection contractor, Serviceteam, managed by Lewisham Labour Councillor Dave Sullivan (see last month's *LLB*).

A motion to a recent Council meeting congratulated Serviceteam on its "purposive management actions" in the face of an "Old-Labour dinosaur mentality".

Radical Labour - A Scottish mist

Vince Mills, of the Campaign for Socialism, writes: Commentators on Arthur Scargill's recent recruitment visit to Scotland suggested that with its left-wing Labour tradition it was potentially fertile ground for the new Socialist Labour Party.

It is extraordinary how long the myth of Scottish radicalism has lingered despite endless evidence to the contrary.

Take local government cuts. Oxford, Cambridge and Bedford are the councils that are fighting them. Not a Scottish council among them, despite some of the worst attacks on Scottish local government jobs and services for some time, exacerbated by Tory reorganisation of Scottish local authorities.

Faced with these cuts, councils have tried to increase revenue through council tax increases. So while services will be cut, council taxes will rise somewhere between 10% and 40%; in many areas this will be on top of rent rises.

Perhaps the political implications of all of this can be grasped by considering Glasgow - the very heartland of Labour's support. The City Council has recently increased rents and despite its overwhelming Labour majority is about to increase council tax by around 40% while simultaneously shedding 2,000 jobs, 700 of which are likely to be through compulsory redundancies.

The document setting out the Labour Group's decision makes it clear that the City Council will be closing schools, community centres and leisure facilities, reducing overtime payments to some of the poorest-paid staff and carrying out service reductions and job cuts.

There was an attempt by some left councillors to move that if the Labour Group was unwilling to consider "illegal" strategies, councillors might want to consider resignation as a way of demonstrating opposition to the cuts through the subsequent by-election campaigns. The Labour Council's leadership was able to brush this aside. Despite a commitment to attempt to expose the Tories as the real villains of the piece, there is likely to be little or no opposition to a severe attack on many working-class people.

The longer term implications of such compliant behaviour are not good news for Labour. Rebuilding local services after a Labour victory will be demanded by Labour voters but is going to be extremely difficult, given the damage these cuts will inflict. This will intensify the likelihood of disillusionment with a new Labour Government. Worse still is the immediate damage to Labour's standing as the party that defends working people, as it sits on its hands while the Tories put the boot into hard won jobs and services.

Brent cross UNISON

Jon Rogers (Deputy Regional Convenor, Greater London UNISON) reports on the latest excess of barmy Brent Council.

THE PERSONNEL Committee of Tory controlled Brent Council in North West London is recommending derecognition of public service union UNISON, the largest union among the Council workforce. The recommendation will go before the Policy Committee on Monday 1st April.

The background to this unprecedented departure from normal industrial relations in local government is the rabid enthusiasm of Brent Tories for privatisation and 'externalisation' of services, and the fact that UNISON, despite a series of defeats and setbacks in recent years, remains an obstacle in the way of this passion.

The implications for UNISON of derecognition would be very serious, as the rights of shop stewards to time off work and to receive information are at risk. In taking this decision, councillors rejected advice of senior officers that derecognition would lead to chaos, showing clearly that their agenda is to make further inroads into the rights and conditions of service of their workforce. Under the Transfer of Undertaking regulations (TUPE), workers whose jobs are privatised or externalised take their existing union recognition with them into the private sector. Following derecognition, Brent workers would be a more vulnerable, and therefore more attractive, proposition for cowboy employers.

Councillors are blaming UNISON - and the local regional official in particular - for the decision, apparently believing that trade unions shouldn't be a thorn in the flesh of reactionary employers. This development opens up the dangerous possibility of a 'compromise' whereby the Council trades recognition for the transfer of an official. UNISON must stand firm against any hint of such a manoeuvre - workers in Brent need a union that takes on their barmy employers. That means a union which chooses its representatives according to its own rules and procedures and not to suit the whims of a gaggle of neo-Thatcherite extremists.

UNISON members will be lobbying the Policy Committee of Brent Council on Monday 1st April (7pm at Brent Town Hall), and are seeking the support of the wider labour movement in this vital struggle. Labour Party members should lose no opportunity to expose Tory Brent's latest escapade.

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Compulsory redundancies looming in Sheffield

Chris Croome
Sheffield LG UNISON No. 2 Branch

THIS YEAR IT is increasingly likely that Sheffield Council will make compulsory redundancies. The Labour Group believe that it is preferable to make cuts now, under a Tory Government, rather than next year under Labour.

Currently 700 employees are threatened with compulsory redundancy in May. Around 100 staff have applied for VER/VS under extreme pressure from management.

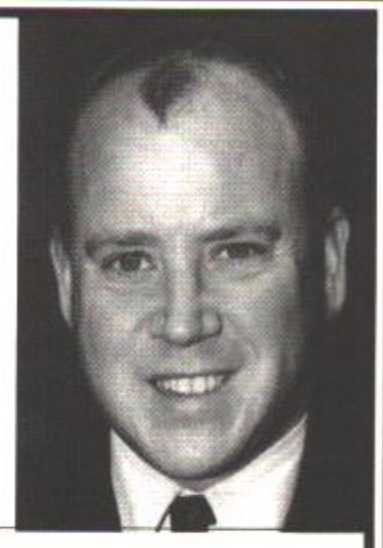
Three years ago council unions voted to take a 3.25% pay cut in exchange for an assurance of no compulsory redundancies. This year the council has made it clear that there will be no negotiations.

There is a very real danger that the council will be able to divide workers in their directorates and across grades and get away with making compulsory redundancies amongst the manual and APT&C employees. Several departments are moving towards sectional ballots for strike action.

Support Hillingdon hospital strikers

Sacked for refusing a pay cut!
Picket Pall Mall
125 Acre Lane Brixton SW2
12-2 pm Friday 29th March 1996
called by the
Greater London Region of UNISON

Leading with the left



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

● I was recently invited along at some ridiculously early hour to review the Sunday papers on a local radio show - apparently this is one of the perks of being elected UNISON's London Capo De Tutti Frutti.

It was a morning on which the *Sunday Express* had excelled itself, splashing their front page with a story suggesting that Princess Di could end up as a Labour MP.

Asked for my opinion on this staggering "news", I pointed out that she would be ideally equipped to be a New Labour MP. She's got no connection with the working class, never been a member of a trade union, she's got bags of money and a posh voice.

I've already warned Dennis Skinner to watch out for attempts to parachute Her Highness into Bolsover - and no, I don't mean Barbara Follett.

● Respect is due this month to Jarvis Cocker for his efforts on behalf of all music lovers at the Brit Awards. For those who missed it, he jumped up on stage and disrupted Michael Jackson's "I am Jesus" routine.

However, I don't think that Jarvis should leave it there. How about wrecking the public performances of other self-styled God figures. Michael Portillo at the Tory Party Conference, for example.

● So now that Mandelson and the dregs of the defunct SDP have published "New Labour's" manifesto, we can all look forward to a mother of a battle over the trade union link after the next election.

Apparently, the launch party for what amounts to little more than a dusted-off version of the old SDP programme was a real blow-out. The disco never turned up but Harriet Harman did.

● What about that Ron Davies then? A Labour front-bencher popping at the Royal Family - whatever next? A proclamation from the roof of Harvey Nicholls? Workers' control of Harrods' Food Hall?

Isn't it amazing that the moment a member of the Shadow Cabinet speaks some sense they're immediately told to keep their gob shut and are forced to issue a grovelling apology. Stalin just used to warm up the firing squad.

● Due to the fact that last month's column was hacked to ribbons on the grounds that it was "too long" I have decided to rationalise this month's output in the hope that it might survive intact.

I also need to get my scarf and shirt dry-cleaned for the mighty Chelsea's inevitable trip to Wembley. See you by the twin towers...

Hillingdon strikers- step up the pressure!

