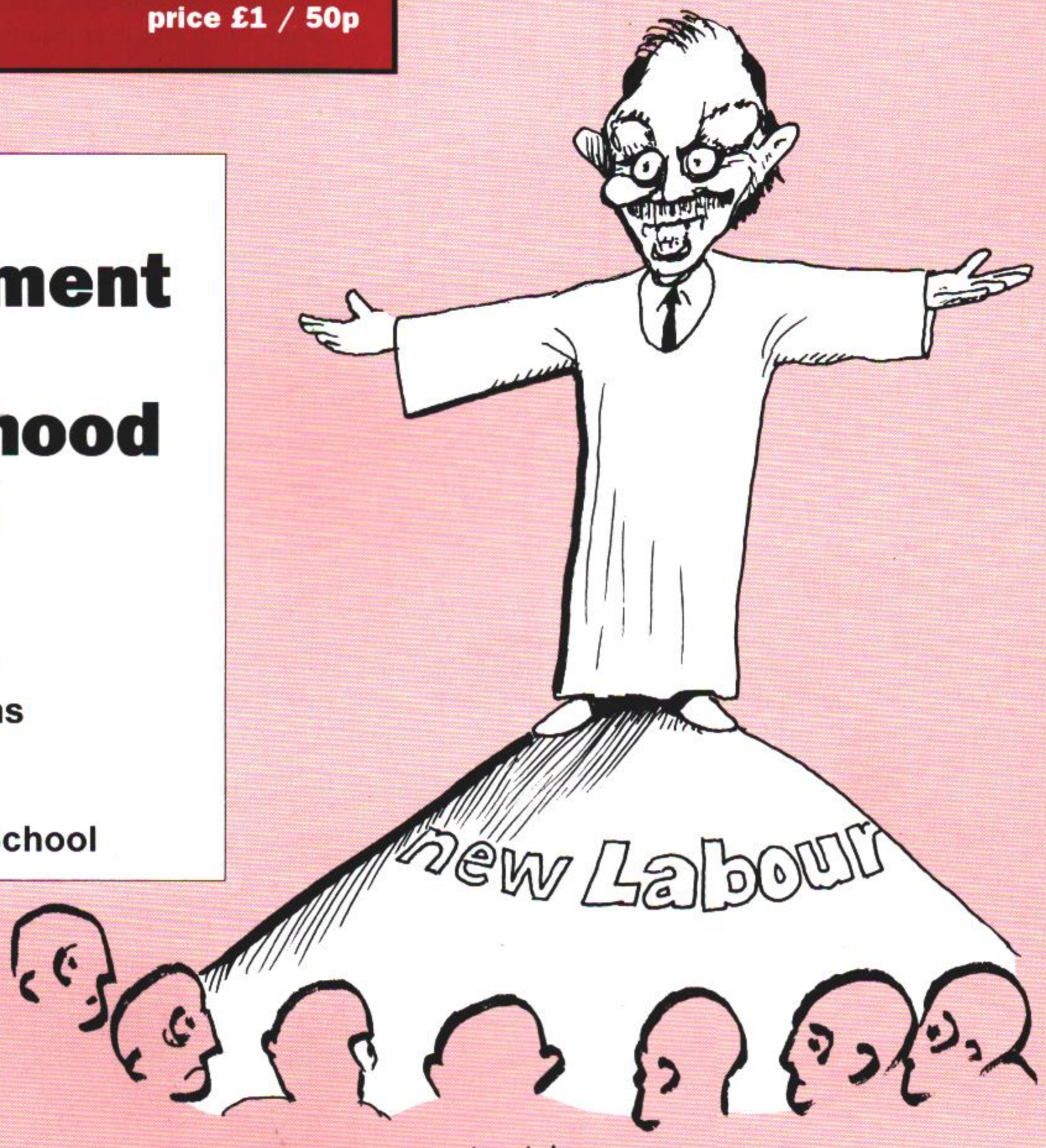
LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

December 1996 price £1 / 50p

Crime, punishment and parenthood special

inside...

- Michael Collins
- Sinn Fein
- US elections
- The Ridings School



...and ye shall cast out the squeegy merchants from the temple

... and the global corporations shall inherit the earth!

Labour Left Briefing

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Campaign to Defend the Welfare State/ Full Employment Forum conference

The future of the welfare state

12.30, Saturday 30th November

Congress House, Gt. Russell St., London WC1

AGENDA

Crime, punishment and parenthood, Ridings school, Green-Left Conference 4-8

Labour's tax cop-out, Blair's murky slush fund, the Alan Simpson column 9-11

College pay strike, NUS, the Geoff Martin column 12-15

Centre spread: Michael Collins - the film; the man 16-17

Mitchel McLaughlin, Nicaragua, Clinton's victory, Zaire, Romania, Korea, the Michael Hindley column 18-25

Asylum rights, Ogunwobi family campaign 26-27

Reviews, Science, Periscope, Correspondence, AOB 28-31

Front cover: DROS.

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Bed time story



WHEN IT COMES to the body politic, morality, religion and politics make a far more venomous cocktail than sex and drugs and rock 'n roll. The moral panic which recently swept through the media and the Palace of Westminster was objectionable not only because of the hypocrisy of those involved, but also because it profoundly misrepresented reality.

Anti-social behaviour is a major political issue, but the debate to which we have been treated has only succeeded in obscuring its nature, scale and causes - and especially the antidotes to it. The collusion of politicians with the media agenda (the age-old mixture of sensationalism and puritan disapproval) shifted public debate further away from the solid foundations of economic and social reality towards the treacherous sands of personal morality. As a result, it has become that much harder for all sections of the labour movement, and indeed all those who wish to see a fairer society, to argue their case.

It is Tony Blair who has done more than any other single figure to precipitate this shift. He has highlighted his religious affiliations, his dedication to "family values" and belief in individual responsibility at the expense of an appeal to reason based on honest policies.

Even as New Labour abandons its aspirations to intervene in the economy, it makes ever deeper, if highly selective, incursions into the personal and domestic sphere. Opinion polls reveal that politicians (along with journalists and sports personalities) rank at the bottom of the hierarchy of public esteem - even lawyers are held in greater respect. It seems unlikely that parents want Jack Straw laying down guidelines for their children's bed-time.

As in the United States, the emergence of "morality" as the big issue proved a cue for an orgy of scapegoating (single parents, scruffy teachers, 'political correctness', immigrants) making it easier to victimise the victims, and blame the poor for their own poverty. In the US, the arguments raging over lifestyles and personal conduct have been dubbed "culture wars". The clear lesson from the US is that it is necessary to fight and win the "culture wars". The concessions made to right wing ideology are not only intellectually dishonest, they are self-defeating. Witness Blair's attempt to have it both ways on abortion. By announcing his own personal opposition to abortion (apparently on any grounds), the Labour leader gave both the Catholic Church and the Conservative right wing a stick with which to beat the Labour Party, and an excuse to accuse him of hypocrisy.

It was instructive to see how quickly the moral panic ebbed from the front pages, replaced by the harsh realities of European politics: the 48 hour week and the looming trauma of a single currency. Behind all these issues lurks the question of British "competitiveness" in the global economy - a question New Labour cannot address because it broadly accepts the need for a "flexible labour market" (low wages, casualisation, weak unions). We end up with Gordon Brown backtracking before the CBI on the Social Chapter, which not so long ago was presented as the centrepiece of Labour's "modern" approach to Europe.

Ironically, we also end up with a referendum on a single currency. For the Labour leadership, this was merely a device to keep an awkward issue off the election agenda. But for those opposed to the Maastricht path to European unity it offers the best hope of blocking what would be a disaster for the working class across Europe.

As currently envisaged, European monetary union would entail massive reductions in public spending, especially welfare benefits, and the removal of economic decision making from the democratic domain. The 'Maastricht model' of European development is one of multi-national and private sector domination, permanent mass unemployment and ever-increasing social inequalities. The TUC policy of joining up and hoping for the best is a non-starter born of desperation. So also is the insular nationalism of the Euro-sceptic right. In fighting for a 'No' vote in a referendum on the single currency we would have to fight equally against xenophobia and national chauvinism. This huge challenge falls to the left and to the labour movement as a whole. To meet it we will also have to engage effectively in the ongoing "culture wars". If we fail, and allow public debate to become increasingly dominated by reactionary 'moral panics', the electorate could become easy meat for both the bankers and demagogues. ❑



Sentencing in a panic

Lock 'em up? Flog 'em? Alex Taylor examines the vexed questions of crime and punishment.

SOCIOLOGISTS of a certain vintage and political persuasion used to set great store by moral panics as engines of reactionary social change. So we have the police, politicians and the press to thank for the 'mugging' crisis of the early 1970s - and the raft of repressive and discriminatory police practices visited on black people as part of the state's response to this carefully manufactured 'crisis'.

Lately this kind of talk has become unfashionable. But what should we make of events over the last few weeks in which the usual suspects - sensation-seeking tabloids, pontificating police officers and rent-a-lynch-mob Tory MPs - have lamented the apparently terminal decline of British society? Concocting a national crisis out of a murder, a school crushed under the weight of Conservative education reforms and some creative crime reporting by prison-junkies in the national press is easy if you know how.

For the assembly of saints sitting on Labour's front bench - Holy Tony, God-fearing Jack and Blessed David of the Home-School Contract - jumping on the band-wagon proved irresistible. 'This isn't a moral panic at all. This is for real. Something needs to be done.' So, in the time-honoured tradition of moral panics, comes the legislative response. The programme for the rotting remains of this Parliament is dominated by discipline - in schools, in prisons and in what's left of civil society.

The centrepiece is the Crime (Sentences) Bill - something they prepared earlier just in case a moral panic should come along. Published by the serial law-breaker Michael Howard on 25th October, this vicious piece of legislation has already been attacked by the Liberal Democrats' Alex Carlile, at least three former Tory Home Secretaries and a hit squad of senior judges, including the present Lord Chief Justice and both his immediate predecessors.

Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition, on the other hand, has chosen to do precisely nothing. Labour did not oppose the Bill on second reading. God-fearing Jack has muttered something about deploring the Government's legislative methods, but made no effort to dissociate himself from Howard's punitive aims. Just the reverse in fact. The day after the Bill's publication, he was widely quoted claiming credit for its 'flexibility' and the creative use of a 'discount' on sentences to encourage more people to plead guilty.

The main provisions of the Bill are well known: mandatory minimum prison sentences for people convicted of a second serious sexual or violent offence, three-time domestic burglars and 'hard' drug traffickers; the abolition of the existing system of early release; and extended powers to supervise convicted sex offenders 'in the community'. All in all, a ringing endorsement for American-style 'three strikes and you're out' populism.

So far, controversy over the proposals has centred on the squeals of anguish emitting from judges who think they will be prevented from 'doing justice' and so-called Tory grandees like Douglas Hurd and Kenneth Baker who claim that the pressure of keeping thousands more people under lock and key will lead to the disintegration of the prison system. There is something to be said for both arguments, although Hurd and Baker are hardly civil libertarians and judicial discretion in sentencing has usually meant giving a free rein to the refined and carefully modulated racism and sexism of unrepresentative judges and JPs brought up to keep the lower orders in their place.

But the case against the Bill is more fundamental than this. It refutes not just this latest piece of political opportunism by Howard, Straw and all the moral entrepreneurs who believe that the lash, the rope and the cell are the only cures for society's ills, but a whole tradition of thinking on criminal justice based on the assumption that more means better. As social anxiety deepens and crime rises it is taken for granted that more police, tougher policing methods, more prisons and harsher sentences are the answer.

But they aren't. John Major has promised to recruit 5,000 more police officers.Yet we know that the chances of them having any significant impact on levels of crime are virtually non-existent. Years of research have failed, in the words of one leading American observer, 'to show that the number of police, the amount of money spent on police, or the methods police use [have] any effect on crime'.

Much the same can be said of Michael Howard's belief that 'prison works'. The US - ever the favoured source of bright ideas for intellectually challenged British politicians on the make - is a case in point. Since 1970, the population of the USA's federal and state prison systems, excluding local jails and special institutions for juveniles, has more than quintupled from just under 200,000 to today's figure of over 1.1 million. To cope with this explosion in rates of incarceration, the state of Michigan was opening a new prison every nine weeks in 1989.

The results of this experiment in mass incarceration have been disappointing. In Louisiana, the proportion of the population in custody at any one time was five times higher in the mid 1990s than in the early 1970s. Meanwhile, the homicide rate in the state's main conurbation, New Orleans, rose by 300%. The city slashed education funding to build still more prisons even as the body count continued to rise.

Far from proving that 'prison works', and justifying the vast sums of money spent on creating the land of the free's very own gulag archipelago, the American experience shows that any slight reduction in violent crime has been achieved only at an incalculable cost in human misery and wasted opportunity.

As usual, African Americans and other minorities have born the brunt of the assault. One recent study estimates that, on any given day, almost a third of all young black men are under the supervision of the criminal justice system, many of them, inevitably, in prison.

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So why do Howard and Straw - the Tweedle-Dum and Tweedle-Dee of law 'n' order politics - seem to believe that locking more people up and keeping them locked up for longer is the answer to their prayers? A hard-bitten cynic would say that Howard is pandering to the atavistic tendencies of the Tory faithful. Anyone with a similarly jaded political palate might even go so far as to suggest that God-fearing Jack might be after a few votes in middle England where, as Mandelson's focus groups probably tell him, the clank of keys and slamming of doors is music to the ears of the Lloyd Webber listening classes.

But let's not give way to cynicism for once. Let's suppose that these two peerless public servants really do have the interests of the British people at heart. Let's suppose that they genuinely believe that mandatory minimum sentences and an end to early release will cut crime and protect the public. How do they see it happening, and how can they justify the measures contained in the new Crime Bill?

Sadly, neither Howard nor Straw has taken the trouble to explain exactly how incarcerating - on the Home Office's own figures - 11,000 more people over the next twelve years at an annual cost of over £400 million is going to affect levels of crime and public safety. They seem to think that 'prison works' because if criminals are inside doing time they aren't outside committing crime.

Only a fool would deny that locking up large numbers of people, many of whom have committed serious offences, is likely to have some effect on crime rates. But the American experience suggests that it will be minimal, and that other areas of social policy - education, training, economic development, and so on - will be starved of resources to fund the most anti-social policy of all - a policy of mass imprisonment.

The real cynicism here is the cynicism of politicians who offer bogus solutions to the problems of crime and public protection as an alternative to thinking more deeply and creatively about why crime occurs and who needs to be protected against it. Instead of wasting money on what prison governors have condemned as 'human warehouses' calculated to brutalise all those who pass through them, wouldn't it be better to look again at what we know about crime and its place in the social fabric of a patriarchal de-industrialising society?

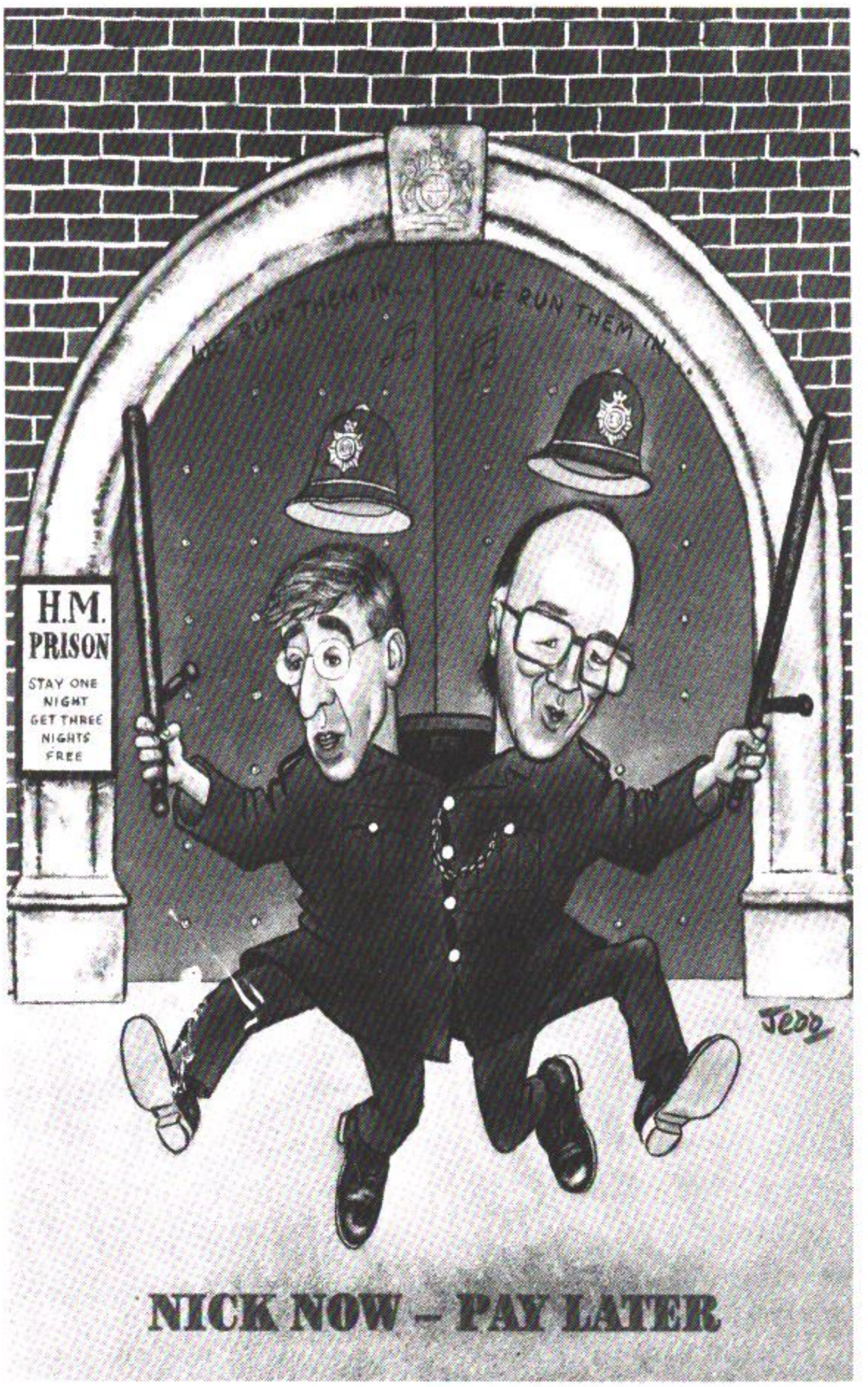
We know, for example, that men are most likely to commit crime. Not single or working mothers or the other women targeted by the moralising disciples of 'family values', but men. What does this say about masculinity in a patriarchal society?

We also know that people who come to the attention of the police and risk ending up, via the courts, in the prison system tend to be economically and socially marginalised - poor, unskilled, badly educated and dependent on drugs or alcohol.

Prison offers them nothing: only further marginalisation. What does this say about growing inequality in a de-industrialising society where prisons are affordable, but childcare, schools, hospitals and social security benefits are not?

We also know that the people most likely to become the victims of crime - often repeatedly - are similarly disadvantaged. Black people and women have to live with the additional threat of racist victimisation and male violence. What does this say about priorities for extending public protection to those unable to buy security in the new free market for personal safety?