Jon Rogers, London UNISON Deputy Regional Convenor reports: ON 1ST OCTOBER 1995 Pall Mall sacked 53 UNISON members employed as cleaners when they refused to accept a pay cut. Six months later the picket line outside the hospital is still going strong in spite of the months of cold weather and lukewarm support from the union. The dispute has reached a bitter stalemate. The strikers will not settle for less than reinstatement on their original terms and conditions. Pall Mall will not countenance this.

Attempts to spread action within Hillingdon hospital have foundered on the weakness of union organisation locally - the strikers' UNISON branch has not met for some months, and this has hindered the strikers in putting their case to the wider union. The dispute can either go forwards or backwards, but it cannot stand still.

UNISON needs to be determined in its support for our courageous sisters (and brothers) at Hillingdon. At the moment there is a danger that the strikers will get mixed messages about our support for them. It is good that the London Region AGM called for a demonstration outside Pall Mall's HQ in Brixton - but unfortunate that the organisation of this has been subject to delay. It is great that the strikers spoke to, and received a standing ovation from, UNISON Women's Conference in Bournemouth on Friday 22nd March - but unfortunate that the strikers' visit had to be arranged at three days notice by elected lay members of the Regional Committee.

The strikers are calling for UNISON members employed by Pall Mall throughout the country to be ballotted for a one day strike. UNISON's next step must be to convene a meeting of representatives of Pall Mall workers to consider this call, and to debate how to put pressure on Pall Mall to settle the dispute.

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Haiti - between donors and peasants

Charles Arthur, just back from Haiti, argues that international banks' demands cast a shadow over the restoration of democracy

IN EARLY March, leaders of the local peasant organisation crowded into a small classroom in Limonade, a village ten miles south of Haiti's second city Cap-Haitien, to discuss the country's new Government. 'We have nothing here, it's a struggle to feed our families. We voted for Preval so he would help us peasants,' said Lucien Orelus, secretary of the Peasant Organisation for the Development of Limonade (OPDL).

New President Rene Preval succeeded Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February. Both are members of the Lavalas coalition which relies on peasants, who make up 70 percent of the population, for the basis of its political support. The OPDL is typical of the many peasant organisations expecting Preval to act decisively in their favour.

These expectations have been heightened by Preval's inauguration speech stressing the importance of revitalising domestic agricultural production, and by his appointment of an agronomist, Rosny Smarth, as prime minister.

But Preval's room for manoeuvre is limited, given his Government's reliance on loans from international financial agencies, such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) which are contingent on the Haitian Government's implementation of free market economic reforms.

Last October President Aristide bowed to public pressure after demonstrations organised by grassroots organisations, and refused to continue with the reforms. In response the international financial institutions suspended over US$130 million of aid.

With the Government due to run out of money within two months, Preval has said Haiti has no option but to reopen negotiations with the international banks. Peasant leaders are concerned about a main part of the structural adjustment programme requiring removal of import tariffs. This measure, by completely opening the Haitian market to foreign food imports, will run directly counter to attempts to support the country's ailing agricultural sector.

The threat posed by cheaper food imports is keenly felt by peasant farmers producing one of Haiti's staple foods, rice. On the northern plain near the village of Acul du Nord, farming methods have changed little. Peasants work the rice fields with only the most rudimentary tools.

Antoine St. Fleur, secretary of the Peasant Movement of Acul, outlined the difficulties created by the lack of any mechanised equipment and the poor state of irrigation canals. But he pointed to more serious problems.

'Without storage facilities for rice we have to sell right after the harvest when the market price is low. But the biggest threat to our production is rice imported from the United States. Miami rice undercuts us.'

The tariff on rice was cut from ten to three per cent last year, and is due to be removed altogether if the IMF and World Bank have their way. With rice farmers in the country's Artibonite region warning that they will burn trucks they find carrying imported rice, this issue casts a shadow over the new Preval presidency.

Charles Arthur is the author of a new booklet, *After the Dance, the Drum is Heavy*, which looks at Haiti in the year following the US/UN intervention and argues that real democracy was defeated rather than restored. It is available at £4.30 including postage from the Haiti Support Group, c/o Trinity Church, Hodford Road, London NW11 8NG. Tel/Fax: 0181 201 9878.

Nicaraguan primaries

Mike Phipps, Brent South CLP writes:

TWENTY-SIX political parties have registered in Nicaragua in preparation for this year's presidential and parliamentary elections. In a unique development, the Sandinistas, who held power from 1979 to 1990, held a primary contest to pick their presidential candidate.

Former President Daniel Ortega won the nomination against human rights leader Vilma Nunez in a high turnout. Despite her defeat, 40% of Sandinista candidates at local and national level are women.

In recent years, Nicaragua has taken a hammering at the hands of the IMF and World Bank. 80% of the aid the country receives goes to paying off the foreign debt. The social sector has been worst hit. Nicaragua now spends less than half what it did on health seven years ago - just $16 per person per year.

Yet much is at stake in the upcoming elections. As Victor Hugo Tinoco of the Sandinista National Directorate pointed out in London last month, the Nicaraguan Revolution still has two unique achievements outstanding. First, there is a neutral, professional army which will accept an electoral victory of left or right - a very different situation to elsewhere in the region. Second, the great majority of property redistributed under the Sandinistas remains in the hands of the small producers who received it.

If the hard right comes to power in Nicaragua in the form of the authoritarian ex-mayor of Managua, Arnoldo Aleman, these basic achievements will be in peril. Worse, the democratic space allowing people to organise to defend their rights is likely to be severely curtailed.

Aleman currently leads in the opinion polls and is likely to have considerable resources from his American backers to buy support. The Sandinistas meanwhile face internal problems. Last year's split by ex-Vice President Sergio Ramirez has been followed by allegations of corruption within the Sandinista Trade Union Federation.

LLB page 22

The new slavery?

Mike Phipps reviews
Last Resorts:
The Cost of Tourism
in the Caribbean
by Polly Pattullo, published by Latin American Books, £14.99.

As Michael Manley points out in the foreword to this thought-provoking book, tourism is now seen by some as the only means of survival for Caribbean countries. Today these islands are one of the top ten world tourist destinations. As old industries become uncompetitive and go into decline in the face of NAFTA and other free trade agreements, tourism offers both a chance for development - and a new basis for dependency.

In the last 20 years the number of tourists to the region has increased sixfold to an annual 14 million. Many of them come on package tours controlled by western tour companies, which have the power to withdraw their trade from certain hoteliers, resorts or even whole islands. When Manley's radical Government was elected in Jamaica in the 1970s, tour operators engineered a big drop in tourism - and consequently in the country's export earnings.

The benefits of tourism for the region's economy and environment are, to say the least, contradictory. The average tourist consumes six times as much water as a local resident. For every dollar tourists bring in, 70 cents go out in imports to service their extravagant needs.

Two thirds of hotels in the Caribbean are foreign owned. Increasingly, all-inclusive hotel complexes exclude local people -even from the adjoining beach. Cuba is one of the worst culprits, banning its residents even from tourist bars and restaurants.

The environmental impact is a further problem. Beach erosion is widespread, caused by piers for yachting marinas or tree-felling to 'improve' the view from the hotel. Other problems include waste and sewage dumping, coral reef breakdown, the destruction of wetlands and sand mining to build artificial beaches. Even 'eco-tourism' is not blameless - especially where brochures advertise - "unspoiled Amerindian settlements" as part of the attractions.

One recent typical controversy involved the building of a Swiss-owned hotel complex over 320 acres in St Lucia. The site was a traditionally sacred area between two volcanoes.

The project was compared to "a take-away concession inside Stonehenge" by St Lucia's Nobel Prize-winning poet Derek Walcott. Local fishermen were no longer able to work the bay where guests lay on imported sand. Amerindian relics were destroyed when the tennis court was built on a burial site.

Many are also concerned about the impact on the islands' contemporary culture, when the principal form of work is servicing the leisure requirements of 'white trippers'. "Tourism is whorism" sums up the attitude of critics in some of the islands, who feel that relations with the First World are little more than a replication of slavery.