Prisons solve nothing. Incarcerating more people in the heat of a moral panic is an expensive exercise in futility. Labour should have nothing to do with it. If there is a crisis out there, pious moralising to the accompaniment of sliding bolts and turning keys won't resolve it. Challenging exhausted patriarchal values and ending the rampant injustices of a clapped-out capitalism just might.



"Singing from the same hymn sheet" - Yes, that's the headline over the editorial in the October issue of *Police*, the journal of the Police Federation, praising the new Labour-Tory consensus on law and order. "The affinity between Messrs Howard and Straw (no matter how much they deny it) is good news for the country and good news for the service. Now if only this tough and realistic approach to the realities of crime extended to twisting the arm of the Tory/Labour chancellor to ensure that police have the means as well as the powers, we would begin to believe that the millennium had arrived a few years early."

'Judge not, lest ye be judged'

Bill Dixon, Ealing Acton and Shepherds Bush CLP, writes: Tony Blair is very much the father of the big, happy family that is New Labour. He tells us off if we use bad language - socialism, union, class, struggle, that kind of thing - and makes us behave ourselves in front of the voters. In his spare time, he is also Father Blair, the conscience and confessor of the nation. A good Christian and family man in a winning smile and smart suit. Family man? Tony Blair? Do me a favour. In October, Blair took himself off to Cape Town to lecture the Commonwealth Press Union about the family and the need for something advertised as a 'new social morality'. During the course of this peroration he declared, 'Parents have a responsibility to know where their children are and what they are doing.' He also had this to say about the importance of the family in forging his 'new', or any other, social morality: 'It is within the family that we learn the difference between right and wrong .... It is within the family that we learn that there is such a thing as society.'

Apart from the odd bit of sexist sniping from unreconstructedly old Tory papers about Cherie's high profile as a working mother, little is made of the Blair/Booth family's domestic arrangements. But it must be a funny old life for the kids. Your old man swans off round to the other side of the world for a long weekend and gets his name in all the papers extolling the virtues of family life. You're stuck at home struggling with a geography project, wanting someone to take you to the football, and he's not there. And wouldn't it be nice if he cooked the tea?

No one has dared to criticise Blair's parenting. After all, he's married and that's her department really. Anyhow, he and the missus make a tidy packet between them and can afford nannies, au pairs and all the trimmings. Fine. Nobody's saying the young Blair/Booths are wandering the streets spraying tags on tube trains and robbing pensioners. But they can't be learning much from their father that they couldn't pick up from the political columns of the *Guardian*.

In South Africa Blair said he had no desire to go back to Victorian sexual hypocrisy or to return women to the kitchen. But what is the image of modern masculinity he projects to his sons? Rarely at home, always out and about setting the world to rights, paying - like a good Victorian father - to have his children brought up by someone else.

If Father Blair's own family is anything to go by, his 'new social morality' will look very much like any other. It will be based on father figures who say a lot but do very little who go out to change the world but order their personal lives in the time-honoured way around their own self-importance. Perhaps he might be taken seriously if he decided to spend more time with his family.

One parent bad, two parents good?

Mike Marqusee writes: There's nothing more hilarious - and scary - than the spectacle of politicians and pundits scrambling over each other to hitch a lift on a moral bandwagon. Take the *Daily Mirror*, the paper that declared "WAR" on Germany during Euro 96 ("Achtung! Surrender!"). Suddenly they were imploring readers to "Join the crusade for all our kids". Their leader writer excoriated Glenn Hoddle's decision to include Paul Gascoigne in the England football squad ("Hoddle's insult to every woman") but their back page banner headline after Gazza's three goals for Rangers read: "Strife beater! Gazza belts three beauties."

In case anyone thought the celebration of aggressiveness - in sport, films, television, and the tabloids - might have something to do with misbehaviour by young males, David Blunkett was there to set them straight: "We have to overcome what some call laddism - the belief that it is cool not to work."

Frances Lawrence expressed sorrow and sympathy for the young murderer of her husband ("My heart goes out to him and his family"). Erstwhile ideologist of punk Tony Parsons took a different view in the *Daily Mail*, where he reminded readers that the mother of "the evil little scumbag" was a Filipino, and blamed the welfare state for sustaining such "foreign leeches".

In the contest for favourite scapegoat single parents had to fight it out with "moral relativist" teachers. In a *Guardian* article, Paul Barker urged readers: "We have decided that marriage should unceasingly give the man and woman deep personal satisfaction. But trouble follows if this is the absolute touchstone. It seems, sometimes, that husbands and wives behave like children themselves. If they can't have everything, then they walk."

When people start an argument with "for the sake of the children" beware what comes next. In an interview in the *Daily Telegraph*, bachelor boy Cliff Richard explained what family values



means to him: "We are suffering from all the things that happened when we did away with corporal punishment. I think it should come back. I like the idea of discipline. We have a nation of kids with no respect for other people's property." Cliff is keen on Victorian values. "There was a pride then. If you saw *Upstairs Downstairs*, even the below stairs people had a code of conduct. I say if you have children and your marriage breaks up, stay together for the sake of the child. You see, if you haven't been slapped across the back of the legs, you probably think, well, I'll just go and find somebody else."

But this month's moral misinformation prize must go the *Daily Telegraph* leader writer who opined: "We need look no further for a symbol of educational decline than the young teacher slouched at his desk wearing jeans and earring - that is, in the attitude and uniform of insolence. There have always been unkempt schoolmasters, with frayed tweed jackets, ragged ties and sandals. The problem is not teachers who are eccentrically shabby, but those whose clothes endorse fashionable rebelliousness... Men with pony tails, women with nose rings, and both with t-shirts ..." It would be funny, if it wasn't so frightening.

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De Gruchy's travelling circus

A personal view on the dispute at the Ridings school in Halifax, by Ian Murch, NUT executive member for West Yorkshire.

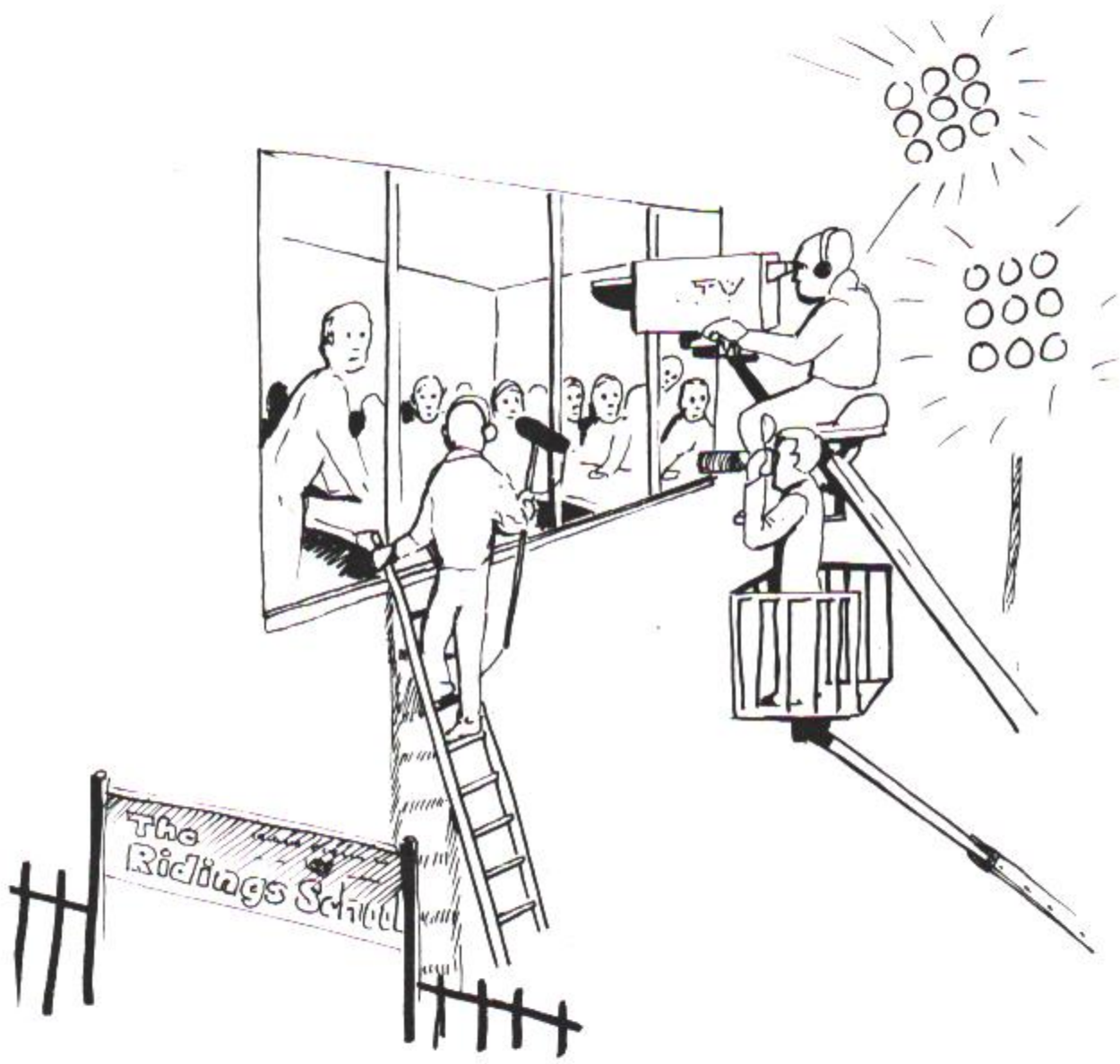
STAFF AT Ridings have been judged on their performances in a week when it was impossible for anyone to work normally. They have been pilloried and their careers put at risk as a result of problems of other people's making, not least the journalists who undermined efforts to maintain order. For this, Nigel De Gruchy, the general secretary of the NAS/UWT, bears much responsibility. He has taken to appearing at the gates of 'problem' schools, followed by a media circus, and milking the situation for all the publicity he can get, with consequences for the teachers, the pupils and the local community, but none for himself.

When I was in the school, on the day when the NAS/UWT's famous list of 60 pupils 'for exclusion' became public, it was creaking under the strain but still functioning. It did not bear the signs of breakdown I have seen elsewhere. It was clean, unvandalised, and the pupils went into lessons in a fairly quiet and orderly way. During the two day inspection it started to fall apart.

Throughout that week, dozens of journalists camped outside the school. They accosted pupils going in in the morning and at lunchtime. Some pupils say they were given money for their stories. Encouraged by the media attention, they stayed outside when they should have been in lessons. When teachers came out to bring them in they made rude gestures and comments behind their backs; these were filmed and they were able to watch themselves on TV when they got home.

On the Wednesday, a 60-foot gantry was brought to the front of the school and a camera on top filmed through the school windows. It is now said that the inspectors observed some of the worst behaviour they had ever seen. Who can be surprised? After 16 years as an NUT local secretary in a fairly turbulent area, I have seen similar effects of media attention before, most notably at Drummond Middle School during the Ray Honeyford controversy.

When I met the NUT members at the school on the Monday of its week of torment, they were very sceptical of the NAS/UWT's claims of 60 unteachable pupils. The school had enough real problems to start with - the results of Government policies concentrating a large number of disadvantaged children in one school. The concentration of large scale unemployment in particular communities, the selling off of the more attractive council houses and the use of the remaining small stock to house families with multiple problems, and the impact of policies on selection, grant-maintained status and open enrolment all combined to give the Ridings an intake more skewed to the bottom end of the ability range than would have been found at any secondary modern in the 1950s. Teachers were left to struggle with pupils who have many education difficulties and poor motivation. Resources were inadequate and diminishing year by year. The LEA - weakened by the loss of resources to a large grant-maintained sector - was not able to give adequate special-needs provision or make proper off-site provision for pupils with severe behavioural problems.



NUT members in the school said that before the media arrived they were under pressure but did not feel physically threatened. They wanted more support for the school: strengthened management, experienced staff brought in to cover for colleagues who were off sick, and the exclusion of some pupils who had worked their way through the school's internal disciplinary procedures. We were in negotiation on these issues, but our efforts have been overtaken by a different approach.

NUT members experience all the same difficulties as NAS/UWT members. Our front line of argument is to press for more resources to deal with them. We will also support members who refuse to accept assault and harassment by pupils who cannot cope with being left in a large mainstream class. I have been involved in my own authority of Bradford in two recent cases in which we balloted members on not teaching pupils who had assaulted staff but had been returned to school by appeals panels. We quite deliberately did not seek the publicity for our actions because we could see that the schools and the pupils would be labelled, and the prospect of a better future for them would be diminished by the media spotlight and the consequent posturing of politicians.

Calderdale NUT Secretary Sue McMahon and her colleagues have continued throughout the crisis to meet with, represent and support our members in the school. I have attended a number of meetings with them, at which we have pressed for greater school security and reduced media access. We are currently putting forward proposals for additional staffing support and for arrangements for dealing on- and off-site with pupils whose behaviour has been identified by the whole staff as unacceptable.

- Messages of support for staff at the school can be sent to Sue McMahon, Calderdale NUT Secretary, 29 Goldfields Way, Halifax HX4 8LA.



Chris Knight, London support group for the Liverpool dockers, reports.

RECLAIM the Future began as a port-occupation and street-celebration in Liverpool. It has now turned into an ongoing movement and newspaper. The first issue features a dragon as its masthead and is headed, "A world to win". The front page, written by a Reclaim the Streets activist, states that the aim is mainly to co-ordinate direct action. Also, the paper hopes to provide a forum for action-oriented debate.

Among the 500 sacked Liverpool dockers, Mike Carden, Billy Jenkins, Tony Nelson and Jimmy Davies Junior in particular are committed and helped produce the splendid first issue. The inside pages cover a range of working-class, environmental and other campaigns across the world, including in the former Soviet Union. At this year's *LLB* AGM we voted to participate on the editorial board of *Reclaim the Future* and to consider a range of options for future involvement.

One small but dedicated Marxist organisation, former publishers of *Workers' Press*, have had a re-think about their existence, deciding to hand over their press and other resources to the journal. Many other campaigns have pledged support for the venture. From the attendance at recent editorial board meetings I predict a vibrant and healthy future for the paper and the mainly youthful forces it represents.

- Information about developments in the Labour Party will be sparsely featured unless *LLB* readers contribute. Photos and articles should be sent to *Reclaim the Future*, c/o Sumner Type, 17-19 Blackwater Street, London SE22 8RS.

Successful Green Left Conference

John Norris of The Way Ahead group within the Green Party reports.

THE Green Left Conference at Conway Hall in London on 9th November attracted over 400 green and socialist activists from a wide range of groups. It was organised by an alliance of five networks - The Way Ahead, the Socialist Movement, the Green Socialist Network (from Democratic Left), the Red Green Network and the Red Green Study Group. They have been working together for the past year to encourage green left convergence.

The Conference opened with a short plenary session. Tony Benn argued that the green left was the latest expression of the progressive struggle. Peg Alexander of The Green Party highlighted the links between social and ecological issues. Cath Bann of the Third Battle of Newbury emphasised the need for environmental campaigners to be more political. For the organisers, Hilary Wainwright of the Socialist Movement spoke on the purpose of the Conference in bringing a fragmented movement together. The Conference also remembered those who have suffered in struggle, supporting the commemoration of Ken Saro-Wiwa.

Political issues ranged from Europe, which featured MEPs Michael Hindley and Frieder-Otto Wolf of the German Greens, via transport to a lively discussion of the nature of work. Others included the nuts and bolts of working together, how to bridge cultural and ideological differences, and using the media.

In the final session, I proposed the organisers' statement on forming Green Left, which the Conference overwhelmingly endorsed as the basis of the coalition. This commits it to encourage co-operation and action by green and left groups and individuals, to foster green left networks locally and on particular issues.

It is developing a green left platform. Its key values are sustainability, equality, democracy and diversity, locally and globally. It opposes the capitalist system which undermines them. The statement describes the defeat of the Tory Government at the General Election as "the immediate priority", but criticises the likely alternatives at this election as inadequate in green and socialist terms. After the election Green Left will hold a second conference to launch the coalition formally. Meanwhile it is building convergence, and wants to hear from groups and individuals interested.

- Contact Green Left c/o Mark Hill, 14 Holly Terrace, York YO1 4DS, or by e-mail to *john.norris@gexpress.gn.apc.org*.

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People's Europe vs. single currency

Geoff Martin, UNISON London Convenor, writes: The recent announcement by Gordon Brown that a Labour Government would hold a referendum before taking us into a single currency represents a major victory for those of us opposed to the Maastricht criteria.

Those inside the labour movement who support early entry into the Euro currency do so out of a mixture of desperation and lack of imagination. Desperation to have 'a seat at the table' (any seat, any table), and lack of imagination in dealing with the economy - it's so much easier to transfer responsibility (and blame) to a bunch of euro-bankers.



Geoff Martin: leading the left.

This mixture of defeatism and desperation has led the TUC into the ludicrous position of supporting early entry into the single currency regardless of the consequences. Thus the TUC has signed up to an economic policy which would slash £18 billion from public spending, destroy the welfare state and throw millions out of work.

This nonsense has got to be reversed and quickly. The vast majority of trade unions have not had a proper debate about Maastricht and the single currency - we need to kickstart it urgently. Our starting point should be the lessons we can learn from our brothers and sisters in other parts of Europe who have already been through the Maastricht cuts machine.

To this end the People's Europe Campaign is organising a major international conference on Maastricht and the single currency on Saturday 1st February at Westminster Central Hall starting at 11am. The conference will bring together trade unionists and campaigners from across Europe. The aim is to start an international campaign against Maastricht and in favour of a genuine people's Europe.

At a recent international trade union meeting in Paris, delegate after delegate outlined the carnage that had been unleashed by Maastricht-inspired austerity measures. In France the Government has gone one step further by effectively hijacking the pension fund of France Telecom in order to massage its balance sheet to meet the single currency criteria.

Instead of blowing in the ear of the Governor of the Bank of England about the need for early entry into the EMU, John Monks and the rest of the Maastricht groupies would be better off talking to European trade unionists about what it really means for working people. Perhaps he'll come along on 1st February to find out some of the hard facts of life.

● Details of the People's Europe conference (and donations towards the costs) to Alan Simpson MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.

Network conference success

Dorothy Macedo reports: Only a week after the manifesto ballot, with the media declaring the Labour left dead and buried, one hundred and fifty Party activists turned out for the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network AGM in London on 9th November. Among them were delegations from local Campaign Groups in London, Manchester, Southampton and Leeds.

After SCG Chair John Austin Walker MP opened the meeting, London UNISON convenor Geoff Martin warned of an early confrontation between an incoming Labour Government and public sector unions. Ken Livingstone described the 'Millbank Tendency' as the real 'party within a party' with a secret agenda. The best attended workshop was on EMU. A lively debate was kicked off by Livingstone and Alan Simpson MP. Despite differences in emphasis, there was unity on the need to fight current proposals for a single currency from an uncompromisingly internationalist perspective.

Another well-attended workshop was held on Party democracy, reflecting the anger and anxiety over threats to destroy the role of CLPs and Conference.