"Without the large hotels, most of the islands would dry up and blow away... Hilton is probably doing more to further local island cultures than any one else," scoffed an American travel magazine of the 1970s. This book provides an essential antidote for those who want to travel without illusions.



A security guard patrols the public beach at the $500 per night exclusive Jalousie resort. Photo: Philip Wolmuth.

Cuba unbowed by lies and sanctions

Cuba Solidarity activist Steve Wilkinson examines the facts behind Cuba's downing of two American planes.

ON 24TH February TV was awash with images of US Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, raging at a "barbaric killing" by an "uncivilised" country, of four US citizens on a "humanitarian mission".

Tiny Cuba had once again irked its powerful neighbour by shooting down two planes belonging to an Miami exile group called "Brothers to the Rescue."

The "Brothers" claimed to be a "humanitarian organisation" looking for Cubans trying to raft themselves to freedom. The pilots "were shot down in international waters", "had not been warned", and a third plane piloted by the leader of the group, only escaped through his superior flying skills.

The US forced through a UN resolution deploring the incident. Clinton, riding a wave of anti-Castro hysteria in Miami, announced that he would sign the Helms-Burton legislation which aims to strangle investment and aid to Cuba.

But now, some weeks on, some interesting facts have begun to emerge. The Brothers to the Rescue were not on a humanitarian mission. They intended to drop anti-government leaflets over Havana during Carnival week. Twice in January they had carried out similar attacks and over the previous 18 months they had illegally entered Cuban airspace 14 times.

Cuba had repeatedly complained to the US warning that they would take any measures necessary to stop the flights if nothing was done. The US Government merely warned the Brothers that it would not "be able to interfere" and suggested they did not fly below the 24th parallel.

At the UN hearing on the incident on 6th March, the Cuban Government presented radar and taped transmission evidence showing that the planes were in Cuban airspace. The third plane, piloted by group leader Jorge Basulto, was not attacked because he never entered the airspace. Instead he ordered his colleagues to fly into a restricted zone around a Cuban military air base while he stayed outside the twelve mile limit.

Basulto has now been exposed as having been trained by the CIA in 1961. He has previously carried out terrorist attacks on Cuba, once shelling the Havana seafront from a speedboat. He was a pilot for the CIA in Nicaragua, supplying arms to the Contras and, according to Cuban intelligence, was planning to carry out bombing attacks on Cuba using the Brothers organisation as a "humanitarian" cover.

The US authorities knew all about Basulto prior to the incident. A Cuban agent, Juan Pablo Roque, who had infiltrated the Brothers, was feeding the information to the FBI. Furthermore, despite the fact that all pilots must keep to a predetermined flight path or face losing their licence, the US aviation authorities had done nothing to stop the Brothers from flying.

"Basulto has now been exposed as having been trained by the CIA in 1961. He has previously carried out terrorist attacks on Cuba, once shelling the Havana seafront from a speedboat."

The Brothers organisation was set up by the right-wing Cuban American National Foundation in 1991. CANF, based in Miami, is the prime sponsor of the Helms-Burton legislation which Clinton was opposing until this incident.

Under the law, British businessmen and their families will be denied US visas if they trade with Cuba. Companies that use Cuban properties formerly owned by US citizens might be sued for damages in US courts. Countries will be denied US aid for trading with Cuba and international aid agencies will be pressured into not donating or lending money by the threat of having their US contribution cut off.

"Cuba's relations with the US may now be at their lowest ebb for years, but the revolution seems to have emerged from this latest skirmish stronger than ever."

The law breaks all international free trade agreements. Last year EU commissioner Leon Brittan wrote to the US State department warning that if US aid to Russia is cut off under the Helms law, its economic recovery could be destabilised which would "threaten the security of Western Europe."

But the law might yet backfire. Already, Canada, the whole of Latin America, and even Britain have told the US that they will ignore the law and seek recompense in the international courts. Some US companies have said they will defy it and begin trading with Cuba.

In his speech to the UN, Cuban Foreign Minister Roberto Robaina said that Cuba knew that the Helms Bill would be passed but that would not scare them: "Cuba never has and never will give in to threats, we are capable of defending ourselves and our dignity. We are not afraid either of lies or sanctions," he said.

Cuba's relations with the US may now be at their lowest ebb for years, but the revolution seems to have emerged from this latest skirmish stronger than ever.

For more information contact the Cuba Solidarity Campaign, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG. Tel: 0171-263-2767.

Bosnia still in crisis

The economic problems facing Bosnia are now a bigger danger than the threat of a Greater Serbia or Croatia, according to Balkans analysist Branka Magas, who was on a recent delegation to the region.

THE DELEGATION, an initiative of the Alliance to Defend Bosnia-Herzegovina, went to Sarajevo and Mostar. It included journalist Noel Malcolm and Labour MP Calum MacDonald, who is appealing for economic aid to Bosnia.

Major difficulties surround the implementation of peace in the region. No serious attempt is being made to arrest known war criminals and the possibility of free elections later this year is remote.

Bosnia is now demobilising 1,000 soldiers a day, but there are no jobs - or even homes - for them to go to. With 6,000 refugees and another million people waiting to return, the crisis can only worsen. Meanwhile Bosnia is expected to pay its share of the former Yugoslavia's national debt!

A further problem is that around half of Bosnia's territory has been strewn with over three million mines. The cost of removing these runs to over half a billion dollars. So far the EU has allocated only $762.000.

For more information, contact the Alliance to Defend Bosnia-Herzegovina, 12 Flitcroft Street, London WC2 8DJ.

Campaign against the Asylum and Immigration Bill

National Demonstration
Saturday 20th April,
Assemble 11am,
Embankment, London, SW1.

A race to the bottom for workers



Michael Hindley MEP argues for a social agenda in the debate on world trade.

TRADE IS AN issue which rarely hits the headlines. There was a flurry of interest when GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs) was signed, and some attention was paid by the left to the issues of environmental and social protection, but there has been little consistent focus on the globalisation of trade and its devastating threat to social standards. A fellow MEP told me that he got more letters about GATT's effects on animal welfare than about its effects on humans.

Leon Brittan, the European Union's trade commissioner said the post-GATT world would be a "Global 1992". It would set in motion the same processes as the EU itself sought with its own completion of the internal market, that is, the Four Freedoms of capital, goods, labour and services.

Global labour movement is not on for a whole number of reasons, though the Third World countries have raised the issue. If there is to be global competitive tendering inside the EU, why not have global tendering? The impact of South Korean construction firms being able to bid for the Newbury by-pass would be absolutely devastating, but it is logical.

In the eight years it took to get the GATT settlement, the EU and the USA demanded and got concessions from the Third World where they are strongest, that is, in capital and services. The EU is now trying to open up the field of foreign direct investment, saying in effect that countries would not be able to prevent capital inflows or outflows. For developing countries this would be devastating, since the success of some countries is based on preferential treatment for home capital. It would be disastrous for banking services which try to promote alternative small-scale or co-operative enterprises. They would be undercut by the transnational banks and their customer-friendly service would be phased out, just as in the UK.

What western producer companies want is the right to exploit cheaper production elsehwere, in short, "delocalisation". This is no idle threat. Germany, the bastion of high-wage, high-skill production, is seeing a massive outflow of capital. German unions are now exposed to Thatcherite cuts in standards under the threat of moving production elsewhere.

We are facing what has accurately been called, "a race to the bottom", - workers constantly told that unless wages and social costs are cut, production will move elsewhere, whereas the workers elsewhere are told not to ask for too much because this would jeopardise their comparative advantage.

The GATT settlement set up the World Trade Organisation (WTO). I have just returned from a short fact-finding visit to its headquarters in Geneva. It has a legal and a statistics section, a library, an investment section, and an environmental section -but no social section. World trade is to continue with no consideration for the social agenda. But this is the most crucial distortion of world trade, and the one most directly affecting human beings, that is, the effect on jobs and welfare of unfair trade based on exploited labour.

There is already a review of the work of the WTO planned for Singapore in December, and there are the beginnings of a debate on the agenda. It is vitally important that we start a campaign now in the labour movement to get a social agenda in the Global Economy. Inadequate as it is, the concept of a Social Chapter had to be conceded by the EU in its own internal market; we now need to challenge Leon Brittan's line and respond, "no global market without a social agenda". The Earth Summit at Rio had a fringe, the Beijing conference on women's issues had a fringe; we need a fringe at the WTO review in Singapore where NGOs and trade unions can put forward the case for people-centred world economics.

Trainspotting



Trainspotting: *"Where is Leith, Danny?"*

Directed by Danny Boyle

Anna Macedo writes: Based on the novel by Irvine Welsh, this film has been described as "The Young Ones on Heroin", but the comparison is only as true as a facetious comment need be: the powerful impact of *Trainspotting* is also maintained by its use of comedy - but it is comedy on a higher level.

It is not surprising that the tabloid press represented *Trainspotting* as a pro-drugs film; I believe, however, that it is quite the opposite. The lifestyle of heroin addicts is portrayed with a gritty realism that is genuinely disgusting, yet the constant comic element keeps the viewer gripped.

The film basically depicts the way heroin addiction enters and leaves people's lives; we see how some of the characters live with heroin and how others die as a result of it. The plot revolves around Renton - compellingly portrayed by Ewan McGregor - the lives of his friends and his experiences in Leith and London. Most of the violence is instigated by Begbie (Robert Carlyle), an alcoholic who nevertheless introduces himself by telling us that he never touches drugs.

Life for these characters is permeated with crime, either getting away or getting caught, giving up or going back on to drugs. Renton does eventually break free but only by betraying his friends. You may come out of the film wondering whether he did the right thing - before you realise he did the only possible thing. Perhaps *Trainspotting* does miss an opportunity to comment constructively on the many problems it highlights, but I feel it is intended to entertain rather than inform.

Megan Hiatt writes: How does Danny Boyle's highly acclaimed film *Trainspotting* live up to Irvine Welsh's groundbreaking novel? Boyle's film is certainly entertaining - fast-paced, inventive and energetic. The culture of drugs addiction in Edinburgh is both enlivened and enlightened by an irreverent, non-naturalistic style of film-making that could be mistaken for approbation were it not for Renton's increasing need to break free from his past.

Atypically, however, this does not mean that he is desperate to control the addiction itself. Far from it: in both film and book the physical addiction to heroin itself is conquerable, but its implications are far more deadly. And this is where the film is lacking a certain something. Yes, the audience understands that Renton must sever all ties with his social group, must reject his "mates", especially the vicious Begbie, in order to "choose life". And yes, long-term physical problems contracted through drug use, in this case AIDS, are vividly portrayed.

But because the film omits many of Welsh's references to particular aspects of life on the housing estates and amongst the unemployed in Leith, including the use of the vernacular that distinguishes the book and establishes a sense of community, much of the social commentary is lost.

We are instead presented with a film that memorably, powerfully and unusually depicts the vicious cycle in which the drug users are ensnared as a social phenomenon, but refuses to draw any conclusions as to causes or solutions.

Cultural Euro-scepticism

Jonathan Ebbs writes: It's that time of year again to get out the bunting, put on your Union Jack underpants and wave the flag for Great Britain in yes, you've guessed it, the Eurovision Song Contest.

Whose heart cannot leap for joy at the very mention of this cavalcade of international talent, and whose eye has not shed at least one tear when the UK spins out to some unknown smirking triumphantly as they warble through some never to be remembered ditty? Personally I am in favour of declaring a national holiday for this spectacle and am currently petitioning Parliament to add it to its English Heritage list of sporting events which at no cost must be allowed to leave earthbound telly.

Because, make no mistake, it is a battle - to the death. If any of you out there are still confused over Europe then look no further. The Eurovision Song Contest is an education, a lesson in historical alliances and resentments still harboured by some of the entrants to this day. Year after year it's always the same. Greece votes for Cyprus, Cyprus votes for Greece, UK votes for France, France doesn't vote for UK, UK gives Ireland 12 points, Ireland gives UK the big fat 0. It's a pattern repeated ad nauseam. Who cannot have felt for songbird Sonia when she was robbed at the last point of victory by another Irish entry, so appalling I can't even remember the name. Which leads me to another thing: why, when the UK clearly leads the world in popular music, do we consistently fail to win? No I don't know either. It is an absolute travesty, only adding to my theory that it's all about international politics.

Popular music is the UK's cultural claim to fame around the world. And yes perhaps that is verging on the nationalistic, although I prefer to think of it as supporting a celebration of cultural identity. Either way would somebody please tell me the difference between me supporting Lulu or even Michael Ball, and following around the country a bunch of dumbos running around a muddy field? The only difference is that there are, as of yet, no reported incidents of Eurovision hooliganism sweeping the continent.

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Jarvis Cocker is innocent! (Official)

Jane Thompson (Greenwich Unison) sides with the *Common People* against Wakko Jacko.

THE FIRST thing I knew about it was when a friend called to tell me that it was the most disgusting thing she'd ever seen. A new speech by Tony Blair? A re-enactment of the Scott enquiry perhaps? No. She was referring to Michael Jackson's 'performance' at the Brit awards.

But during the performance something else had been going on that wasn't shown by the TV cameras. Jarvis Cocker, lead singer of the highly acclaimed group Pulp, had been arrested amid allegations of assault on members of Jackson's entourage, including children. Over the next few days the story began to unfold. It seems that Cocker, disgusted by Jackson's egocentric Messianic imagery, had taken it upon himself (egged on by keyboard player Candida Doyle) to make a public demonstration against Jackson's posturing.



Jarvis Cocker.

Footage of Cocker's one-man stand shows him running onto the stage during the performance, looking bewildered, showing his (clad) bum to the audience, flapping his hands, being chased and lifting his cardi. For this totally rebellious act Cocker was rewarded with two hours of questioning in his dressing room and several hours in local police cells. He was released in the early hours of the morning to reappear in court on 11th March. During this time police studied all available footage and witness statements and have now concluded that there is no case to answer. It seems that even the best-paid lawyers in LA were unable to make something out of nothing.

At best, Cocker's actions were a public demonstration of the music industry's sycophantic relationship with a man deluded enough to cast himself as some sort of saviour. At worst, they were a drunken dare that got out of hand. Either way it has seen Cocker's credibility soar, even in the tabloid press, and Jackson's plummet which, as far as I'm concerned, is no bad thing. ❑

Nixon loses again to JFK by a landslide

Steve Smith reviews Oliver Stone's latest film, Nixon.

SINCE NIXON'S death almost two years ago, a ferocious campaign has been waged on both sides of the Atlantic trying to convince us that the 37th president wasn't the greatest political crook in history after all. Oliver Stone is very aware that his film biography appears in the midst of this revisionist storm. Perhaps that is why *Nixon* is one of the most cautious and understated films of Stone's career.

The problem is, however, that Stone's genius lies precisely in his ability to bludgeon audiences with wonderfully bombastic ideas and imagery, communicated by innovative film-making techniques. The brilliance of Stone's flawed masterpiece *JFK* will live on for decades. Despite being laughably soft on Kennedy's Cold War politics, the film was one of the most savage attacks on the real rulers of America, the secret state of the "military-industrial complex", ever to appear in a popular cultural form. It was a classic whodunit brought to life by dazzling editing and almost surreal flashback scenes of historical reconstruction.

While many condemned *JFK* as ludicrous conspiracy theory, they missed the point that the film was a fable aiming to expose the corruption of American government. *JFK* was therefore on a completely different level from the apolitical anti-government paranoia of a cult series like *The X-Files*.

While Kennedy made only fleeting appearance in *JFK*, Anthony Hopkins's Nixon all but squeezes everything else out of Stone's latest film, including much of the politics.