The final session voted to change the name of the Network to 'The Network of Socialist Campaign Groups' and elected Will McMahon (Secretary), Simon Letts (Treasurer), Kate Ahrens (Newsletter Editor), Anne Kane (Women's Officer) and myself as Chair.

● Join the Network: send £5/£2 to NSCG, 3 Blades House, London, SE11 5TW. Register your local Campaign Group or left caucus and get a seat on the NSCG national committee by sending £10 to the same address.

Paying the piper

Tony Blair's private office has received secret donations totalling £500,000 from a group of multi-millionaires.

Because the donations are to a "blind trust" administered on behalf of the leader's office and not the Labour Party, they will not be covered by Labour's pledge to publish the details of all donations of more than £5,000.

Among the donors are Sir Trevor Chinn, chairman of Lex services, one of the country's biggest motor dealers, Sir Emmanuel Kaye, whose fortune derives from an industrial truck company, Bob Gavron, publisher, and Alex Bernstein, former chair of Granada television.

It is a truth universally acknowledged in politics that money buys influence. Tycoons make an investment if they believe it will yield a return. There seems no reason to think that the recent gifts to the Labour leader should be any different.

What's the money for? With some twenty staff members, Blair's office is bigger than any of his predecessors' and appears to be growing weekly. The "blind trust" (if the Tories did this Mandelson would dub it a "a secret slush fund") comes on top of £360,000 the leader receives from the Party and the unions plus the money allocated to HM Opposition from Government funds.

Resources on this scale make the leader's office an autonomous power in the land, immune to the mechanisms of either public or party accountability.

Tax and spend: the bi-partisan Big Lie

Mike Marqusee reports: When a report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies revealed that 64% of the British public would welcome higher spending on health, education and other public services even if it means that income tax was raised, pundits rushed to assure us that the results did not mean what they seemed to mean. A spokesperson for the right wing Institute of Policy Studies told *Newsnight* that people might say such things to pollsters but in the privacy of the polling booth "human nature reasserts itself".

But the IFS study only confirms what the British Social Attitudes Survey has shown for a number of years. A clear majority prefer increases in public spending to cuts in taxes.

Why then is New Labour so desperate to present itself as a 'no tax no spend' party?

Partly because its leaders and chief advisors have come to believe in Thatcher's monetarist credo and refuse to contemplate any alternatives. And partly because they have swallowed a simplistic (and expedient) rationale for the 1992 defeat. Yes, tax was a major issue then, but exit polls showed a complex picture in which fear of higher taxes was only one element of a general distrust of Labour and its leaders. Indeed, those who believed Labour would raise their own taxes more than John Smith said he would, were as likely to vote Labour as Tory.

As Will Hutton recently observed, "Whoever wins the next election will have to raise taxation" - because of the accumulated fiscal deficit and the unreality of the Government's current projections. We are being treated to a general election campaign built entirely on a bi-partisan Big Lie. Gordon Brown will have to raise taxes simply to deal with the situation he has inherited - or else unleash a public spending holocaust. If the Maastricht convergence criteria are to be met, the squeeze will be even more vigorous. After Brown's waffle about slashing the starting rate to 15 or even 10 pence in the pound, the backlash will be severe. The new Labour Government will be quickly discredited and, even worse, popular cynicism towards politics in general will be deepened, which can only feed the growth of the far right.

The real issue is the distribution of the burden of taxation. Personal taxation is lower in Britain than in Germany, Spain, France or Italy. If our top marginal rate (currently 40%) were boosted to the level in Germany (53%) the revenues generated could be used, for example, to boost the education budget by some 20% immediately. British business has the lowest burden of taxation in any of the G7 advanced industrial countries.

British companies have turned tax evasion into a fine art. As Ken Livingstone has pointed out, dividend payments as a proportion of GDP have soared in the last decade; we should tax them accordingly. Labour should be outlining a realistic strategy to increase tax revenues by shifting the burden of taxation to the wealthiest one third of the population.

The consequences of Labour's current strategy were starkly exposed in its response to the Tories' accusation that Labour "would cost families £1,200" in extra tax. The Millbank Tendency swung into action, offering a detailed rebuttal of Tory claims on Labour spending commitments. Their detailed dossier makes clear that Labour will be campaigning in the general election on the following rock-hard commitments: no new capital spending on schools or hospitals, no increase in overseas aid, no reversal of cuts to the BBC World Service, no investment in regional development in England, no new investment in railways, no extra funds for local government, no increases in pensions and no abolition of the Jobseekers' Allowance.

Bob Crossman remembered

Liz Davies writes: Robert O'Neill Crossman died of cancer on 21st October, aged 49. Robert had been a leading lesbian and gay rights campaigner and activist in the Labour Party for many years.

I first knew him, as Bob, in the early 1980s, when he had been elected to Islington Council. In 1986, he became Mayor of Islington and was the first out gay Mayor in the country. He made a political point of being gay, appointing his then partner, Martin McCloghry, as his Mayoral consort. He attended Gay Pride and other gay events as Mayor, often dressed in his Mayoral robes and chain. In 1982, he had set up Islington Council's Lesbian and Gay Committee, one of the first in the country. He ensured that the committee was accountable to the lesbian and gay community by taking meetings out of the Town Hall and into gay venues and centres.

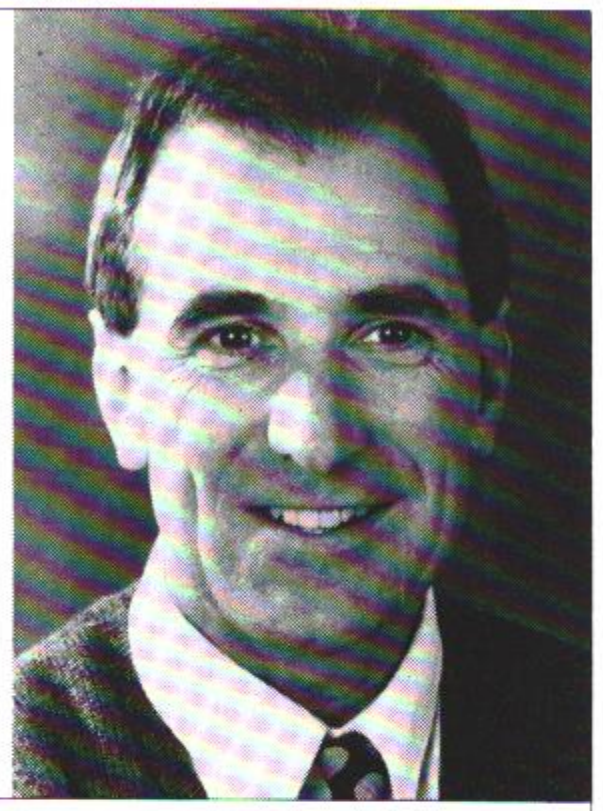
His political activity was not confined to lesbian and gay liberation. In 1985, he was one of nine Labour Councillors who refused to set a rate under the first year of rate-capping. In 1993, he voted with me and other Labour Councillors against proposals to close two Council nurseries, making an impassioned speech in support of nursery provision.

Bob was funny, warm-hearted and principled. His personality dominated any gathering he took part in, but he always made an effort to encourage everyone to speak. He never denigrated another opinion, however much he may have disagreed, and was never personally hostile after political conflicts. He had the most outrageous taste in brightly-coloured jumpers. After he left the Council, he joined the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence. One of my abiding memories is the sight of him in a nun's habit, on a dance-floor in an east end pub.

A memorial service was held at Islington Town Hall on 23rd November. A bizarre combination of Labour councillors and activists and members of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence turned up, all decked out in yellow, at Robert's request. He would have enjoyed the contrast.

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the Alan Simpson column



The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

Their morals and ours

IT MUST be a confusing time for the uncommitted observer. Political parties lurch off into a 'holier than thou' pursuit of individual responsibilities and the moral high ground. At the same time churches and charities take a sideswipe at structural inequalities and corporate power.

Within this exchange, it isn't the churches which worry me. Their tirade against poverty can find all sorts of biblical endorsements. All the childhood images I had about Christ throwing the traders out of the temple were never based on an assumption it was because they wouldn't cut a deal on Sunday trading, or that one of them had blasphemed or another had lusted after their neighbour's donkey. The message was simply about the need to challenge the power and pre-eminence of capital.

Far less edifying is the sight of politicians in pursuit of personal moralities. Too often it ends up as the simple pursuit of scapegoats. Off we go chasing benefit fraud without so much as a murmur of recognition that 50 times as much is fiddled out of the tax system. There are high profile, seek-and-destroy missions against the over-claiming of benefits but not to recover the billions more lost in underpayments for the sale of public assets at knock-down prices. Not a single firm of accountants has ever been told that an incoming Labour Government will hold them responsible for the under-valuation of public assets and will take action to recover the losses from them. Just see how rapidly this would change today's privatisation valuations.

Politicians who bemoan the lack of parenting skills, 'family values', or demand education contacts between parents and schools, remain silent about the growth (and pressures) of multiple, part-time working - having to take several jobs to make up one living wage - or having to work the ludicrous hours which sever your links with children, partners and friends.

We see a pillorying of beggars in the streets, but not of the retreat from full employment and social house building, which puts them there. We see global capitalism destroying jobs and prosperity in the developed world at the same time as it destroys lives, health and the environment in the developing one. Yet still there is a queue of politicians to sing the praises of free trade and a dynamic market economy.

At one time imperial power was seen as the colonisation of foreign lands and the appropriation of their minerals and resources. Today it is the prerogative of corporations not countries - enshrined within the GATT treaty - as the right to colonise life forms and their genetic codes. Pharmaceutical companies are rushing to slap patents on trees (in India) and plants (in South America) because of their possible curative powers. A cancer patient in America has had his cell lines patented by his own doctor. Tribes in Papua New Guinea and Panama have had their cell line patented by the US Commerce Department. A company called Myriad Pharmaceuticals has patented the cancer gene in women so as to get a monopoly on diagnostics and testing.

These are amongst the giant immoralities of our time, sanctified by the new deities of global corporate power. Often it is left to politicians to act merely as the apostles of avarice and exploitation in this new world order.

Earlier this year the United States Secretary of Agriculture tried to 'sell' a conference of Indian agronomists and farmers the virtues of their increasing dependence on US seed multi-nationals. He was blunt and to the point - 'There would be very few inventions of anything, particularly in agriculture, without patent protection because it is the fundamental fact of nature that people will not go through the expense of development of new ideas just for the altruistic benefit of the human race.'

Forget the whole world history of developing and sharing ideas, propagating and sharing seeds, nurturing the gifts of diversity rather than colonising into them. Patented monocultures: we have entered a world in which 'profit' is the only deity in town. Today's huge immoralities are not to be palmed off on the poor, the destitute, the homeless and the dispossessed. They are to be found within the bloated concentrations of wealth and power, in the boardrooms of social indifference and environmental irresponsibility.

If socialists are in search of things to express moral outrage about, let's avoid the embarrassment of 'who keeps coal in the bath?' campaigns. Who keeps cash in off-shore havens? Who keeps life forms under patent and monopolises global trading? These are the more serious starting points in the pursuit of a more genuine moral high ground.



God's a Tory after all...

As Siberian blizzards lashed the country, universities held a one-day strike on Tuesday 19th November. Activists report on what went on.

Brighton

Picket lines were formed outside the two universities at 7am. Many departments were reported to be closed. 350 strikers marched through the town to a lunchtime rally addressed by unions and NUS. There was strong support for the pay claim to be linked to the TUC campaign for a National Minimum Wage of £4.26. The Labour PPC for Brighton Kemptown announced that a future Labour Government could not do much because "the money is not in the cupboard". The Chair had to intervene as hecklers suggested he look in the other cupboard - the one that paid city slickers £300m in bonuses.
The Director of the Institute of Development Studies opened the library (without borrowing facilities) despite the complete absence of staff. A student employed as evening supervisor was asked to supervise the Reading Room - where she sat for seven and a half hours without a break or even a drink. UNISON branches must attempt to recruit students working at universities - and help them learn about their rights at work.

Bristol

Pickets stopped all but a handful of people at Bristol University. A morning march of 1,000 through the city centre went on to a joint rally with the University of the West of England. Speakers contrasted the 1.5% offer with the 26% rise MPs awarded themselves.

Cardiff

The strike was solid throughout Cardiff's institutions. The University was picketed and effectively closed down. A march stopped city centre traffic for half an hour. Over 1,000 crammed into the area in front of the Welsh Office for a rally and to hand a protest letter to Welsh Secretary William Hague. PPC Julie Morgan welcomed the show of union solidarity. The press estimated 10,000 were on strike in the biggest wave of industrial action in Wales since the miners' strike.

Exeter

Pickets on all main entrances from 6am turned back postal workers, buses and many delivery vans. Despite a pledge by the Vice-Chancellor that the university would be working normally and some intimidation, the campus was virtually dead. The hall booked for a lunchtime rally was too small, but staff crammed together to hear speakers from the unions and NUS pledge support for the action and determination to carry on the fight for decent funding and wages.

Kent

NUS members joined strikers on the University picket line from 6am and 400 attended a lunchtime joint union rally, with Labour Councillor Cheryl Hall speaking in support of the action. The Vice-Chancellor sent letters to all staff asking them to "consider your position very carefully."

Lancaster

There was almost total support for the strike - even the bars were shut! The student union voted at a general meeting to support the action. The method of calculation of pay to be stopped is causing further unrest. Unions are refusing to be tempted by the local offer of 3% (with strings).

Liverpool

Liverpool University was all but closed down as union members went on strike and non-members took a day's leave or did not cross picket lines. The union is growing. Pickets stopped most deliveries and followed management around campus, turning lights off in empty buildings which management were turning on. The Students Union closed down. The University Vice Chancellor, interviewed on BBC, called for the Government to sort out university funding.

LONDON

Goldsmiths

Momentum gathered and the day went well, with virtually no teaching. Sympathetic noises from the Warden meant staff did not feel intimidated about taking action. Pickets at the main building turned away deliveries. Students organised a meeting in support of the strike and joined the picket line to talk to fellow students (helping to persuade one punter it was not worth crossing to go and do his laundry!).

Greenwich University

NATFHE branch rep Andrew Dawson said there was a "very encouraging response" to the strike call. A march through Woolwich to the mass meeting saw strikers determined to "build on the action". Post Office staff refused to cross picket lines. The action was strengthened by the announcement the day before of 20 compulsory redundancies. The Vice-Chancellor encouraged scabbing.

Institute of Education

Picket lines were maintained from 7am to 6pm. It was as quiet as a Sunday in the building! One AUT scab announced, "I fully support your action but you have chosen the wrong day." No, he did not mean the dreadful weather: he had a meeting to go to!

King's Colleg-

An impressively large picket at the main Strand site deterred some scabs. Postal workers respected picket lines at the Kensington site (where the strike was all but solid). Only the Theology department refused to cancel lectures - which will be met with a truly secular union response.

Middlesex University

The Enfield campus was shut, and the Fine Art site was shut by management, who feared occupation. Very few scabs went through and students maintained a 100% boycott. Nora Carlin (NATFHE), said, "it was good to be with other unions on the picket."

Queen Mary's

After months of attacks from college management on local terms and conditions, unions have grown and the strike was supported by many non-union members taking leave. Pickets on the main site and at medical faculty buildings turned away many deliveries, although the number of drivers who were supportive of the action but feared dismissal if they didn't deliver showed just how many private contractors the college uses.

University of East London

Personnel circulated a memo announcing that the university would be open as usual and stressing how much pay strikers would lose. A public e-mail debate, including demands for docked pay to be donated to the Student Hardship Fund, has been initiated in response.On the day, pickets at the main site turned away deliveries, would-be scabs and students. The day coincided with one of the Graduation Ceremonies. Pickets gave out leaflets about the strike and departmental staff did not join the platform. Staff who had to read out student names wore "I'm on strike" badges, and the Principal condemned the Government in his speech.

University College

Before the strike, the Personnel Director circulated a letter saying that the Provost understood the complaint the unions had and expected the College to be closed - as it duly was. The letter promised that all docked wages would be donated to the Student Hardship Fund.

Manchester

The strike was solid across the four universities, with a lunchtime march led by University Vice-Chancellor Martin Harris and rally attracting nearly 2,000. Unions feel that the withdrawal of goodwill will put institutions in severe difficulty. At Manchester Metropolitan, pickets at every entrance (nearly 100!) virtually shut down the university. No national

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armbands, placards or leaflets were received, and valuable time was spent before the strike in producing material locally.

Oxford

Pickets were mounted at several sites including Oxford Brookes, the Bodleian Library and Science Faculty, sharing 15 placards, five armbands, fewer than 200 leaflets and 18 stickers. Despite many scabs going in, a student boycott and lecture cancellations meant it was a quiet day. In Oxford's biggest demo for years, 1,200 marched to a meeting in the Town Hall called by all the unions with support from 23 student unions. Only 600 were allowed in, so the rest marched down the busiest shopping and bus route in the city centre (from which the police had banned the march in the first place). Speakers at the rally included representatives from Oxford CWU on their current battle against victimisations.

Newcastle-upon-Tyne

Over 1,000 attended a lunchtime demonstration, addressed by trade unions and a striker from the Magnet Kitchens factory in Darlington, who have been on strike for six months. The day served as an introduction to trade union principles for some young students whose only experience of regular full time work and trade union organisation comes in stories from their grandparents.

St Andrew's

Well supplied with placards and material from the Regional Offices, pickets braved snow, hail and biting winds all day long, but were rewarded by seeing only a few scabs go through. Several hundred brave souls dodging crashing waves marched along the pier.

Stirling University

The University was brought to a virtual standstill by action involving all the unions and with the support of the Students' Association. A strong picket complete with large coal braziers was mounted at the two main gates, stopping every car and bus with many turning back. A couple of hundred people took a three mile march to a mass rally in Stirling's Albert Hall.

Swansea Institute of HE

Security staff left one site at midnight, leaving halls of residence to the students, who responded accordingly. Pickets arriving at 6.30am met fire tenders leaving the site after searching in vain for a fire. Despite the awful weather, UNISON and NATFHE pickets effectively closed the Institute for the day.

University of Wales, Swansea

Strikers picketed from 6am. A 9am rally drew further strikers, whose help maintained pickets at all six gates, stopping deliveries and buses, and at outlying buildings with assistance from some students. The library and Students Union were both closed, there was no catering service and most other buildings were empty. The College of Nursing, Midwifery and Healthcare, scattered on various sites, was virtually closed down. One pocket of UNISON scabs covered strikers' jobs. Some departments gave non-striking staff a free day off, which threatens to demoralise some union members.

End lower earning in higher learning!

Christine Lennie, Branch Secretary, Queen Mary & Westfield College UNISON branch, explains the dispute in Higher Education.

FOR the first time, all eight unions which represent members in higher education - AEEU, AUCL, AUT, GMB, MSF, NATFHE, TGWU and UNISON - have balloted simultaneously for industrial action. All ballots were successful and the national day of strike action on 19th November will be followed by indefinite withdrawal of goodwill.

Higher education staff have been slow to resort to industrial action. The university sector does not command public support as the NHS does, nor does it have the day to day impact of the postal service or the railways. With higher education commonly regarded as elite provision for the privileged few, staff have been reluctant to take action which would attract little public interest or sympathy and could further erode the education of their students. Now the mood has changed, with the unions in dispute reporting over 20,000 new recruits nationally since the ballot was called.

Staff have accepted below-inflation pay offers for the last few years but the derisory offer this year was the last straw. Perhaps employers thought that, having accepted low offers before, staff would accept this one. Or perhaps the Government suggested to them that if they offer a rise low enough to provoke a strike, employers will have the excuse to impose individual settlements - breaking national pay bargaining. The removal of national bargaining in the NHS has been crucial in weakening opposition to Government cuts to the health service and it would be convenient to break national agreements in the higher education sector too.

Universities have changed almost beyond recognition over the last decade:

- The reclassification of many polytechnics as "new" universities increased the number of places available in higher education, prompting greater competition between institutions for applicants.
- The Government set strict targets for increased student numbers, adding to the competition for places. Failure to meet these targets bears severe financial penalties.
- The need to recruit and retain more students has inevitably adjusted teaching techniques to accommodate students with a greater variety of abilities and experience in classes which are larger than ever before.

The Government has not increased its funding to institutions to match the increased students numbers and therefore universities have succeeded in providing for greater numbers of students only through the hard work of their staff. Increased student numbers have an impact on staff at every level, from catering staff in the refectory, to Registry staff keeping track of more students, to Heads of Department trying to balance the research needs of their staff against teaching requirements. Most institutions have been reviewing staffing levels. Many services have been contracted out, resulting in reduced job security, lower wages and worse terms and conditions. At Queen Mary & Westfield College we have seen many posts frozen, delays in advertising vacancies, posts advertised at grades below that of the previous post-holder and refusal to consider regrading.

With staff coping with greater workloads and levels of responsibility (and a resulting increase in stress-related illness) you might have thought that they deserved recognition, gratitude and a decent pay rise. However, the employers' first and final offer this year was:

- 2.5% increase for manual staff (the basic rate for all manual staff is less than the TUC's recommended minimum wage of £4.26 an hour)
- 1.5% increase for academic, academic-related and all other support staff (an average rise of just 10p an hour for all support staff, one third of whom earn less than the European Decency Threshold).

The employers did not even attempt to justify this offer so they should not be surprised that their staff are not prepared to accept it. Enough is enough.

The *Labour Left Briefing* HE Dispute Bulletin gives more regional coverage of the one-day strike and an activists' checklist on the next steps. For single copies (photo-copiable) send an A4 self-addressed envelope to: *LLB*, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

Students defend free education

Students have begun to organise independently in defence of free education, despite the supine role of the NUS leadership. Joshua Peck of Queen Mary's and Westfield Student Union and Labour Club reports.

AFTER 17 years of funding cuts from the Tory Government and a massive rise in student numbers, higher education is facing crisis. Seeking to defuse the issue before the General Election, the Government has commissioned Sir Ron Dearing to examine the future of higher education and report back after the General Election. Dearing is likely to recommend students should pay directly for their education through tuition fees.

This is largely backed by the Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals. The CVCP threatened to introduce "top-up" fees in a misguided publicity stunt to scare the Government into reversing cuts. However, some institutions took to the idea. Although attempts to introduce them this year were narrowly defeated, institutions will try again next. These plans would escalate a students' debt on graduation to a potential £20,000. This would deter thousands of people from entering higher education.

Repeated calls for the NUS to act have come to nothing. Many students - seeing the system that enabled them to go to university being dismantled - are starting to fight back independently. On 20th November students from across the country joined a protest march in London against plans for tuition and "top-up" fees, organised by the Campaign for Free Education. Demonstrators called for a renewed commitment to free education from the National Union of Students and the Labour Party. On route marchers held a "spontaneous" sit-down on Waterloo Bridge.

The demo wasn't huge. NUS had refused to lend their support and many students' unions had stayed away. However a wide range of institutions was represented from Glasgow (Caledonian University) to London (Guildhall). There were even delegations from the more "conservative" University of London colleges.

Perhaps most important was that there were people there who, at last year's round of conferences, had voted against free education. Events at the London School of Economics and Huddersfield - which came closest to introducing "top-up" fees this year - have started to persuade some that once you start the ball rolling it will prove hard to stop.

At the rally in Kennington Park Tony Benn MP called on students to unite with other unions in education to fight cuts and fee proposals. Only the day before, the national higher education shut-down showed the effectiveness of unified action. Funding cuts and changes in Party policy have been possible because politicians believe only those involved in higher education are concerned, and working people do not want to pay for it. Too many times I have been told of the "poor bus driver" paying for my education. I don't want the "poor bus driver" to pay disproportionately for my education or for the education of his or her own children.

The timing of the student campaign against fees coincides with the university unions' fight against low pay and cuts. This gives us an excellent opportunity to unite these common struggles.

Conference of trade union left organisations

Build the fightback!
Organise the left!

11am-4pm, Saturday 1st February 1997

ULU, Malet Street, London WC1

Contact: Will Reese, 116 Rosslyn Avenue, Coundon, Coventry, CV6 1GN.

Trade Union

Merger talks are well under way between the two largest Civil Service unions: Civil and Public Service Association and the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union. The two NECs have agreed a joint "Aims and Values" statement, to be put to an indicative ballot of members in January.

The ballot is not legally required for proceeding with steps towards a merger, but it will inform decisions to be made about the draft rule book. The latter will be debated at the unions' annual conferences next May and, if carried, will be submitted to a final ballot later in the year.

The joint statement will include: a move to two-yearly national conferences and elections (allowing resources to be re-directed to local and departmental negotiations); submission of changes agreed by conference in key union rules and policies to individual ballots; and continuing moves to link union branches to single employers. Some of these proposals are likely to be controversial.

Talks also continue about merger with the next largest Civil Service union, the Institute of Professional and Managerial Staff, which represents technical and scientific staff. If these also go through, it would leave only the high-flyers in First Division Association as a separate Civil Service union.

A John Pilger article on the Liverpool Dockers in the *Guardian*'s Weekend magazine highlights the role of the TGWU and TUC. The T&G was always on cosy terms with dock owners. Ernie 'we're all on the same side' Bevin, was a TGWU leader in the days when the workforce was casual and men fought each other for a day's poorly paid and dangerous work - a rapidly returning scenario thanks to Bevin's heirs.

Today's employers boast of their continuing good relationship with the union, while Bill Morris says "there can be no turning back and no backsliding until victory is won", and refuses to give the dockers support by making the strike official and getting national and international solidarity. John Monks at the TUC has also refused to help, while mouthing platitudes about the evils of low pay and casual work. The International Transport Federation positively blocked efforts towards international solidarity, worried that the dockers are setting up an alternative organisation.

Blair has many allies for his 'all in the same boat now' line. The role of the T&G in the dockers' struggle is only the most blatant example of sell-outs - every union has similar sorry tales to tell.

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Notebook

In a follow-up to his letter to full-time officials (see November *LLB*), MSF general secretary Roger Lyons has written to the branches that nominated him the last time he stood for election, asking for their support again. This is despite MSF rules against canvassing.

There is a rumour going around the union that the voluntary sector full-time officer Chris Ball has had his pay upped by £2,000 to take on research work normally done by research officer Hilary Benn, because so much of the latter's time is being taken up acting as Lyon's unofficial election agent. If true, this amounts to a £2,000 donation to Lyons's campaign.

Rumours about how MSF for Labour, Lyons's support group, is funded are bound to proliferate. The group's handouts never include a contact address or number, nor request financial support, unlike the much more open left groups.

Japanese dockers have voted to join the international blockade in support of the Liverpool dockers. They will take action against the OOCL shipping line trading in the Pacific rim. They have also donated a further £5,000 to the dockers' hardship fund.

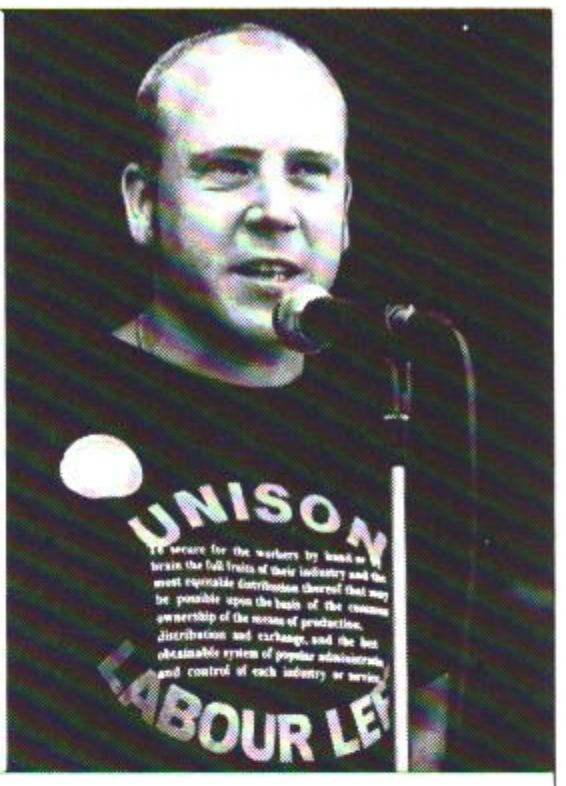
Note the following:
1. Reduction in maternity pay by 33.3%.
2. Reduction in annual leave by 3 days.
3. Closure of staff nursery facilities.
4. Reduced redundancy pay.
5. Charging trade unions £42,000 for use of premises.
6. Charging 10% interest on season ticket loans for travel.
7. Reducing special parental leave and leave for family bereavement.

You could be forgiven for thinking that the above are the latest onslaught by the Tories on workers' rights, pay and conditions. In fact, they are some of the proposals that Labour-controlled Islington Council intends to impose on their workforce as part of a £16m cuts package which will devastate both jobs and services in the Borough.

Over the past year Islington's workers have been subject to constant attacks by the Council leadership. Huge turn-outs at Council union meetings and rallies show that Islington's workers do not intend to be sacrificed on the altar of Blair's "New Labour" ideology. Islington's workforce has shown in the past that it is prepared to fight back against such attacks on the rights of trade unions and workers. The latest measures by Islington Labour Group have only served to rekindle that spirit.

the Geoff Martin column

UNISON's London Region convenor takes a lefty look at life.



- Was I the only person surprised to see Noel Gallagher on the front of Labour's Blairite Fanzine right in the middle of the heated debate about public 'morality'. Where Class A drug use, burglary and car theft fit in with Blair's 'God, Austerity and the Lash' social policies is beyond me. The Gallaghers have owned up to all of the above and with Blair's addiction to evangelical religious mumbo-jumbo you'd expect to see the Oasis boys on the first train to the boot camp once Tony comes to power. Not touted as youth role models.
- On the subject of Oasis, Noel Gallagher is supposed to have said that Tony Blair's Conference speech made him want 'to go out and hit the first person wearing a bowler hat.'

Err, think you've missed the point there somewhat, Noel. Blair's economic policies are all about sucking up to the men in bowler hats. Sounds to me like too much of the old white line my son. Get back to making some decent rock and roll tunes and leave the politics to us old Clash fans.

- I was recently invited over to France for an international conference on privatisation organised by the French Workers Party. The train departure for Paris meant a rapid exit from the Chelsea game and also meant carting my luggage up to the pre-match drink and a question and answer session in the pub on where I was off to. In summary one analysis of my expedition ran as follows: "Geoff's off to speak at a conference in Paris. That means he gets to spout the usual bollocks and some poor sod has to translate it into French bollocks". It's that kind off down to earth piss-taking which keeps your feet firmly on the ground.
- In Paris I had to share a room with Jeremy Corbyn and I found something out which I'm going to be forced to report to the Labour Chief Whip. I wouldn't normally dream of grassing up Jezza but this time he's gone too far. He confessed to me that he's planning to hold a meeting in the House of Commons with *Tony* Adams.
- So Blair's planning to go bald now in an attempt to appeal to women voters is he? I have to say it's a far more legitimate tactic than most of the other stunts he's pulled. Mind you, if he thinks he's going to sneak into the Socialist Slaphead League he's got another think coming.
- I saw that Paul Richards from the LCC on the box the other night and it wasn't even halloween. Since when were the Party image makers touting the 'Boris Karloff after a bad night at the graveyard' look as a vote-winner?

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

March for the Liverpool dockers

Saturday 14th December
Assemble 12 noon, Speakers' Corner, Hyde Park
March to rally at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square

The Liverpool dockers are coming to London. Together with Tony Benn and the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs, they are organising this joint trade union demonstration in the capital. Support from trade union branches is beginning to roll in. An array of folksingers, comedians and other celebrities have signed up to entertain us at the end of the march including: Billy Bragg, Rory Bremner, Ken Loach and folksinger Leon Rosselson. Reclaim the Streets activists will be part of the action, along with a dragon and other performers. Bring any musical instruments and banners and enjoy the festive occasion!

MICHAEL

An Irish tragedy

Terrorist, traitor or Irish national hero? Tony Dale, Manchester Central CLP, looks back at the real Michael Collins.

MICHAEL Collins first appeared in the public eye when he took part in the 1916 rising - a rising which was greeted with disbelief and hostility by the Dublin population.

However, the execution of 15 of the leaders of the rising started to change the mood in Ireland. Support began to ebb away from the constitutional nationalist party towards Sinn Fein, partly because nationalist leader John Redmond was willing to consider the exclusion of part of Ulster from the area promised Home Rule. Threats by the British Government to extend conscription to Ireland also built support for Sinn Fein.

The transformation of the political situation was confirmed in the 1918 elections when Sinn Fein won 73 seats compared to the Home Rule Nationalist Party's six seats. Sinn Fein refused to go to Westminster and instead set up the Dail Eireann as the parliament of the Irish Republic.

Michael Collins was now a leading Sinn Fein member and became a minister in the Dail Eireann executive. Collins' main role was as an organiser for the semi-military Volunteers, which, as the army of the Dail Eireann, became the Irish Republican Army.

The confrontation between the Dail Eireann and Britain developed into the Anglo-Irish war in 1919. Michael Collins was the brains behind the IRA's guerrilla war. Collins' role as military organiser was important, but the IRA's ability to maintain the campaign depended on the information, hiding places, silence and cover provided by a supportive and sympathetic population. Britain's agreement to negotiate was a victory for Collins' tactics but it was also a victory for the mass defiance of the population.

The negotiations led to a treaty which did not make Ireland a Republic and led to partition. The treaty resulted in civil war. Why did Collins agree to it?

The 1921 treaty proposed an 'Irish Free State' within the British Empire. Collins saw this settlement as far from ideal but as a stepping stone to a Republic. He saw that the Irish people would not countenance the continuation of a bloody war over a form of words. The 'Irish Free State' did become a stepping stone to the Irish Republic, formed in 1949.

The opposition to the Treaty inside the Dail, led by Eamon de Valera, did not insist on a Republic as the only acceptable solution. De Valera in fact advocated an "external association" relationship between the Empire and an independent Ireland. De Valera's opposition "Document No. 2" did not mention the word "Republic".

The real tragedy of the Treaty was how it led to partition. Collins and the other negotiators got an agreement that if Northern Ireland continued to exclude itself from the Irish Free State a Boundary Commission would be created to look at the border. Sinn Fein were led to understand that the Boundary Commission would reduce Northern Ireland to four counties. They believed this would make Northern Ireland unviable and inevitably lead to a united Ireland.

Most of the anti-Treaty side agreed with Collins' scenario on the border. De Valera's "Document No.2" accepted the provisions of the Treaty on Ulster. It has been estimated that of 338 pages of debate printed in the Dail report only nine pages are devoted to the question of partition.

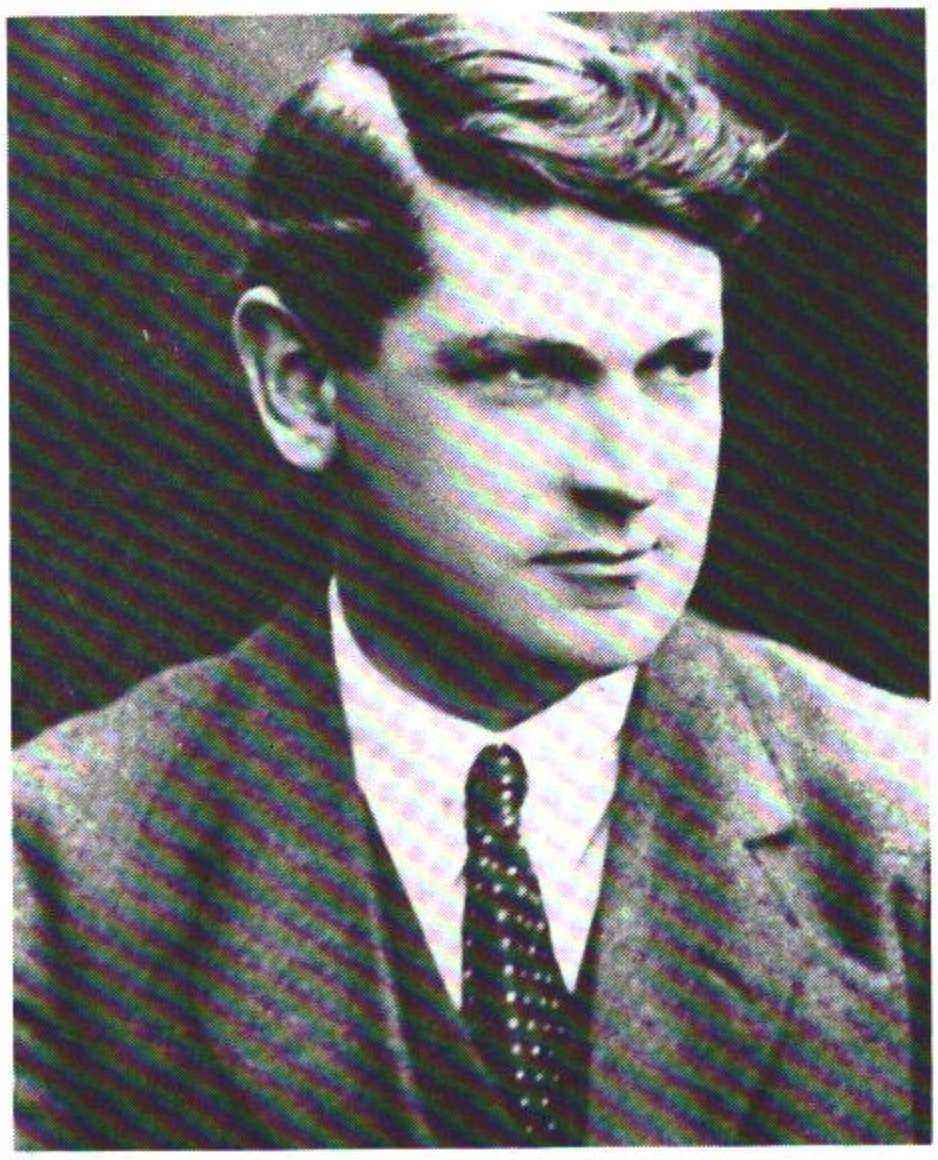
The Dail voted to endorse the Treaty. The divisions developed into a bitter civil war. Collins and the pro-Treaty forces won the civil war primarily because the anti-Treaty side had little support among the vast majority of the population.