The polemic that drives Stone's best work is all but absent, replaced by a rather dull psychological investigation of Nixon himself. Nixon is portrayed as a tragic Shakespearean hero - basically a decent guy but with some bad flaws that are inevitably going to bring him down. It is not uninteresting, but it's all a bit routine. Four television movies have already given us similar characterisations that plod along the same path of narrative conservatism. Hopkins' performance in the title role has been over-rated - only the trademark Nixon smile is satisfying.

There are some attempts by Stone to recapture the swagger of *JFK*, but they invariably fall flat. Larry Hagman as a JR-like Texas oil man who is bankrolling Nixon is a nice touch, it is true, but consider this scene. The oil man and a group of businessmen and Cuban exiles are trying to persuade Nixon to run against Kennedy once more after the 1960 defeat. When Nixon replies that Kennedy would be bound to win the 1964 election, the assembled company look at each other like a group of B-movie villains and a Cuban says, "Suppose Kennedy doesn't run in '64?" Generally, Oliver Stone can do a lot better than hammy stuff like this.

Those of us on the left should treasure a film-maker like Oliver Stone, whatever his faults. He has done more to popularise the notion that American bourgeois democracy is a sham than the likes of Noam Chomsky ever will. Let us hope that *Nixon* isn't a sign that he's getting old and starting to slow down. ❑



LLB is decent - official

Commenting on the **Hackney Council library occupation** to save services in the early 1990s, the anarcho-syndicalist *Public Service Workers Network* stated, "It was sustained by Labour Party members, mostly supporters of *Labour Briefing*." They write, "Credit where it was due at the time. *Briefing* served as a rallying point for decent socialists." But before we can rest on our laurels, however, we are reminded, "Some lefties are OK, most don't have a clue, many have destructive political agendas - be wary." You have been warned.

Public Service Workers Network is available from PO Box 1681, London, N8 7LE.

LLB's oily links

One of the wonders of the revolution sweeping the **former Soviet Union** has been the opportunities for the creation of "stakeholding" its society. Imagine *LLB*'s delight at being invited to a conference at the Hotel Inter-Continental on Trade & Investment Opportunities in the Russian Oil Industry. For just £1,874.13p delegates can enjoy sessions including 'After the Parliamentary Elections and Looking Forward to the Presidential Elections' led by none other than A. Pravda (we kid you not).

Not the GLC

The proposals for a **new London authority** have taken an unexpected twist with the Association of London Government's Labour Leaders investigating new powers for the beloved 'stakeholders'. Plans have been unveiled for a possible second chamber: "the formalisation of a stakeholder structure into a second chamber appointed from an agreed list of London's representative bodies, with the entitlement to provide advice on the authority's budget and policy making." The document is indecisive on the prospect of a directly elected mayor - a straw poll of stakeholders in *Periscope* revealed Tony Banks marginally ahead of Dick Whittington's cat.

Benn for President

A readers' poll of the *Independent on Sunday*, voted **Tony Benn** to be the first elected President of Britain. The pro-republic *IoS* gave readers a choice of 15 people. Benn topped the poll. 46 votes above **Betty Boothroyd** and 65 above third-placed **Jarvis Cocker**. Nearly a thousand readers voted, and the positive letters included "one from a (probably lonely) councillor in Tunbridge Wells headed 'Up the Republic'."

Harmanisation of education continues

Tony Blair's senior schools adviser, **Professor Michael Barber**, is to send his daughter to a private or selective school. The Hackney resident joins former chair of the Greater London Labour Party, **Glenys Thornton**, in attacking Hackney's improving state sector schools. **Rhodes Boyson**, Tory MP, hit the nail (rather than the pupil) on the head, saying "There are now so many Labour politicians and advisers sending their children to grant-maintained or independent schools that they should set up a special school for them and see how it competes with the state system".

No One Likes Him...

South London's professional Millwall-loving, working-class hero, **Danny Baker** kindly appeared in his local paper supporting his local school. Well, not his local school exactly - the £4,000-a-year private prep school where his kids join one of Labour MP **Roger** "they need competitive sport and discipline" **Godsiff**'s. Wot a diamond geezer.

Not so gorgeous George

MP **Bruce George** (Lab., Victorian Era) managed a telling contribution to the Commons inquiry into **gays in the armed forces**. His concerns over lesbians and gay men being allowed to serve are based on the fact that there was no use having a "politically correct" army with 50% women, 6% blacks and 10% homosexuals if they could not successfully fight wars. The Chief of Staff may be more worried about an army made up of sad old political has-beens in grey suits rather than fully trained soldiers whether they be male or female, black or white, gay or straight.

New Labour, blue Labour

It was probably inevitable. We've copied their policies, now their presentation. The bright Blairites of Haywards Heath decided that the best way to recruit more members in the Tory commuter belt is to issue **leaflets printed in blue**. Could conference soon be singing "The peoples flag is royal blue.."? That would indeed be music to **Mandelson**'s ears.

Keeping up with the Gordon-Duff-Penningtons

Tony Blair's recent conversion to being a friend of the countryside has brought him some strange allies. Step forward the improbably-named **Patrick Gordon-Duff-Pennington** who, speaking from Muncaster Castle on the likelihood of a Labour Government, stated: 'I view the possibility with no apprehension at all.' Mr GDP would also welcome **Jack Straw**'s comment that whilst finding foxhunting and staghunting 'particularly bloody', he was, according to *Countryman's Weekly* "against any legislation to ban them or any other fieldsport". Straw has broken ranks as the only Labour MP to oppose Party policy on banning hunting and *Periscope* (as well as the foxes and stags) looks forward to him being slapped down by the Labour leadership as quickly as fellow shadow cabinet member Ron Davies.

Fair fur trade?

Gwyneth Dunwoody MP's friends and sponsors in the **fur trade** have been lobbying MPs with a wonderfully Orwellian letter, which commences "Do you realise that the fur trade is naturally committed to animal welfare?" The British Fur Trade Association writes that "the International Fur Trade Federation together with the Canadian Government has invested millions of dollars into developing more humane trapping technologies." They fail to point out that the only reason for this is so they will have to comply with new tougher EU laws to keep open their lucrative European market.

'Progress Watch'

As a service to the labour movement, *Periscope* has mounted 'Progress Watch' to monitor the machinations of the **magazine of the Mandelsonite right** (see last issue). Right-wing think tank (a contradiction in terms if ever there was one) magazine *Progress* has now started to corrupt the youth of South London by sponsoring a Young Labour Comedy Night. (Mo Mowlam was due to present her policies on Northern Ireland). *Progress* appears, along with Derek Draper (not known for his youth) on the 'thank you' list of the South London *Young Labour News*.

Where is the money coming from to finance these ventures? We should be told!

Mandelson has friend!

How sad that when **Roy Hattersley** wrote a critique of **Peter Mandelson**'s new book just one voice leapt to his defence. It was his former 'gofer' at Walworth Road, **Colin Byrne**, Labour's former Chief Press Officer who failed to get Mandy's job when Peter became an MP. He described the book as 'a realistic and practical handbook for New Labour in government'. Does Mandelson still write Colin's press letters for him?

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Science

The Aquatic Ape - in from the cold?

Elaine Morgan, feminist author of *The Descent of Woman*, has long been ridiculed for proposing that early humans evolved along lake and estuary shores. Establishment theory instead pictured "Man the Mighty Hunter" striding out from the forest into the "hot, dry savanna". *Labour Left Briefing* invited Elaine to write for us in the light of recent 3.5 million year-old fossil discoveries by Philip Tobias, the 'grand old man' of South African anthropology and co-discoverer of Homo habilis. In a dramatic public announcement, Tobias has admitted that the first hominids loved shaded, well-watered environments and that the "savanna hypothesis" is now dead.