The Irish labour movement called for an end to the civil war: "To the workers, again, we say: Unite and stand fast! Do not allow yourselves to be drawn into opposing camps". James Larkin, the trade union leader and revolutionary socialist, urged the anti-Treaty IRA to call off the civil war.

Both sides incurred losses at the hands of former comrades. Michael Collins was one of the casualties, killed in an ambush. Soon after his death the anti-Treaty IRA called off the civil war and stated "other means must be sought to safeguard the nation's right".

The civil war itself had not been fought over partition. In fact, it deflected attention from the issue of Ulster. The strategy endorsed by both sides in the war - to rely on the decisions of the Boundary Commission - was shown to be fundamentally flawed when the six county border was reinforced and Northern Ireland was born. This was the real tragedy of the conflict.

Michael Collins

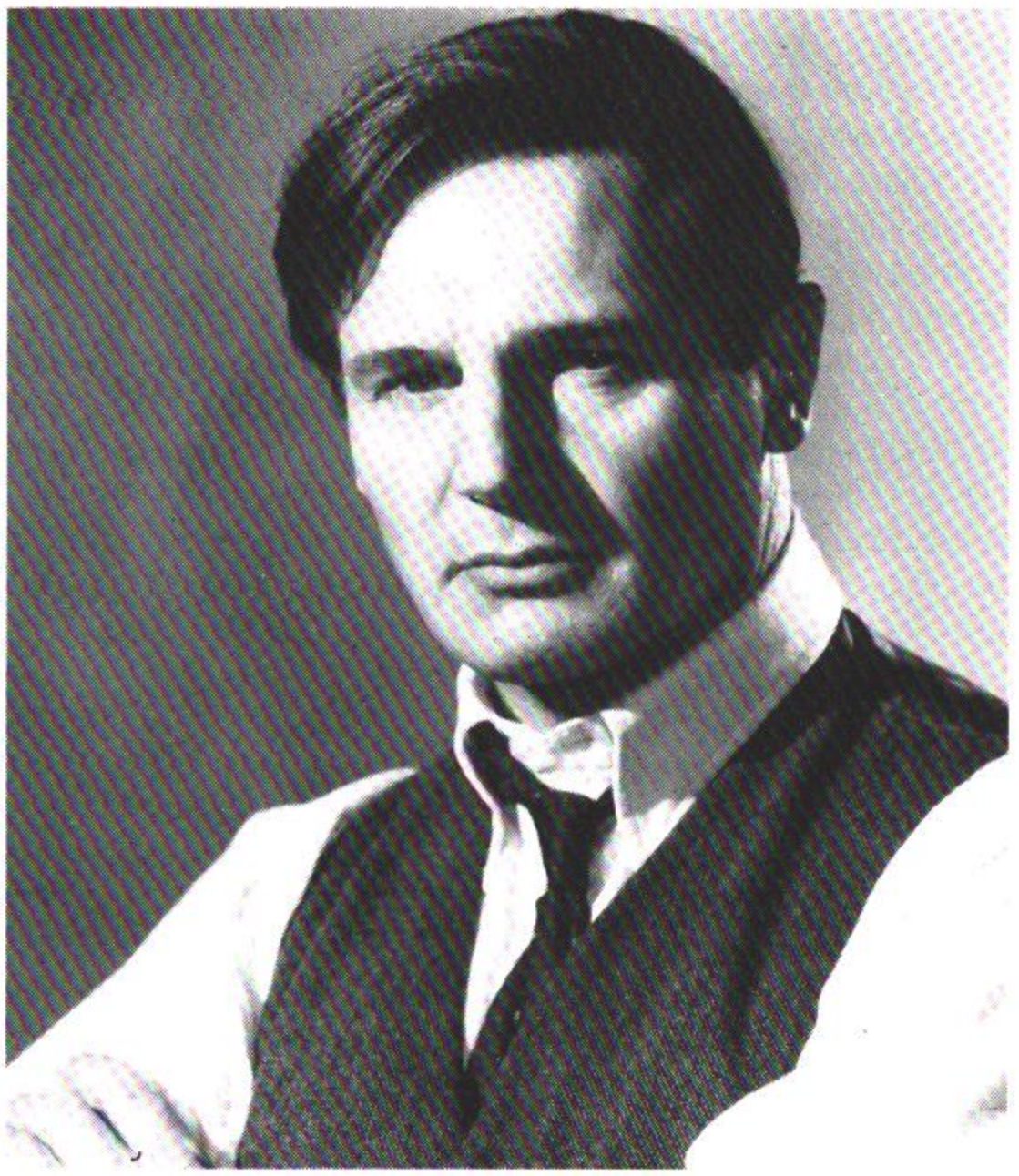


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COLLINS

High body count, low audience involvement

Sue Lukes reviews Neil Jordan's film, Michael Collins.



Liam Neeson as Michael Collins.

IT WAS with some enthusiasm that my Labour Party ward organised an outing to see Michael Collins, but with rather less that we left the cinema.

On the positive side, this film is openly sympathetic to republicanism and shows British rule as brutal. The photography is stunning and some of the characters engaging.

But the focus on Collins fails to explain much of what was happening at the time, and the addition of a romantic sub-plot (with Julia Roberts displaying all three of her facial expressions) undermines rather than adds to the attempt to make a historical figure live and breathe.

Alan Rickman plays De Valera using the mannerisms left over from his performance as the Sheriff of Nottingham in *Robin Hood*. It is thus all too obvious from the start - even to those of us who did not know the story - that he was going to betray his comrade. And Rickman seems to have given Dev the vowels as well as the morals of Michael Howard. Very confusing indeed.

The film fails to shed much light on precisely what Collins' contribution was, but is framed with quotes telling us it was terribly important. He is presented as a pioneer of urban guerrilla warfare, but wasn't it Connolly who invented or theorised much of what we saw on screen (he is dismissed in the first few minutes as a crippled failure shot after the Easter Rising)? But then Connolly was older, and a socialist, and unlikely to captivate either Julia Roberts or an audience reared on young soldiers, so we may wait longer for a good film about him.

The focus on guerrilla warfare is also badly skewed. Watching the *Battle of Algiers* again recently, I remembered how distressing and painful the scenes of torture are - because the audience has been led to identify with the destiny of the Algerian people. Michael Collins has a high body count: I saw three hangings, innumerable close-up shootings, several massacres, all in beautifully co-ordinated colour. I felt disgust; but I doubt the film would make anyone new to the issues care more or less about the Irish struggles.

Scottish Socialist Alliance

The Scottish Socialist Alliance is proud to announce the launch of its own magazine, *Red*.

The first issue is now available and contains news on campaigns from around Scotland, the latest debate and discussion on the Scottish Left and eight pages of arts reviews and interviews. Of particular interest to many readers will be an interview with Scottish author William McIlvanney.

Supporters and others interested in developments on the Scottish left are urged to take out a subscription, £10 for a year, cheques payable to Red Publications. Single copies of Issue 1 are available at £1.50 including post and packing.

"Red Publications", PO Box 13968, Edinburgh, EH16 6ZJ.

Ireland: remove the hurdles

Mitchel McLaughlin, Chair of Sinn Fein, calls on the Labour leadership to take a lead in the search for peace in Ireland.

ONE OF the conundrums in the build up to Britain's General Election is Labour's fear that any innovative thinking on the Irish Peace Process will be exploited by the Tories. Any accusation that Labour is soft on the IRA is enough to send the Labour front-bench scrambling for cover under John Major's coat-tails.

Regrettably there are those in the British establishment and in the leadership of Unionism who still foolishly want outright victory over Irish Republicanism and reject any suggestion of an accommodation between the people of Ireland, and the people of these islands. They see dialogue as nothing other than an exchange of threats. Such futile posturing, by the unteachable in pursuit of the unreachable must not be permitted to determine the agenda for those who recognise a historic window of opportunity.

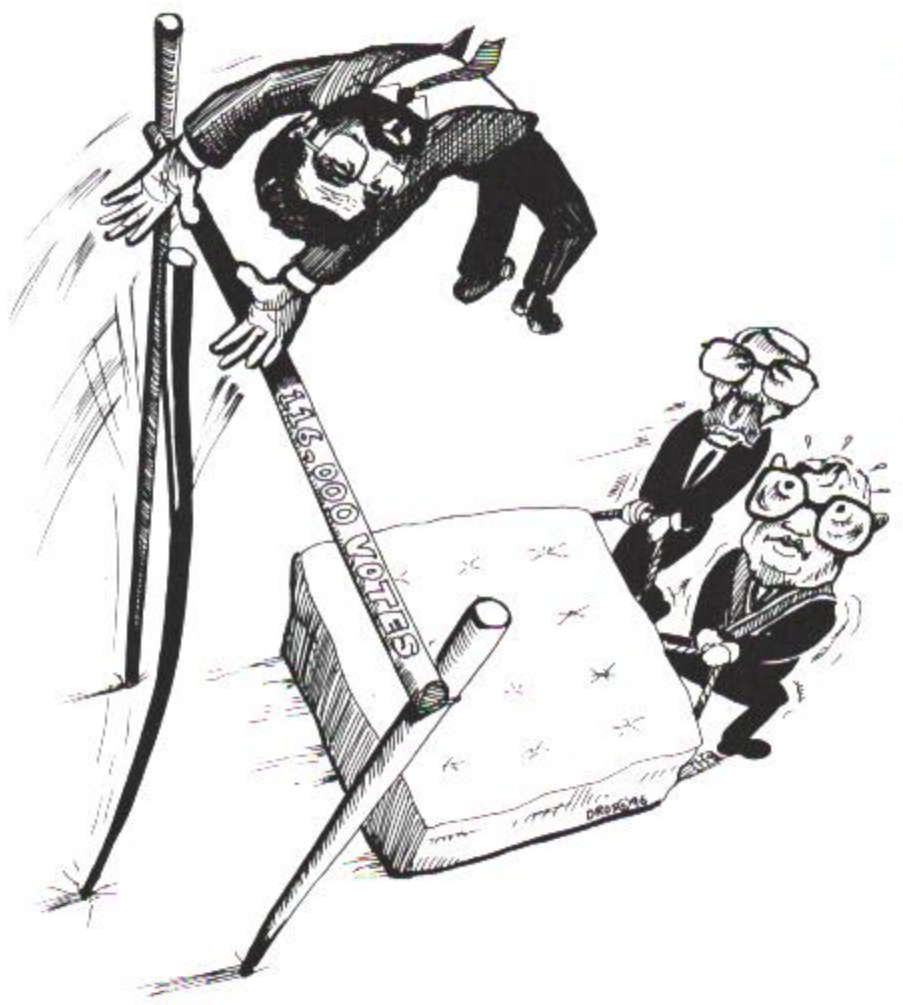
When Sinn Fein embarked on its peace strategy we knew that it would be both difficult and risky. Success in peace-making will always be dependent on former enemies entering into a full partnership in which all positively engage and seek to build trust and confidence. The Peace Process is not a tug-of war: all sides have to pull in the same direction for a common goal.

A credible process of negotiations has to tackle the causes of conflict in Ireland fundamentally. There can be no question of domination by any one side. The Irish Taoiseach John Bruton said earlier this year that new arrangements and structures must afforded to all, "on the basis of equal treatment, secure and satisfactory expression and protection in all spheres of public life". Mr. Bruton also acknowledged that a "settlement can only be brought about through inclusive all-party negotiations" and "without clear and firm guidance and commitment at government level there is no real prospect of resolving the problem".

That means the two governments taking the lead. It also defines a positive role for the opposition parties, especially those who aspire to be the incoming government after the forthcoming elections!

Credible negotiations must see the removal of all preconditions. The demand for an IRA surrender - for prior decommissioning - is an obstacle to negotiations. John Major in a recent *Irish Times* article, said it would not be allowed to block progress. But that is exactly what it has been since Patrick Mayhew first raised it as a precondition in March 1995.

Of course, the issue of arms will have to be satisfactorily addressed in negotiations. The



removal of guns is an obvious goal of a peace process, not a precondition to involvement in that process. Also, a convincing negotiating process must reflect the widely held view and reality that there can be no internal settlement. It must tackle the critical issues raised by the lack of equality of treatment in the Six Counties and the need for parity of esteem. Discrimination, which still depresses nationalist areas, the lack of an acceptable police service, the absence of a proper legal and judicial system, the protection of human rights, and the release of 'prisoners of the conflict' must be satisfactorily addressed.

Few commentators or observers believe that the Stormont talks can seriously deal with the whole agenda of direct concern to people at the grassroots. The Stormont talks are not inclusive. They are surrounded by a barbed-wire fence of preconditions; they lack any momentum or dynamic, and the British Government has failed to implement the confidence building measures proposed by Senator Mitchell almost one year ago. In fact, the recent review of emergency legislation has recommended that the 'temporary' legislation be made permanent and that some aspects become more draconian.

John Hume and Gerry Adams have been working to reconstruct the peace process since it collapsed in February. It is important to understand that Sinn Fein cannot deliver anything unless the British Government makes clear that there is to be a credible process of talks without preconditions, on a broadly acceptable time-frame and with which everyone can engage in initiatives to build confidence. It must be made clear that the British Government will not treat any new IRA cessation in the same way that it treated the last one.

Sinn Fein remains convinced that an historic opportunity still exists if only John Major is also prepared to take risks for peace. We must all adapt to changing circumstances; we must all be willing to suffer the discomfort of change in order to achieve a better future. We must seek to close the gap between the promise and the current reality of what we can all achieve.

For all its uncertainty we cannot run away from the future. Our task therefore is hard, clearly defined and cannot wait. Real negotiations are the only way forward. Without political will, the road ahead is fraught with danger. With political determination, our goal of a new and democratic political dispensation for the new millennium, which is fair to all, that threatens nobody and that fairly accommodates the identities and rights of all, is achievable.

Can the British Labour Party, especially its leadership, find the courage to take risks for peace in Ireland?

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Sandinistas lose again

While there was large-scale fraud, the right wing decisively won last month's elections in Nicaragua. Mike Phipps, a former executive member of the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, examines why.

THE LEVEL of fraud and the number of irregularities in this election were massive. While this might moderate the margin of victory, it is unlikely to alter the fact that right-wing strongman Arnoldo Aleman won the presidency outright in the first round.

According to the disputed figures, Aleman won 49% of the vote, about 10% more than the Sandinista candidate Daniel Ortega, who originally lost office in 1990. Votes for the national assembly were much closer, with Aleman's Liberal Alliance just ahead of the Sandinistas but lacking an overall majority. The parties of government from 1990 to 1996, which presided over the reduction of Nicaragua to the second poorest country in the hemisphere, were predictably wiped out. In municipal elections, the Sandinistas did much better, winning over 50% of councils. All results are provisional because the Supreme Electoral Council suspended announcements with 90% of the poll counted, because of clear mismanagement.

A recent Sandinista communique documents the electoral fraud. Over 850 telegrammed results switched votes from the Sandinistas to the Liberal Alliance. Over 2,500 final-vote tallies are considered problematic. In the department of Managua alone, all records from 262 polling places were not legally constituted and 1,000 polling places had inconsistent documentation. Similar problems are apparent in Matagalpa and Jinotega. In all three departments, Liberal Alliance activists were the presidents of the Departmental Electoral Councils, overseeing the conduct of the poll.

The Sandinistas are calling for new elections where the most serious abuses occurred. The underlying problem arises from a politicisation of the Electoral Councils, whose heads were nominated by political parties following a change in the electoral law. Earlier this year, the head of the Supreme Electoral Council resigned, saying he had inadequate resources to tackle the problem, and as a result elections "cannot be considered fair."

Yet Sandinista leaders are admitting that any re-count is unlikely to reduce Aleman's lead below the 45% necessary to trigger a second round. So the question has to be asked: Why did the Sandinistas lose again?

Everyone recognises the Sandinistas have moderated their approach since the 1979 armed insurrection that brought them to power. This time they campaigned on the need for economic reactivation, the promotion of domestic producers through accessible credit and the creation of 150,000 jobs. Their vice-presidential candidate was chosen to appeal to the business sector - an agricultural businessman who voted for the now discredited UNO coalition in 1990 and whose land was confiscated under the Sandinistas. Even the Party's revolutionary anthem was replaced by Beethoven's Ode to Joy.

In the summer, Daniel Ortega and 20 other presidential candidates signed the *Minimum Agenda*, a document drawn up by over 100 organisations, including trade unions, producer groups, community and women's organisations. It highlights Nicaragua's critical problems of poverty, crime, poor sanitation, housing, health and education and calls for an incoming government to tackle corruption and improve living standards. The only candidate not to sign was Aleman, thus promoting his anti-establishment credentials while promising the earth to rich and poor alike.

The *Minimum Agenda* was promoted by Nicaragua's right-wing Archbishop Obando y Bravo, although this did not prevent him from denouncing the Sandinistas and appearing in public with Aleman in the closing stages of the campaign. The US State Department also publicly attacked the Sandinistas, who even faced physical attacks. Six activists were killed in a wave of violence led by Liberal Alliance supporters.

But there are deeper reasons for the Sandinistas' defeat. 75% of Nicaraguan people live in poverty; 60% are unemployed. With the privatisation of 354 state companies in six years, the public sector has been cut by more than two-thirds. One woman in three is a lone mother caring for between five and six children on average. Seven hundred and fifty thousand children have no access to primary or secondary education. Illiteracy has risen to 30%.

Most Nicaraguans are quite simply desperate. These levels of deprivation are scarcely compatible with a democratic society or the exercise of rational choice in an election. The IMF and the World Bank made it clear they would accept no renegotiation of the country's punitive Structural Adjustment Programme. Aleman, as a well-financed populist dispensing free gifts and wild promises, was well-placed to take advantage of the despair. Meanwhile, to the clear distaste of some of their traditional supporters, the Sandinistas' pragmatic concern for alliance building with the right did not seem likely to resolve the country's fundamental problems.

What now? Aleman's record as the ruthless mayor of Managua and the funding of his campaign by right-wing Cubans suggest the new president may not let civil liberties or



PHOTO: HAZELL PLUNKETT

The Liberal Alliance on the campaign trail.

the law stand in his way. He has promised a "Truth Commission" which will revise, case by case, all amnesties granted since 1979 in order to deal with those who should have been tried for "murder and the acquisition of properties". How far he will go may depend on the social balance of forces, but his victory could destabilise the fragile regional peace.

The Sandinistas remain caught between the pressure for radical change from their traditional base and the calls for moderation from an increasingly well-heeled leadership. Running local councils and a further six years of national opposition will undoubtedly heighten these internal tensions. ❑

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USA election special:

Ernie Haberkern reviews the mixed results of US trade unions' involvement in the 1996 elections.