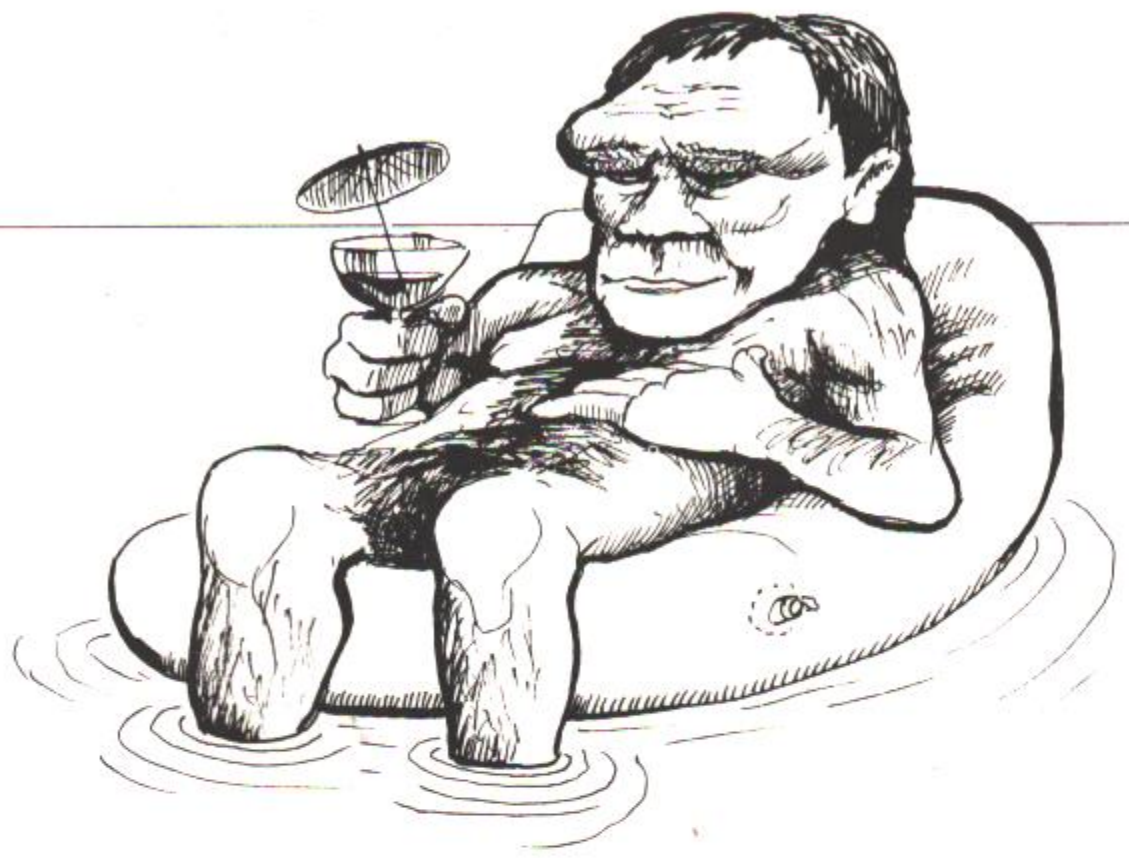
THE AQUATIC ape theory (AAT) posits a semi-aquatic phase in early human evolution. For thirty years, this idea has been likened to stories about Loch Ness monsters, despite the impeccable standing of scientists such as the great marine biologist Sir Alister Hardy, who was among the first to propound the theory.

Several enigmatic features found in Homo, while unique among primates, find close parallels in the physiology of certain aquatic or semi-aquatic mammals. Examples include 'nakedness' (loss of functional body hair), a layer of fat bonded to the skin, a descended larynx, and voluntary breath control - an essential precursor of speech.

Walking on two legs has no mammalian parallel, but Hardy noted that a wading ape venturing into deeper water would simply have to walk upright to breathe!

My critics said AAT was unnecessary. They claimed that the scenario for the ape/hominid split was well understood: one population of the ancestral apes moved from forest out into the "hot, dry savanna". There, they became two-legged so as to "run faster" and carry weapons, while the torrid heat caused them to sweat profusely and shed their body hair. AAT referred to all this as "the savanna theory". In different versions, it reigned supreme for over fifty years.

In what for me has been a remarkable and exciting development, the experts have in recent months suddenly started to abandon this whole idea. Detailed studies of the African paleoenvironment show that savanna conditions evolved in Africa much later than had previously been imagined. The habitat of Lucy (Australopithecus afarensis) is now agreed to have been "lush and well watered" (her bones lay among crocodile and turtle eggs and crab claws). Australopithecus ramidus, a million years earlier still, lived in woodland. Richard Leakey wrote in 1992: "The great plains and the immense herds on them are... much more recent than the origin of the human family". And now Professor Phillip Tobias, lecturing in London on his recent fossil discovery "Little Foot", has announced that "the savanna hypothesis" (of which he had been one of the most illustrious supporters) "is washed out".



Is this the beginnings of a paradigm shift completely revolutionising our understanding of human origins? I think it could be. The strength of savanna theory lay in its contention that the hominids' habitat was radically different from that of the apes. This claim is severely undermined if the protohominids were largely tree-dwelling, as is now agreed, only crossing open spaces in occasional transit from one patch of forest to the next.

Meanwhile, AAT is waiting in the wings. The arguments against it look increasingly precarious. Nearly all the Rift Valley fossils were recovered from lake or river sediments. Unfortunately, this can never prove that the entire species lived by the water, since only bones deposited in watery sediments get preserved. On the other hand, neither can it disprove the idea. If the first hominids were indeed largely tree-dwelling, why did they and no other apes become bipedal on the ground? A flooded forest offers a possible answer: there is geological evidence of extensive flooding in the areas where the oldest hominids are found.

The strongest argument for AAT is the number and variety of Homo's unique features, for some of which the aquatic explanation is the only one on offer. These anomalies are not a common subject of research. Many specialists still find them simply distracting, and sometimes respond "We may never know the reason" or even "There may not be a reason".

But the questions will not go away. Professor Tobias enjoys being back at square one. "A change of paradigm", he says, "shakes us up; it rejuvenates us; and this above all, it prevents mental fossilisation - and that is good for all of us".

CORRESPONDENCE

Your letters are welcome but please keep them under 300 words. Please send a PC floppy if possible.

Write to:

Labour Left Briefing
PO Box 2378
London E5 9QU



Your reports from Gorton and Birmingham are economical with the truth. There have been irregularities in many Labour CLPs, including Slough, Swindon and of course Leeds, with candidates imposed by the NEC, and even a seat possibly being earmarked for Alan Howarth, of all people.

Labour is not functioning as a democratic party, and the exclusion of certain so-called Asian (in fact, British) candidates is not so very different. I am surprised to find a robust defence of such right-wing candidates as Ahmed Shahzad, who have a reactionary agenda that is sexist, homophobic and separatist, underpinned by an exploitative petty bourgeois economic philosophy. That such a motley crew of opportunists can be taken seriously on a left-wing basis is quite incredible.

Is an *LLB* supporter suggesting that we should have more right-wing MPs and LP members merely because they are Asian? Why should I (and I am British, not Asian as some comrades persist in calling me) be expected to support certain candidates merely because they claim some Asian loyalty?

Neither Shazad (Gorton), well known in property development circles, nor Sarwar (Govan), a millionaire wholesaler, are candidates who have any remotely egalitarian or socialist views. Apart from being Asian, what are their positions on social issues such as the rights of women or child labour?

In both Govan and Gorton there has been mass recruitment on a clan basis, paid for by reactionary elements. These blatantly anti-democratic practices cannot be defended on the basis that they have been carried out by Asians or any other group. The recruitment of individuals who do not speak English and never attend ward meetings except to vote as directed during the selection process cannot be democratic.

The current Asian MPs are no advertisement for any specific Asian representation. It is rather strange that socialists are expected to make a special effort for the selection of reactionary candidates who despise the left and merely exploit its influence and vocabulary. Is this what the left should be arguing for?