ONE OF the headline-grabbing stories in this American election year was the "re-emergence" of the labour movement as a player in the game. Urged on by its new leader - John Sweeney of the Service Employees' International Union - the AFL-CIO, the US equivalent of the TUC, spent $35m on a high-profile campaign to take back the Congress from the Republicans. Not since 1984, when the AFL-CIO under Lane Kirkland forced Presidential candidate Walter Mondale on a reluctant Democratic Party, had the unions been so open in their attempt to alter the political agenda of the country. The results have been mixed.

Judged by Sweeney's rhetoric the campaign was a failure. Only minor gains were made in the House. Newt Gingrich remains the Speaker and will appoint the chairs of the committees which control the legislative process. The Senate is marginally more Republican than before.

That is only half the story. The fact that labour was doing something publicly sparked real enthusiasm in the activist core of the movement and among liberal sympathisers. Since the failure of Mondale's campaign in 1984, the AFL-CIO had abandoned the public arena, preferring to concentrate on making deals in back rooms. Their reward was Bill Clinton. As President, he treated labour with as much contempt as Reagan. Even Richard Nixon had been better on labour issues than Clinton. Then, in 1994, the Republicans swept the House and Senate, and what Republicans!

This new draft explicitly repudiated the old cold war consensus on the welfare state, something which Reagan never did. The words "Labor Party" sprang spontaneously to the lips of hardened bureaucrats. More importantly, these phrases resonated with a union rank-and-file that was tired of losing strikes while liberal Democrats fought the cultural wars over politically correct slogans. The American working class was looking for change.

What it got was John Sweeney. According to the *New York Times*, Sweeney was a Democratic Party hack before he became a union leader. He never whispered the slightest criticism of Kirkland's political cowardice at home or his militantly anti-communist politics abroad. Sweeney's actions since coming to office can be rationally explained in only one way. He saw his mission as putting the genie back in the bottle.

For a number of years Tony Mazzocchi of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers has been steadfastly recruiting trade union activists to Labour Party Advocates. Mazzocchi has built an organisation dedicated to propagandising inside existing union structures for an independent party of labour. After Clinton spearheaded the drive to pass the North American Free Trade Agreement without the protections sought by unions and environmentalists, LPA began to pick up steam.

The 1994 electoral disaster and the resulting chaos at the top of the AFL-CIO added more steam. After his election, Sweeney moved quickly to turn off the valve. His $35m campaign was meant as an alternative to the growing disgust with the Democrats. At its convention this summer LPA did the only thing it could. It declined - at this time - to challenge the Sweeney leadership. Anything else would have meant the immediate demise of LPA. Sweeney, unlike Kirkland, is not yet discredited. The overwhelming majority of trade unionist activists (but no longer the majority of the working class) still sees the Democrats as the only choice. Sweeney's successful derailing of the Labour revolt against Clinton and the Democrats was the movement's real defeat in this election.

Americans are still disillusioned with the present party structure. The second Clinton administration will be an even more corrupt farce than the first. "Washington" will continue to be a synonym for corruption and incompetence. John Sweeney is part of that corruption. He wasted the enthusiasm and dedication of the membership that threw itself into the 1996 campaign.

● Ernie Haberkern, writing in a personal capacity, is the director of the Center for Socialist History in Berkeley, California and a veteran of 25 years of trade union activism.

What George Stephanopolos won't tell Tony Blair about the US Presidential elections:

Clinton's record

Plus side: Family and Medical Leave Act, giving workers right to unpaid time off from work, minimum wage raised (still lower in real terms than in 1975), defended women's right to choose on abortion.

Minus side: health care reform debacle (40 million Americans still without medical coverage), North American Free Trade Agreement, the 1994 Crime Bill (instituted death penalty for 70 offences), increased defence spending (now $268 billion a year), $40 billion Mexican bail-out, bombing of Iraq, Welfare Bill (pushing an additional 2.6 million people into poverty by 2,000), signing of bill denying federal recognition to same sex marriages, 1.6 million in prison (and rising). In 1992, for every dollar earned by the average worker, the average chief executive earned $145; in 1996 the gap had grown to $187 to $1. Annual Index of Social Health: 73 out of 100 under Nixon, 43 under Reagan, 40 under Bush, 38 under Clinton.

The campaign

$800 million spent on presidential campaign alone; another $800 million on Senate and house races, three times the 1993 total. Average successful candidate for House spent more than $500,000; for the Senate $4.5 million, the bulk of finance provided by corporations. Network TV news coverage of the campaign was down one third from 1992.

Results

Republican Congress and Clinton promise of bi-partisan, consensus government. Worst turn out since women's suffrage. Non-voters include ten million "unnaturalised" aliens and 14 million ex-offenders denied the right to vote. A majority of eligible working class electors do not vote.

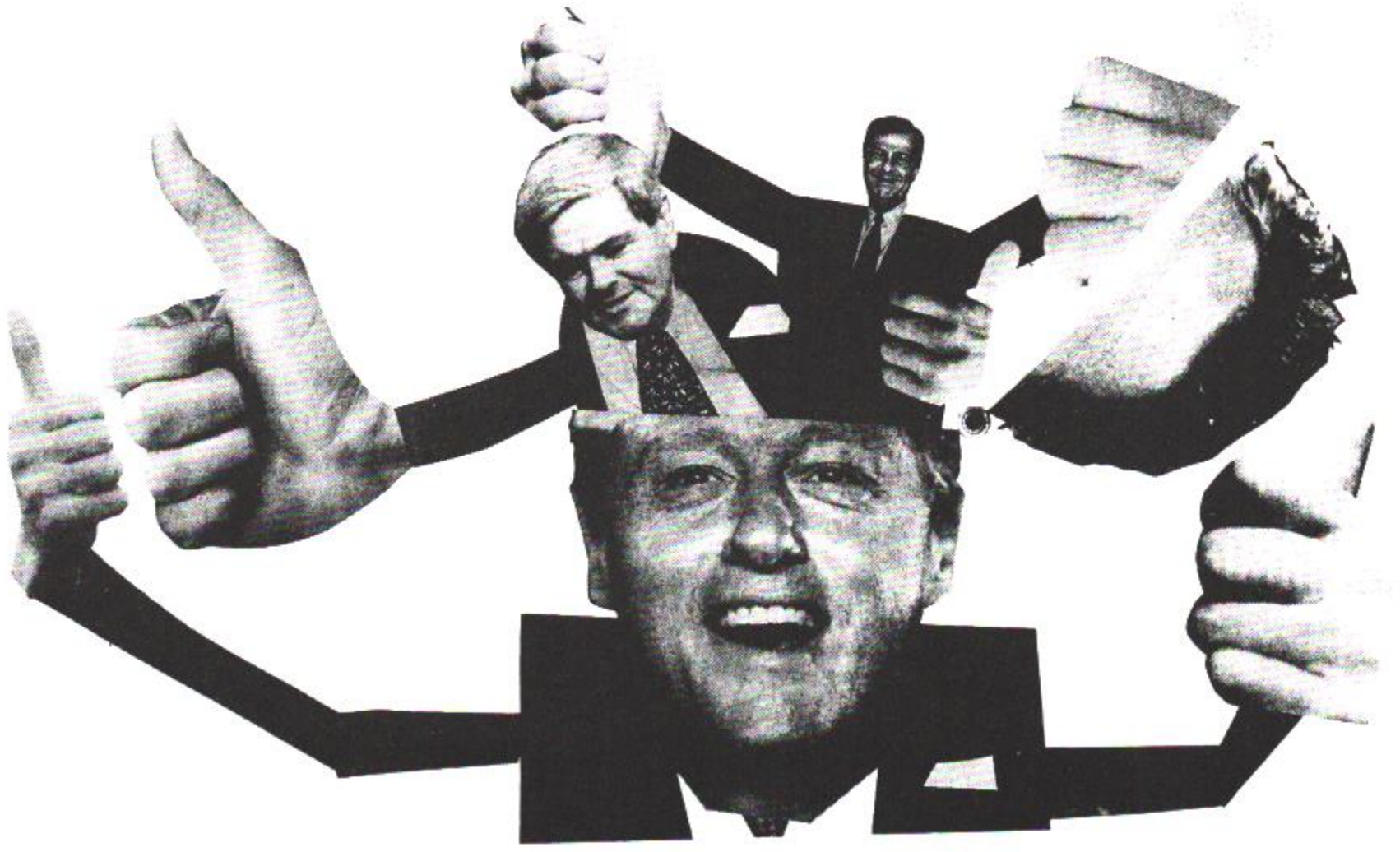
Clinton supported by 20% of eligible electorate. Black people supported Clinton over Dole 84%-12%; whites preferred Dole to Clinton by 45%-44%.

Paul Wellstone, the only Senator up for re-election who voted against the Welfare Bill, supported union rights and environmental restrictions on business, and criticised the Gulf War, defeated well-financed right-wing Republican attack (with no help from Clinton or corporate donors) by 50% to 41%.

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Clinton's lessons for labour

Steve Zeltzer, a member of the newly-formed US Labor Party and an active shop steward, argues that it's time for the unions to break from the Democrats.



What's in Clinton's head?

SURVEYS SHOWED that 23% of the total vote came from union households, up from 14% in 1994 and 19% in 1992. The union vote went 63% to the Democrats and 37% to the Republicans. Clinton's signature for a slave labour Welfare Reform Bill and his support for NAFTA left a sour taste with many workers around the country. Only weeks before the 1996 election, Senate Democrats backed a bill that will make it much harder to organise tens of thousands of FedEx workers. In response, Teamster's president Ron Carey temporarily stopped all union money going to Democratic Senators' re-election campaigns. But for the most part, Clinton's betrayal of union members was passed over in silence by union leaders.

The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), led by Jerry McEntee, said virtually nothing about the Welfare Bill, under which thousands of AFSCME members will be sacked and replaced by welfare recipients. AFSCME and the service employees' union, SEIU, argued that Clinton should be re-elected so he could "fix" the Bill. With a Republican majority in both houses this is highly unlikely. After the election, McEntee argued that it had been a victory: "We saw the right-wing dominated Congress take a turn to the centre." The problem for the AFL-CIO leadership is that the centre continues to shift to the right.

In New York an explosion is already building against AFSCME head Stanley Hill who has acceded to the Republican mayor's ambitious workfare plans. Leaders of AFSCME locals are demanding a fightback and the replacement of Hill, a major supporter of McEntee. The New York Labor Party chapter includes some of these leaders and now has a chance to lead the fight with the unions against slave labour.

The Latino community has borne the brunt of racist attacks on immigrant workers for supposedly taking jobs away from Americans. During the election this community mobilised and significantly increased its turnout. In California, this led to the dumping of Orange County Republican Bob Dornan, who had championed attacks on immigrant workers, blacks and Asians as well as lesbians and gays.

One of the sharpest confrontations in the coming four years will be over privatisation and contracting out. On the election trail Clinton was constantly bragging that he had dumped over 250,000 Federal workers and vowed to continue the process. Within twenty-four hours of the close of polls, Clinton was trying to line up Dole on a "non-partisan" commission whose well-publicised agenda was the privatisation of social security (pensions for the elderly). It was no accident that when AFL-CIO President John Sweeney spoke at the Democratic Convention he forgot to mention privatisation, contracting out and NAFTA. Although the unions had nearly 30% of the delegates, there was not one mention of trade unions or the right to organise in the party programme.

The pay-off for the unions' subservience to the Democrats was not long in coming. As soon as Clinton was re-elected, he got a new corporate banker as chief of staff and dumped some of his "liberal" cabinet members.

Ralph Nader, a long-time consumer rights advocate and opponent of corporate greed, ran as the candidate of the Greens. Nader refused to spend more than $5,000 on his entire national campaign, yet received 9% of the vote in Wisconsin and nationally more than 600,000 votes. If this had been a real campaign with the backing of a labour party Nader might have received 10% to 15% of the vote, instead of 1%-2%. In San Francisco, he beat Ross Perot, 8% to 3%.

Despite the increased union vote, voter abstention continued to be massive. Fewer than 100 million Americans went to the polls, less than 50% of the voting age population. Although the Labor Party voted against running in national or even local elections for the time being, support for a real political alternative is growing and was evident in increasing votes for third party candidates. Bob Wages, a Labor Party founder and leader of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic workers, came out for Clinton, arguing that "once again, lesser evil is our only choice." It is to be hoped that it will not be possible to put this argument in the next presidential election. ❑

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Death dealers exposed

Did British companies arm the Hutu militias in Zaire? Eric Fergusson investigates.

THE DISCOVERY of documents implicating an Isle of Man based arms broking company in arming the Hutu militia of Zaire has once again made the arms trade the centre of political and media attention. Just before the story broke, another story arising from the United Nations draft report on arms supplies to Rwanda, implicated another British company.

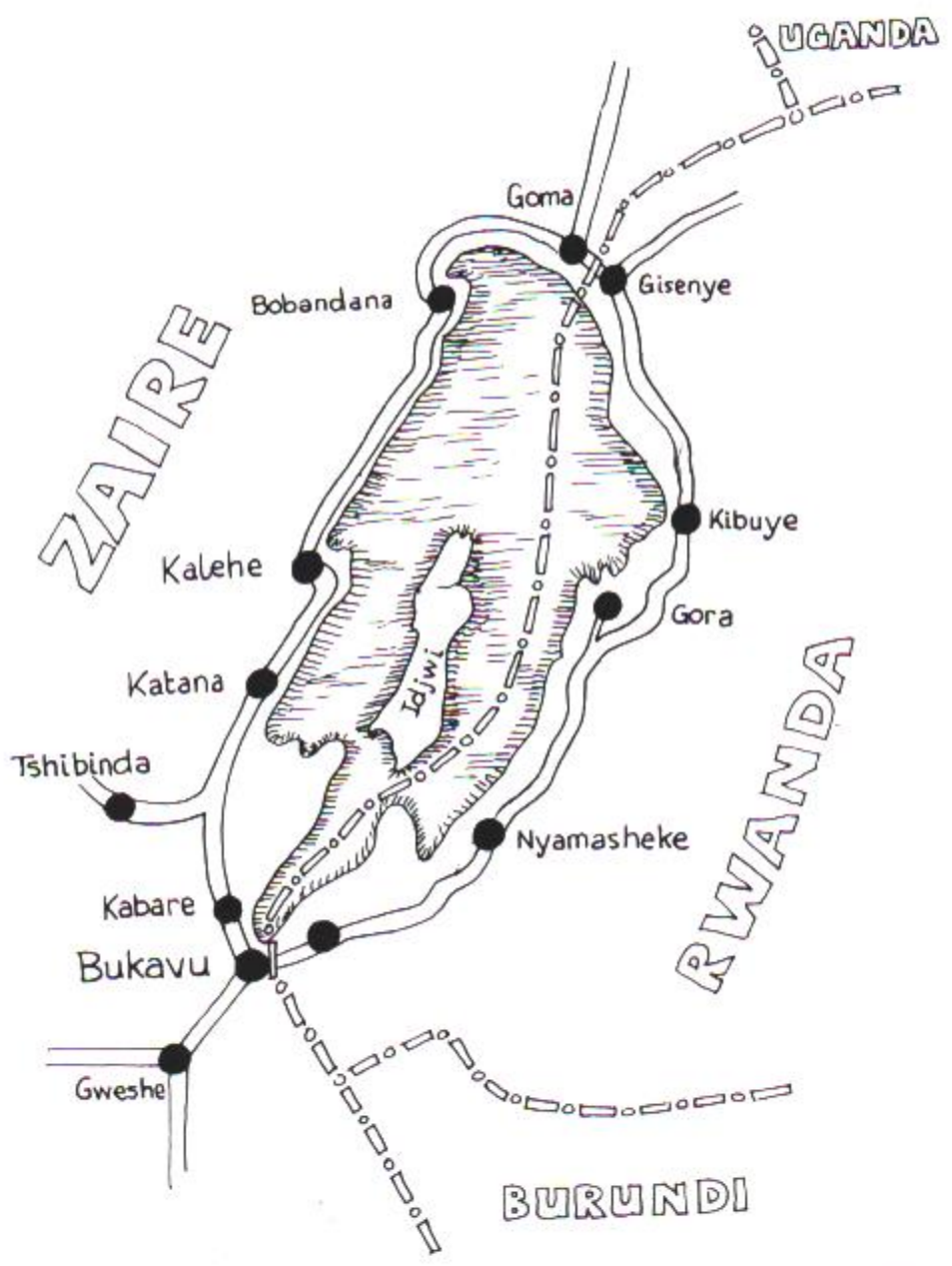
Two urgent questions need to be answered following the recent revelations. What did the Government know and when did it know it? What policy for controlling arms trade brokering from Britain can those opposed to the trade offer?

That arms were being shipped to Hutu forces in eastern Zaire to prepare them for a re-invasion of Rwanda was well known over a year ago. Aid workers in the area had sent reports to this effect to all European Union capitals. The main source of small arms, former Warsaw Pact countries, was also widely known.

How much more did the British Government know? In June, 1995 a Roger Cook ITV programme *Merchants of Death* revealed that an airfreight company based in Newmarket had organised the supply of weapons from Bulgaria to Hutu soldiers in Goma, Zaire. It also detailed how the shipment of small arms was arranged by the Newmarket company through Bulgaria and into Goma.

Does anyone in Customs and Excise watch television? British Government inaction appears even more odd when the role of the United Nations special commission on arms supplies to Rwanda is taken into account. The draft UN report, which some have claimed is being suppressed by the Security Council because it implicates so many western countries, points out that the Chairman of the UN Commission had written to the International Liaison Section of UK Customs and Excise on 30th November and 18th December, 1995. He wrote again on 26th August, 1996, requesting information concerning a British based company said to have been involved in transporting arms to Goma. No reply was received.

On 12th November 1996, Tony Lloyd MP asked Dr Liam Fox MP, a Foreign and Commonwealth Minister, what requests the UN had made to the UK for information regarding arms supplies to Hutu rebels and what the Government had done about them. In reply Fox said, "The Government has a record of receiving one letter, dated 12th September 1996, from the UN Commission of Inquiry regarding supply of arms to the former Rwanda armed forces. Her Majesty's Customs and Excise has not at this stage found evidence to support criminal proceeding in the UK, but will continue to co-operate with the UN commission, and will investigate as appropriate any new allegations."



The UN, it should be noted, had requested information about an unnamed company transporting arms to Goma. Miltec, of the Isle of Man, which was the centre of the media furore, was an arms broker, not an arms transporter. The evidence of the Roger Cook programme suggests that it was the Newmarket based company to which the UN was referring.

The Government appears to have mislaid not one but two letters from the UN at the end of 1995. The Christmas post is always bad but to lose two letters is somewhat suspicious. To put it bluntly either the Government is incompetent and incapable of administrating arms export controls and research (which is possible) or someone, somewhere, is covering something up.

It is likely that there are more Miltecs and other such companies out there making money out of arms deals without the arms ever touching British soil. Others arrange the air transport for such deliveries.

It should be acknowledged that this type of trade would be difficult to control even if there were a government in power committed to stopping it. A first step would be to ensure that all companies involved in flying or shipping arms from third countries to customers abroad should be registered as an arms broker with an independent body and that arms embargoes should apply to them, i.e. they should be made subject to export licensing controls.

Secondly, the Campaign Against Arms Trade would like to see a Minister of State appointed with specific responsibility for controlling and phasing out military exports. Such a Minster would be based in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office with the aim of reducing and eventually eliminating arms exports

In addition, any person(s) found arranging the transport of arms via third countries to areas where war and/or genocide is taking place should face criminal prosecution and jail. This is the rub. Most of the brokers and flight organisers are the barrow boys of the arms trade and individuals can be seen to be personally responsible. Aiding and abetting genocide through supplying arms to the Hutu militia and other such forces should be treated with long terms of imprisonment.

- New briefing available from CAAT *Killing Jobs - How the arms trade creates Unemployment*, £5.00. Also *Response from CAAT to the DTI consultation on strategic export controls* - 50p from CAAT, 11 Goodwin Street London N4 3HQ.

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Ceaucescu's heirs finally go

Dave Palmer, Hornsey and Wood Green CLP, examines a watershed election in Romania.

THE PARTY of Social Democracy in Romania, the main party of ex-Communists, has finally lost power. The PSDR (and its precursor, the National Salvation Front), had held sway since the overthrow of Ceaucescu in 1989 but won only 22% of the vote. Romania's main opposition grouping, the Democratic Convention - a coalition of 15 'centre-right' and liberal parties (mainly revivals of the pre-Communist National Peasant and National Liberal parties) - won 30%. The DC has formed a government with the 'centrist' Social Democratic Union, led by 'technocratic' ex-prime minister Petre Roman, which polled 13%. The Government will have to rely on the ethnic Hungarian Party, which received 7%, to get a parliamentary majority.

PSDR leader Ion Iliescu lost the final round of voting for the presidency to the DC candidate, geology professor Emil Contantinescu by 46% to 54%. This is the first time Romania's head of state has been voted out. In his campaign Iliescu had claimed the opposition would reinstate the monarchy, close down large factories and threaten national unity by including ethnic Hungarians in the government. All the main parties were actually offering much the same in terms of economic and foreign policies: further market reform, privatisation, an anti-corruption drive and speedy entry into the EU and NATO. The PSDR's fall is historic. How should those committed to pluralism, tolerance and socialism feel about the electoral defeat of an avowedly 'socialist' party? The answer is: relieved. The influence of one of the main forces fostering ethnic nationalist tensions in the region, a party of conservative, post-Stalinist bureaucrats reluctant to democratise, appears to be waning. Ion Iliescu and his party are less bloodthirsty but still close political relatives of Serbia's Slobodan Milosevic and the Serbian Socialist Party.

Romania has substantial and diverse minorities. The largest are the Gypsies and the Hungarians of Transylvania. There are also Bulgars, Russians, Ukrainians, Turks and a residue of 'Saxon' Germans and Jews. The 'national communist' dictators, Ceaucescu and his predecessor and mentor Gheorghe Gheorghui-Dej (who ruled from 1952 to 1965), forged and ruthlessly utilised a homogenising nationalist ideology and state apparatus. Ceaucescu's propaganda emphasised the mythical 'Dacian-Roman' identity of the Romanian people and the state's mono-cultural Romanian character. The Romanian people's supposed 'Latin' character - and links to the greatness of the Roman Empire - were a favourite theme (Communist-era statues of Roman figures dot the urban landscape). The Hungarian minority (8% of the population, mostly in Transylvania) was portrayed as a disloyal 'fifth column', discriminated against in education and jobs, stripped of cultural and linguistic rights, and subject to forcible assimilation.

The December 1989 revolution began in Timisoara when Romanians spontaneously joined the Hungarian crowds attempting to stop the detention of dissident cleric Laslo Tokes. An intra-party coup was carried out (probably under preparation for some time) by leading figures in the regime who did not want to go down with Ceaucescu. The National Salvation Front was formed and declared itself a caretaker government until elections, with Iliescu (a one-time Ceaucescu aide who had fallen from favour) as the main spokesperson.

The massed ranks of ex-party bureaucrats who rallied to join the NSF monopolised all state institutions, and in the absence of any independent civil society, the NSF maintained control of the country with ease. Its regime utilised many of Ceaucescu's tools of power. The *Securitate* was kept more or less intact, just re-named. One-party control of TV, though not the press, was effectively maintained and used to smear opponents. The NSF soon resorted to the most easily available means of securing popular support: mobilising Romanian nationalism. In response to pressure from Transylvania's Hungarians for basic rights, the NSF emphasised the mono-ethnic Romanian character of the state, damned its opponents as 'enemies of Romania' and accused the Transylvania Hungarians of seeking unity with Hungary.

In the September 1992 national elections Iliescu easily beat the main opposition candidate, Contantinescu, in the run-off for the presidency, but his party - which won 27.7% of the parliamentary vote - needed outside help to govern. After two months of deadlock it formed a minority government supported by ultra-nationalist (anti-Hungarian and anti-Semitic) parties who had secured a 10% vote. A government re-shuffle in August 1994 saw the ultra-nationalists given cabinet posts and in January 1995 they signed a pact with the Government.

The Government promised a 'social-market economy'. Privatisation was slower than in the rest of Eastern Europe. The private sector is concentrated in agriculture, retailing and trade. A high proportion of the industrial sector remained in state hands. Corruption became rife at every level with the emergence of a small and very rich business elite with personal ties to the ruling party.



Bucharest after the 1989 "revolution".

In the local elections in June 1996 the PSDR lost virtually every large city and town, including Bucharest, and performed poorly in the countryside, its stronghold. Just prior to the national elections the PSDR broke its pact with the ultra-nationalists and threw them out of the cabinet.

Living standards are comparable to Latin America. With little foreign debt but few internationally competitive industries, negligible foreign investment and 50% of the population still in the countryside, Romania's people would be best served by a policy concentrating on modernising agriculture and redirecting industry towards providing capital inputs to farmers and light consumer goods to domestic consumers. It is vital that any government, of left or right, eschews the ethnic nationalist card and follows the example of neighbouring Moldova, where Romanians are the main ethnic group and the government has implemented policies that ensure the linguistic and cultural rights of minorities. ❑

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South Korea: Amnesty highlights student repression

AMNESTY alleges that the brutal dawn raid on Yonsei campus by 2,000 riot police is being used "as a pretext to crackdown on so-called leftist groups". Amnesty reports an alarming escalation in the number of political prisoners in recent months "as the authorities try to stamp out left wing thought".

Contrary to attempts by the western media to blame "student violence" for the incident, it forms part of a broader pattern of state repression. Amnesty has documented a serious deterioration in human rights in South Korea as early as 1994, as Kim Yong Sam's "democratic" Government has used laws inherited from its militarist predecessor to repress any group that has sought reform.

The battle for Yonsei was the most recent and brutal example of this state violence. The Asian Student Association (ASA) claims that the Government mobilised 18,000 riot police

Amnesty International is urging the UN to take up the abuse and ill treatment of the 5,715 Korean students detained in the mass repression at Yonsei University in August. Paul Field, Dartford CLP, reports:

who fired 9,000 tear gas canisters during the nine day confrontation. Over 1,000 students were injured and 5,715 taken into custody. Amnesty details the torture of those arrested, beatings with batons, sexual assaults on women, the forcing of students to kneel in the same position for hours and the denial of medical attention for the injured.

The crackdown was unexpected and unprovoked. Students were gathered for the sixth annual Pan-National Reunification Rally. In July the students had sought government clearance for the rally to go ahead. In the event, the state not only used massive violence to stop the rally, it also vowed to break its sponsor organisation Hanchongnyon (the Federation of University Councils). The police have powers to destroy organisations which are deemed to "benefit the enemy" (North Korea). ASA says that Hanchongnyon offices were seized by police at seven other universities. Even the conservative *Far Eastern Economic Review* reported that Koreans were "puzzled" by the action, speculating that Kim may be garnering conservative votes for next year's presidential election.

Hanchongnyon had tried to end the standoff peacefully by announcing that it would disperse quietly. The authorities responded by saying they wanted to interrogate all participants and promptly ordered police reinforcements. Electricity and water were cut off, ambulances and food deliveries prevented from entering. Tear gas was fired into buildings even as students waved white flags. In the aftermath of the conflict the Government announced its intention to increase the investigative powers of the Agency for National Security Planning to combat what it describes as "an escalation of pro-North Korean activities by students and others".

Domestically, the Government's action is designed to appease hard-liners in the *Chaebol* (the four dominant conglomorates) and military. Since his election four years ago Kim Yong Sam has been forced to make major concessions to their combined strength. Within three months of his election sustained resistance from the *Chaebol*, who together produce 45% of GNP, had forced Kim to shelve his key economic pledge to reduce the monopoly powers of the large conglomerates. Disquiet that government talk of reform had led to worker unrest raised fears within the civilian elite of a right wing coup by a section of the military allied to the *Chaebol*.

After a brief period of liberalisation, Kim responded to this threat by following an identical path to his predecessor Roh Tae Woo and arrested hundreds of dissidents and trade unionists. Since South Korea's transition to 'democracy' in 1987 the arrest of political prisoners has been far higher than under military dictatorship. This latest crackdown, coming as it does after the guilty verdicts given to former presidents Roh and Chun for crimes committed under the military regime, is designed to assure the generals and corporate executives that Kim's Government takes a tough line towards all its opponents: be they of the student left or militarist right.

At an international level, Kim is raising the menace of communist subversion because it helps his Government to remain on a war footing with its northern neighbour. Over the last two years his administration has strictly limited investment in the North and deliberately undermined US attempts to reach an accord over its nuclear programme in an effort to bring the Stalinist regime to its knees. This remains a high risk strategy for the Southern ruling class. A study by the Korean Development Institute has determined that a sudden and unplanned Korean unification, such as took place in Germany, might cost $800 billion over the next ten years.

A section of the political elite appears to have been won over to this type of German style economic annexation because a more genuine national reconciliation is even more dangerous. *Business Korea* warned that if South and North move closer to genuine reunification "the social atmosphere will be loosened with less government controls and social norms" and "the infiltration of socialist principles into the country's labour unions".

Salazar free at last

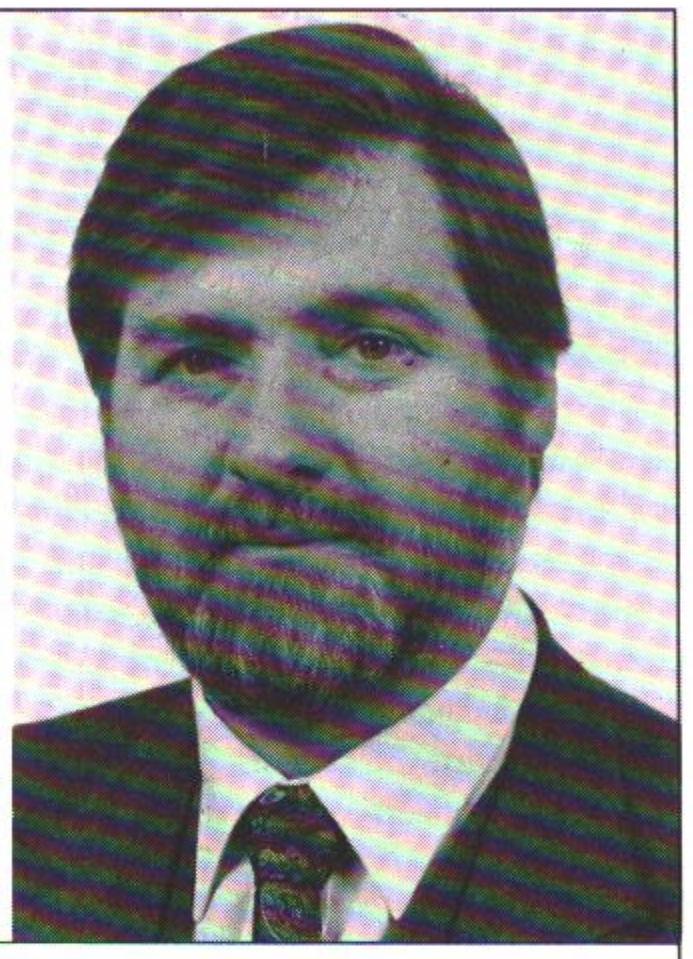
Jeremy Corbyn MP reports: Manuel Salazar, after twelve years in prison and nine years awaiting execution by lethal injection on "Death Row", has been freed. The jury at his retrial in Joliet, Illinois found him guilty of "involuntary manslaughter" but not guilty of murder. As he has served more than the maximum sentence he was released on bail.

As part of the international campaign to save Manuel, I had flown over to the trial. I was present on 8th November when Manuel was released and this was one of the most unforgettable and emotional moments of my life.

This result would not have been achieved without the sustained international pressure from the campaign. Another injustice has at least been partly corrected but there is still much to do. We have many cases in Britain that need our help and campaigning to ensure justice - not least that of Danny McNamee.

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the Michael Hindley column



Labour's MEP for Lancashire South gives a global perspective.

THE Working Time Directive, which will come into force in the United Kingdom because of the recent European Court ruling in Luxembourg, is quite a modest affair. The most significant part of the Directive is not the much-disputed 48 hours a week, but the long-awaited statutory requirement for paid holidays - three weeks now, increasing to four by 1999. Further improvements come with minimum standards governing daily and weekly rest periods. For now, the actual "48 hours" sections of the legislation simply exempt workers from being made to work more than 48 hours without their consent. This measure is a boost for the trade unions but workers isolated in small firms without union representation will find it difficult to stave off the inevitable browbeating from Scrooge-like employers demanding agreement to keep up Britain's disgraceful record of working the longest hours in the EU.

The storm the court ruling unleashed was incredible to behold, not so much the anticipated and lamentable "johnny-foreigner forcing his laws on us" but the amazing assumption that Britain is surging ahead in the global economy and that this quite modest humanitarian improvement of widespread Dickensian work practices would halt the flood of capital into Britain.

Why is it that all the aggressive interviewers never fasten on to the far more destructive outflow of capital from the UK? If the UK is such a good deal for the Germans, French, Koreans, Japanese and so on, how come our own City of London still bases so much of its own investment strategies on outward investment?

The point is that much of the recent investment could well be of only a temporary nature. Yesterday Hong Kong, today the UK, tomorrow whoever else offers up its workforce for exploitation. The sad reality is that the UK made its money in the nineteenth century by dirty and nasty - literally and figuratively - capitalism, then squandered much of the accumulated capital by investing short-term abroad rather than long-term at home. The rise of the labour movement forced British capitalism to reinvest some of its ill-gotten gains in the welfare state, but thanks to the failure of the Labour Party to democratise what workers had won, the Thatcherite revolution has clawed back much of that advance. The retreat under Old Labour has become a rout under New Labour.

Labour's aspirations have been so battered by the Tories that now we dare not ask for more than minimal advances in working and living standards. It is in that context that the EU, with its abiding commitment to actually talking to the workers and believing that happy workers work better and that healthy workers work better too, stands out like a beacon of hope for millions in this country. Contrary to the hype here, "Europe" is not waiting with baited breath for a Labour victory so that advances can be made. Those with higher social standards, for example in Scandinavia, are worried that New Labour will not move beyond the rhetoric of change but will line up on the right, accepting that the Thatcherite revolution is irreversible.

That was the message from Gordon Brown to the CBI. "Do not worry - we'll not let Europe introduce social measures without your veto". The only actual measures in the pipeline that Brown can be talking about are rather modest, but welcome, proposals on increased disclosure of information, measures to shift the burden of proof in sex discrimination cases to favour the employee and extra measures to combat sexual harassment. That is the reality of the European social advance which, Brown assured the CBI, would not be allowed to hold up British capitalism.

At the time of the original debates on the Social Chapter opt-out, the Labour Party adopted a reasonable consensus saying that the next Labour Government would immediately implement the Social Chapter and then press to be at the forefront in introducing better working standards throughout the EU. Now even that has been abandoned.

There is an arrogant and presumptuous madness in the air among the Milwaukee Tendency; they think the election is in the bag and they already fantasise about winning a second term. But they may be forestalled. They still need Labour's traditional support to get in; their mentor Clinton knew that - he ditched the traditional Democrats after the election, not before, and he forged a new centre from the safety and authority of power.

The only thing that can prevent a Labour victory is New Labour's shameful abandonment of its own core support - who could well decide to abandon Blair before he gets into office and puts into practice his aim of abandoning the Party.

Milwaukee Tendency machinations

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FIGHT RACISM

'Why should I die here in prison when I came here for rescue?'

Sue Jones writes: Seven hundred and fifty asylum seekers are in detention in Britain today, about 100 more than last year, and numbers are rising. They are suspected or convicted of no crime. Many have no idea why they are detained: "And if you try to understand why, you cannot. Even the immigration officers say they cannot understand. If you come with your brother they give your brother release and hold you."

Six people have died in immigration detention since 1987. Joy Gardner's death attracted a lot of publicity. Ahmed Katangole and Kimpua Nsimba hanged themselves in prisons where they were meant to be watched. Omasase Lumumba was killed by prison officers "controlling and restraining" him in Pentonville. The verdict was unlawful killing and no charges were brought. You can still see faded posters of Siho on north London streets. He set fire to himself when they came to deport him to Turkey.

Immigration detainees live in a system that is largely outside the law, facing daily abuse and harassment in a regime governed by immigration officers who are unaccountable to any court. People are held for months and even years (18 currently detained for over a year), terms which only those found guilty of serious crimes would normally suffer. Their basic needs are ignored. They often have no real access to medical or other facilities. They are held essentially as a deterrent to anyone else who considers applying for asylum: hostages of Howard's policies.

A recent conference, organised by the churches and the Asylum Rights Campaign, called again for the "release for the captives", having heard a moving account of the mental health problems caused by such detention from a doctor who has just completed some research. "Detention ... generates a climate of misinformation, threat, deterrence, lack of choices, punishment, criminalisation, powerlessness, adverse conditions, discrimination and ... recreates the oppression from which people have fled. It places detainees in predicaments parallel to those they may have faced under torture or previous detention. It maintains the mechanisms of persecution which precipitated their flight. Detention is clearly abusive and inhumane." The Labour front bench has given no assurances about ending this flagrant abuse of human rights. Campaigning is needed now.

- For details of ARC's campaign for detained asylum seekers, contact Mike Kaye at 3, Bondway, London SW8 1SJ, tel 0171 820 3046. For details of your local detainees support group, or to start visiting detainees, contact A R Attar, 53, Western Rd, Winchester, Hampshire SO22 5AH tel. 01962 863317.