Manjoula Pindar

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If you wish to enrol in the *Briefing* club please send in your name and address, the number of £1 shares you want and a cheque or request for direct debit / standing order form. Return to: Leonora Lloyd, c/o PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

I read Patrick Sikorski's article in support of the SLP with interest and some approval. After all, what socialist doesn't hate Blair? As a member of the SWP, I have no time for the Labour Party, so fighting Blair from within has little appeal, although I applaud those who are still trying. However, I wouldn't start from there. Back in the real world, people simply want to see the back of the Tories and that means getting Blair into office. Anyone who stands in the way runs the risk of being marginalised. Of course, that doesn't mean that we don't criticise or oppose Blair. We most certainly do. That work needs to be done at the grassroots level in trade union branches and the campaigns against Tory cuts and closures.

That said, if Arthur Scargill stands against Tony Blair in Sedgefield, he would certainly have my wholehearted support.

Keith Flett
Tottenham

Perhaps if Harriet and Jack had read Mike Eslea's article first, they would not have decided to send their son to St. Olave's. They would still be left with the problem shared by many socialist parents living in particularly deprived working-class areas that their local comprehensive does not cater for bright children.

Under the present system, parents are usually entitled to send their children only to the nearest comprehensive. Popular schools, usually those in middle-class areas, which attract pupils across the full ability range, are so full that only children who live very near the school or have a sibling there have any chance of getting in. Just about the only alternatives, other than selective schools, are church schools, which attract pupils across the ability range but are possible only for churchgoers.

I don't know about William Penn School near where Harriet Harman lives, but I do know the school in my area, which Bernie Grant said he regretted sending his children to. It tries very hard to educate pupils who have been excluded from other schools, those who have English as a second language and others. However, the tiny number of pupils who get five GCSEs shows that a child who is 'academic' is likely to have few peers and might get a lot of stick from his classmates. I say 'his' because amongst boys far more than girls there is a prevalent ethos against showing interest in school.

I suspect it was for these reasons that Harman and Dromey decided against their local schools. Until these comprehensives can attract children across the ability range and until they can challenge their brighter pupils instead of boring them, then socialist parents in these neighbourhoods will be faced with the same dilemma.

Bernard Misrahi
Tottenham

"No regime without a solid record of democracy and human rights should be sold weapons", wrote Harry Cohen in last month's issue. The question is, who decides? Who decides what constitutes a "solid record"? Twenty years or six months? Who decides what is meant by "democracy"? Turkey and Israel are "democratic" (ask the Kurds and the Palestinians). Northern Ireland is a "democracy". Iraq was fighting a "just war" against the "undemocratic" Iranian regime when Thatcher decided to arm Hussein - surely, by Cohen's logic, she was right to do so.

The point that needs to be made is that we should convert not "a large part" of the arms industry into making civil goods, as Cohen suggests, but all of it. We must recognise that there is a fundamental contradiction between weapons (which are used to exercise power over people) and democracy (which is the exercise of power by people). In other words, a democracy cannot use weapons or it ceases being a democracy. Indeed, the contradiction comes out in Cohen's sentence: is it really possible to have a democratic "regime"?

William West
Munster, Germany

It is natural that *LLB* will be centrally concerned with the merits, or otherwise, of the setting up of the Socialist Labour Party. Yet each side will trump the other's argument with one of the following truths that will hold good in the near future. One, it is unlikely that the Socialist Labour Party will capture sufficient Labour votes and activists to establish it as a major political party across the country. Two, it is unlikely that the socialist left will build up enough strength to have a major influence in the Labour Party.

LLB's loyalty is to socialist politics, not to the Labour Party as such. In those constituencies and districts where left activists have some influence in the local Party and council or where there is a left-leaning MP or PPC to defend, new people should be drawn into these struggles. Where, on the other hand, the SLP has an active local organisation and the Labour Party is a fiefdom of the modernised right, it is unlikely that new people will be either motivated or effective inside New Labour.

The competition of two strategies may not be such a bad thing if it succeeds in bringing new activists into the struggle and enhances the flexibility of response of the left overall.

Pete Bowing
Hungary

Congratulations on your positive coverage of the recent cross-union broad-left meeting. I noticed that you didn't mention the involvement of UNISON's CFDU. That may have annoyed poor old Geoff Martin.

Unlike previous correspondents, I won't complain about the characterisation of me by Geoff in your last issue. I realise that he is trying to be humorous. Sadly, his humour is more foot-and-mouth than tongue-in-cheek.

I do object to my union branch being dismissed as the 'Hampshire Popular Front'. With over 8,500 members, it is one of the largest and best-organised union branches in the country. As a Chelsea supporter, Geoff will never have seen a crowd that size. Geoff tries hard to portray himself as a macho worker 'wiv street cred'. Once upon a time, he worked as a hospital porter. He claims to have 'loads of scary mates'; presumably Rodney Bickerstaffe is one of them. Last issue he treated us to a picture of him smoking a Woodbine - well hard!

The truth is that Geoff is a journalist who is a member of a voluntary sector UNISON branch. His only contact with health workers is writing about them. In both his day job and his union career he depends on the patronage of UNISON's leadership. By putting the boot into the left he can earn brownie points, or is it brown-nose points?

Geoff has recently been elected, unopposed, as the Convenor of UNISON's London Regional Council. The CFDU didn't oppose him because they thought it would be sectarian to oppose an *LLB* candidate. The right supported him because they are better than the left at recognising their own.

Paul Wozny
Deputy Branch Secretary, Hampshire UNISON

The wreck of the Sea Empress has been a major environmental disaster along miles of South Wales coastline. Unless the beaches are cleared up in the next few weeks, it threatens to become a commercial disaster as tourism is the main industry on this part of the coast.

The sequence of events following the running aground of the oil tanker is a story of utter incompetence. The harbour-master and the pilot felt the ship should be tugged off straightaway, but were overruled by the salvage company and the owners - despite this being contrary to marine law. Many believe it was the Welsh Office that overruled the experts on the spot.

Stories that there were language difficulties with a Chinese tug in the area have added to the confusion. In fact, the salvage company seem to have told them they weren't needed, so they went home. The help of a Norwegian vessel with the capability of shifting the tanker was also rejected.

Pembrokeshire beaches are in a state of devastation. Tankers are digging large holes to suck out the oil, but the slick stretches as far as the eye can see. Traders along the coast could be ruined by this, but if the Braer disaster off Shetland three years ago is anything to go by, any compensation will be slow to arrive and wholly inadequate. Voluntary organisations are working flat out, but specialist equipment and services cost money, which is not yet forthcoming. Residents are organising mass meetings here to press the Government for action.

Pembroke Resident

Joan Maynard wants a future Labour Government to act as "a persuader of the Unionists". Implicit in most of the articles in the March issue of *LLB* is the idea that Britain, having created the mess in Ireland, must now sort it out.

Clearly, Britain has a role to play in resolving the conflict and bringing all partners to the negotiating table. Labour should talk to all sides, including Sinn Fein, support talks without preconditions and oppose the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

But any lasting solution to the conflict will only come from within Ireland. The objective is to enable the people of Ireland to live in peace side by side. The Unionists have their own agenda and will not be convinced otherwise by "persuaders", whether they be John Major, Tony Blair or whoever.

There are two distinct communities in Ireland who are suspicious and distrustful of each other's motives. That suspicion can only be broken down by dialogue and compromise on both sides.

The formation of a Labour Party could be a factor in ending the stalemate. Before the ceasefire, trade unions successfully organised protests calling for peace, involving workers from both communities. A step forward would be for the trade unions to launch a Labour Party to give workers an independent voice calling for an end to the sectarian divide.

Sarah Cotterill
Manchester Cental CLP

Camilla Power ('Civil war in the womb' - March *LLB*) treats three issues as though they were one:
(a) observations (useful to medicine) of how women's and embryos' bodies work;
(b) speculation (amusing but of no practical value) about how natural selection might have brought about this state of affairs;
(c) value judgements about women's roles.
This is just confusing the issues.

Alan Leadbetter
Stoke

A.O.B

"The last resort was 'Let`s say it`s national security.' And it was balls." - **Rupert Allason MP** *on Scott.*

"Everyone in public life ought to be arrested at least once." - **Allan Clark,** *former Tory minister.*

"I do not want to see the job of monarch left to an accident of birth" - **Paul Flynn MP.**

"My generation was brought up on the Rolling Stones and Dave Dee, the Beach Boys and Jimi Hendrix...I always preferred the Barron Knights." - **John Redwood.**

Send your items of AOB to Paul Morris, ***LLB,*** PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

LLB Quiz Night

Saturday 30th March, 8.00 pm

Calthorpe Arms,
Gray's Inn Road,
London WC1

(half-way down from King's Cross Station)

Prizes, raffle, food - entrance: £3/1.50

LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING LLB

How was that?

Mike Marqusee, our cricket correspondent in Lahore, provides a post-mortem of the World Cup.

THE CLIMAX of the cricket World Cup saw justice prevail and the underdog triumph as Sri Lanka defeated Australia before a packed Gaddafi stadium (yes, it's named after the Libyan dictator) in Lahore.

The Lankans, known in the cricket world as the last devotees of "fair play", had been shocked to find themselves accused of ball-tampering and 'chucking' during their winter tour of Australia. The subsequent Australian refusal to play in Colombo (which had more to do with a power struggle within the International Cricket Council between First and Third World nations than any genuine fear of the Tamil Tigers) compounded the insult. Wisely, Lankan captain Arjuna Ranatunga disowned any motives of "revenge" and placed the emphasis on crafty cricket. In a low-scoring battle of nerves, it was those notoriously hard competitors, the Australians, who cracked first.

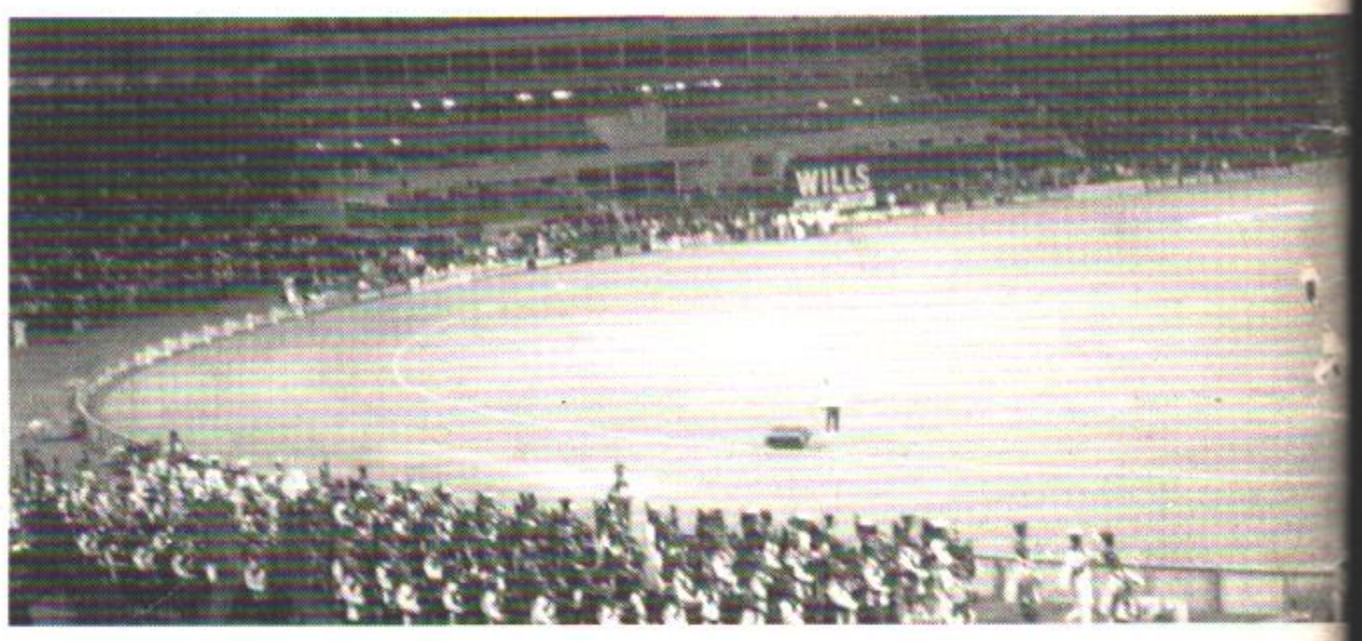
Thanks to huge efforts by an army of unsung workers, the myriad of obstacles to staging a tournament of this scale spread across an entire sub-continent were largely overcome. The British press notwithstanding, the organisation was for the most part efficient. A notable exception was Delhi, where the local Cricket Association and the police conspired to exclude and abuse genuine ticket holders. Here, as elsewhere, the VIP culture showed itself to be the curse of sub-continental cricket. In both Pakistan and India, the bulk of the often exorbitantly priced tickets was earmarked for multi-national corporations, government departments and other vested interests. As in Britain, sponsorship and media deals have reduced the importance of gate receipts while increasing the status-symbol value of cricket tickets, which have become a currency of patronage.

Across the sub-continent, cricket enjoys a mass popularity far in excess of that enjoyed by any sport in Britain. Cricket matches here are popular festivals. The problem is that they are staged under the aegis - and for the profit - of an elite. It is highly unlikely that any of the reported $100 million revenue generated by the tournament will 'trickle down' to the grassroots of the game. Thanks to satellite TV, cricket in the sub-continent provides an ideal vehicle for multi-nationals to flog their products all over the world, as well as to penetrate the markets of south Asia. Sponsored by Coke, Visa, Fuji and the tobacco giant ITC (31% owned by British American Tobacco), telecast by Murdoch's networks to an audience of 1 billion, the World Cup turned into a carnival of globalisation and certainly the most flagrant celebration of commerce in the long history of the game. Yet far from enhancing international or even regional harmony, the globalisation process seems to have exacerbated tensions between and within nations. For far too many in both countries, the Bangalore quarter-final meeting between the two arch-rivals became a substitute for war, a focus for geo-political and religious rivalry. In both countries, it served as an excuse for nationalist and communal demagogues to spread disinformation and whip up hatred.

Of course, there are millions of ordinary cricket fans in South Asia who see the Indo-Pak matches for what they are - games of cricket. Tragically, their voices are drowned out by the belligerent and often politically motivated minority.

Contrary to reports in the British press, there was no "riot" at the Calcutta semi-final, where the Indians succumbed to the Lankan spinners and the pressure of being home-side favourites. The behaviour of sections of the crowd at Eden Gardens was reprehensible, and certainly a blemish on Calcutta's reputation as a sporting city, but cannot compare to the racist and alcohol-fuelled abuse at the NatWest semi-final at Headingley. As two members of the *LLB* editorial board who were present can testify, the majority of spectators at Calcutta were even more upset by the hooliganism of the minority than the Indian collapse.

In both India and Pakistan, the high commands of the cricket boards, aided and abetted by sponsors, advertisers and sections of the media, hyped up the prospects of a home-team victory, rather than the honour of staging the tournament itself. The prolonged, over-publicised build-up to the Cup generated not only unrealistic expectations but the wrong kind of expectations. What came to be anticipated was not a cricket competition but a national triumph. The backlash in both countries was inevitable.



World Cup Final, Gaddafi Stadium, Lahore.. Photo: Graham Bash.

Speaking to the Lankan Marxist and trade union leader Bala Tampo some weeks before the final, I asked him how he felt about his country's recent emergence as a cricket superpower. Tampo is a cricket fan and a veteran of the freedom struggle against the British, but he confessed to some ambivalence about his country's success on the pitch. "It feeds a spurious nationalism, a Coca-Cola nationalism," he said. It seems that cricket nationalism is becoming more strident in South Asia even as the countries of the region surrender genuine national self-determination to the IMF and the multi-nationals.

Mike Marqusee's book,
Anyone but England - Cricket and the national malaise,
is available from Verso (0171-437-

Printed by RAP Printers & Publishers, 201 Spotland Road, Rochdale OL12 7AF.