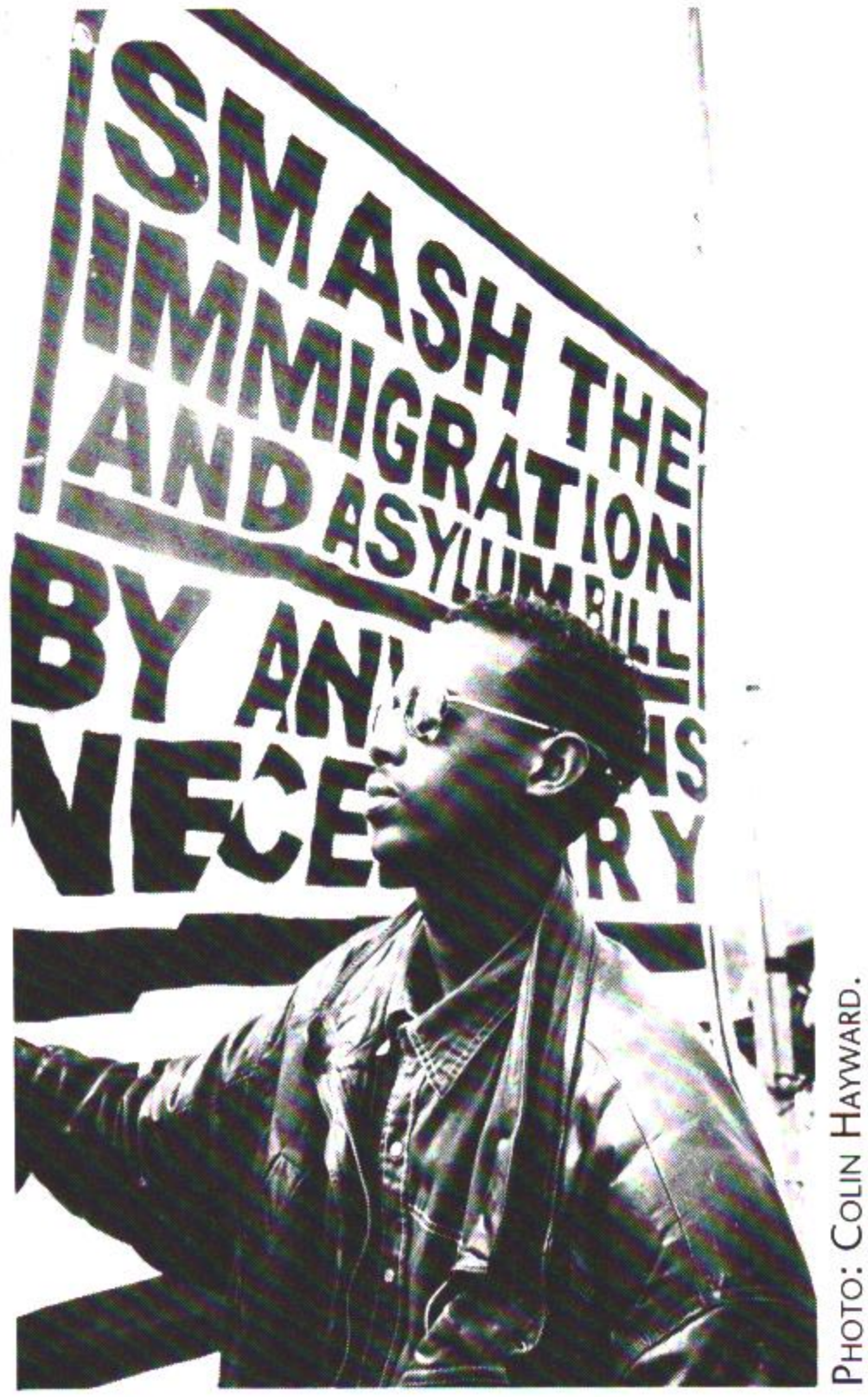


PHOTO: COLIN HAYWARD.

Protesting against the Asylum Act, 20/4/96.

Beyond the boundary

WHEN FAST BOWLER Devon Malcolm returned from the England tour of South Africa last year he wondered publicly whether his shabby treatment by the England management had something to do with his colour. The cricket establishment rounded on him and insinuated that he had been "got at" by "militants".

In a newly published book, former England cricketer Dermot Reeve reports that Ray Illingworth, then England manager, referred to Malcolm as a "nig nog" in the practice nets and batting coach John Edrich, looking for Malcolm, asked "where's the black boy?"

The Hit Racism for Six campaign will raise the matter with cricket authorities, who continue to insist that racism is not a problem in the English game.

Jacko embraces Hitler fan

DURING A RECENT three day visit to Bombay, pop singer Michael Jackson performed at a gala charity event for a Shiv Sena front and publicly embraced Sena leader Bal Thackeray.

Shiv Sena is a Hindu-nationalist, virulently anti-Muslim, semi-fascist party that engineered the January 1993 Bombay riots in which police and goonda (political muscle men) attacked and killed Muslims in the streets and their homes. Thackeray is an open admirer of Hitler who publicly rejoiced when Hindu communalists tore down the Babri mosque in Ayodhya in December 1992.

Whacko Jacko - 'Bad', sad and now a dad - met twice with Thackeray and presented him with the black hat which he wore during his performance. Proceeds from his musical extravaganza will go to the Shiv Udyog Sena, a self-styled "employment agency" (i.e. conduit for kickbacks and corruption) run by Thackeray's nephew.

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1000 days in sanctuary

John Stewart from the Ogunwobi Family Campaign reports on the long struggle against an unjust deportation.

ON 8TH December, it will be 1000 days since Sunday Ogunwobi went into sanctuary in Downs Baptist Church, Hackney, to campaign against his family's deportation to Nigeria. Back in 1994, when the sanctuary began, no one had any idea it would last so long, that there would be a need for so much campaigning and that the Government would be so obstinate.

The Ogunwobi family has lived in Britain for many years. Sunday came as a student in 1981, his future wife, Bunmi, in 1984. They met and married in 1986. Their children Debbie, Tunde and Phoebe were all born and attended school here. They know no other way of life. In 1981, the Government passed a deportation order against the family and ordered its immediate removal to Nigeria.

The family discussed the situation with friends at the local church and decided not to accept this injustice but to challenge the decision by openly defying the order to leave. On 15th March, 1994, the day before the deportation order came into effect, Sunday Ogunwobi went into sanctuary at Downs Baptist Church in Hackney. Soon afterwards he was joined by his wife and children. They have been living at the church ever since.

Sanctuary is not hiding. The authorities have been kept informed of the family's whereabouts at all times. Sanctuary has no basis in law - its legality was removed by a 1623 act. At any time the family can be removed by Immigration and Nationality officers. However, sanctuary has always had a moral basis. Its essence lies not in legal argument about the sanctity of any church building, but in providing a moral challenge to the ability of any governmental power to persecute the powerless. The Downs Baptist Church sanctuary has provided the Ogunwobi family with a place of limited safety from where they can argue the justice of their case.



Jesse Jackson visits the Ogunwobi family at Downs Baptist Church, Hackney.

It has not been easy for the family. They live in two small rooms at the church. The pastor has given up his office so the family can have a sitting room and they sleep in a cold, dimly lit room previously used for storage. The children are collected by a family friend and taken to school. While the youngest, Phoebe, has spent most of her life at the church, the two older children find it hard to understand why they are forced to live this way.

A campaign has been formed to support the family. Local and national churches have offered tremendous support, encouragement and financial assistance. Individual members of the Labour Party and other political organisations have also been involved. The local council unanimously passed a resolution calling on the Government to allow the family to stay and Early Day Motions have been tabled by the family's MP, Diane Abbott, supported by more than one hundred MPs of all parties. International support has come from the World Council of Churches, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and the Reverend Jesse Jackson. Despite this and the possible effect on the children's health of moving to Nigeria, the Government seems to have set its face against any reprieve.

Downs Baptist Church has become a centre of activity, supporting not only the Ogunwobis but also others in Hackney facing deportation. When Sunday went into sanctuary in 1994 his was the only public anti-deportation campaign in the area. Now there are at least four others and there have been successful campaigns for Mircea Ilin and Rabi Islam. The Ogunwobi campaign is now the longest running sanctuary in modern British history.

In May 1995, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns held its founding conference at Downs Baptist Church, and last month the national launch of One World Week was held at the church. While the Ogunwobis have not yet won their struggle they remain an inspiration for others in similar circumstances.

Despite their hardships, the Ogunwobis remain in good spirits, with many good friends and a strong Christian faith. As the sanctuary passes its thousandth day, they remain convinced of the justice of their case and determined to continue their struggle. The Ogunwobi Family Campaign is holding a public meeting at Downs Baptist Church on Tuesday, 10th December, at 7:30pm. Speakers include Sunday Ogunwobi, Jeremy Corbyn MP and representatives of the Mircea Ilin Campaign and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns. ❑

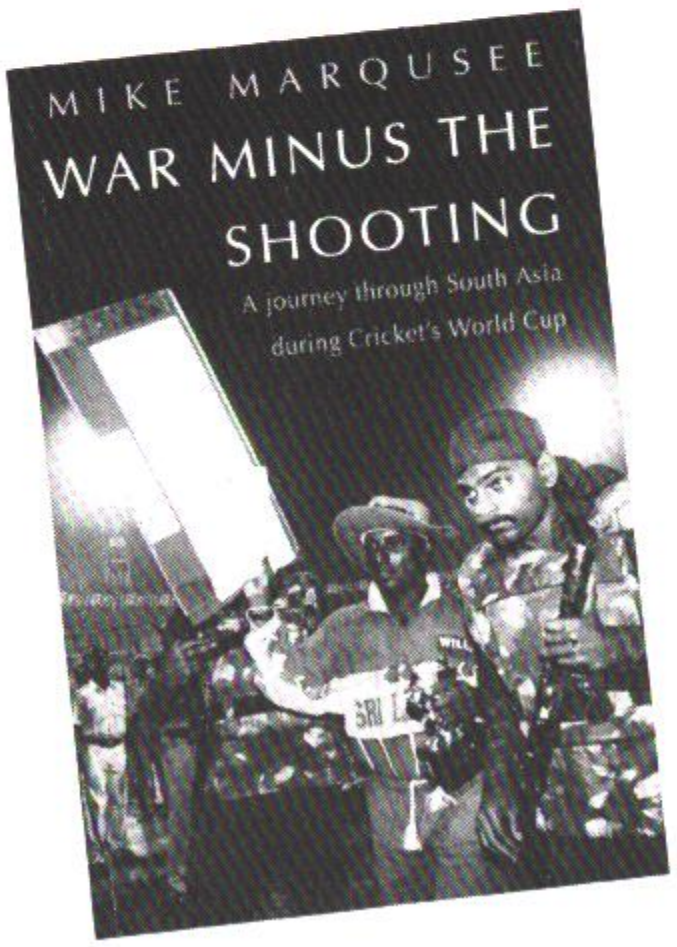
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David Pope reviews
War Minus The Shooting: A journey through South Asia during Cricket's World Cup
by Mike Marqusee (Heinemann, £12.99).

AN AMERICAN journalist once wrote a book about baseball entitled *How Life imitates the World Series*. Mike Marqusee's latest book might easily be called 'How The Noble Game of Cricket Imitates Life'. *War Minus The Shooting* is a detailed and illuminating account of three months the author spent in the Indian sub-continent following this year's cricket World Cup. It shows how the global economy affects the Indian sub-continent and this most traditional of sports.



The influences of corporate sponsorship, publicity-conscious politicians and the jingoistic media pervaded the tournament. There were additional strains caused by hostilities between India and Pakistan on the Kashmir frontier and a bomb planted by the Tamil Tigers in Colombo. The author covers these matters in detail. He explores the subject of racism and contrasts the attempts by the South African team to ingratiate themselves with fans, with the refusal by Australia to play in Colombo and the siege mentality of the hapless English. He stresses that the majority of fans were well-behaved and appreciative of good play by anyone. The 'riot' after India's defeat in the semi-final was quite mild compared to the usual goings-on at West Ham and prompted largely by the 'win at all costs' attitude of the media.

The book contains vivid descriptions of several matches, particularly the tense and eagerly-awaited encounter between India and Pakistan. I enjoyed especially the author's account of Kenya's humbling of the once invincible West Indies.

War Minus The Shooting offers a number of fascinating anecdotes about the history of cricket in South Asia. I was staggered to learn that for the first half of this century, teams representing the different ethnic groups in India met in an annual tournament in front of large crowds. Only partition brought it to an end. The book is not without blemishes. It lacks photographs and I hereby volunteer for the job of photographer when Mike next covers a World Cup or overseas tour. More serious is the author's occasional failure to explain who individuals are and his use of words such as "kvetching" (just after he resorts to a dictionary when described as a "wowser").

However, these are minor imperfections. This book is an effervescent celebration of the noble game and I recommend it wholeheartedly to fans, the curious and anyone interested in a portrait of South Asia.

Labour's double dealers

Mike Phipps reviews Forces of Labour, *by Andy McSmith, published by Verso.*

ANDY McSMITH, *Observer* journalist and former Press Officer of the Labour Party, is no friend of the left. *LLB* once called him 'one of the most gullible journalists in Westminster,' a remark he laughs off in the book.

All sorts of interesting information emerges in these half dozen sketches of some of Labour's key players. Did you know that Jack Cunningham as Shadow Employment spokes-person during the ratecapping battles of 1985, privately tipped off Environment minister Kenneth Baker that the Labour leadership would not back any council defying the law?

Throughout the book, there emerges a picture of media manipulation, off the record press briefings by the leadership against ambitious rivals, and petty score-settling. McSmith writes of the huge influence wielded by the shadowy and unaccountable Charles Clarke and Patricia Hewitt in the Kinnock era - although only *LLB* covered this at the time, when it mattered. Less documented is how the Kinnock-Smith rivalry led to media briefings against Brown and how the intense personal differences spilled into public view. While ordinary Party members were working to get Labour elected, our leaders were using the national Tory press to pursue their personal intrigues.

Even the 'upright' John Smith was not averse to dealing out abuse in the intensive wheeler-dealing of bagging block votes. When MSF leader Roger Lyons visited Smith to report he had failed to win over his union delegation to cut the block vote, Smith told him to go back and 'fucking well try again'. Lyons finally 'persuaded' the MSF delegation to abstain.

Now with Blair in charge, back come Peter Mandelson, Alistair Campbell and many of the other self-seekers who came to prominence under Kinnock. Alongside them in the inner circle are Derek Scott, Social Democratic candidate in Swindon in 1983, Roger Liddle, SDP candidate in Fulham in 1986 and other ex-defectors. Blair is of course much more forgiving of these individuals than the Labour loyalists on whom he heaps the blame for its years of opposition.

An odd book, then, with some pretty sour passages. Why, for example, the author chooses to dissipate his considerable abilities in a 30-page sneer at former Militant leader Ted Grant is something only he can explain.

Travellers' rights

TRAVELLERS ARE being denied their human rights, concludes a new survey of council provision for travellers in London.

The report from the London Irish Women's Centre followed a survey in 1994 of 22 councils in London. It examines the position of travellers in an historical and political context and highlights the lack of council provision or even awareness on the issue. It makes over 30 recommendations, calling for drastic action to tackle the discrimination travellers face.

- ***Rights For Travellers*** **is available, price £2, from the London Womens' Irish Centre, 59 Stoke Newington Church Street, London N16 0AR.**

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The price of a cigar

Ted Johns reviews The Price of a Cigar, *by Peter Wood, published by Anchor Books at £9.95 (£4.50 to members of the labour movement).*

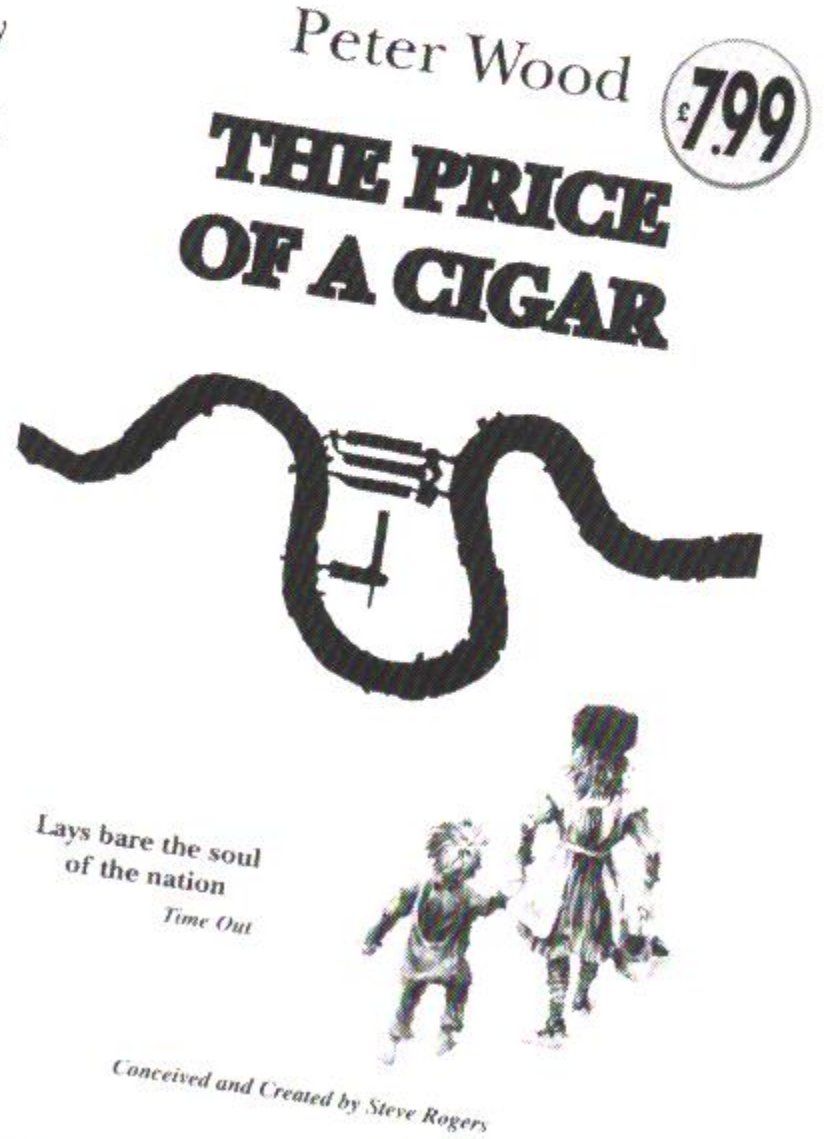
"GRANDAD," I recall asking Granddad Tom Murphy rather ingenuously on my seventh birthday, "When you won your Tanner Strike, did you save one to give to me on my birthday?"

I don't remember now if I got the sixpence - probably not, because sixpence was as hard to come by in the depression years of the thirties as it had been in 1889.

Three doors down from our house lived my other Granddad, Ted Johns, who, with Tom Murphy and thousands of other east Londoners, had stood and fought the Great Dock Strike - and had won the now famous "Dockers Tanner" - throughout the summer of 1889.

I was brought up on stories of the strike. It was woven into the fabric of my family's history. Ted Johns, a staunch socialist in the Socialist Federation (he was still a member of the ILP when he died in 1948) and Tom Murphy, who was very heavily involved in the formation of the Dock Labourers Union, would tell me and my brothers tales about the meetings, the lobbying of other workers to join the strike, and the satisfaction they clearly still felt forty odd years after the event when the workers came out: Pickfords carmen, Singer Sewing Machine works, Fry's Chocolate, Gaslight and Coke Company, London and South-Western Railways and many others (how quickly the more organised labour unions - indeed the Labour Party itself! - chose to ignore the lessons of these events a hundred years later, during the miners' strike).

So it was with some scepticism and a conscious intention to pick holes in the book that I started to read *The Price of a Cigar*. Here, I thought, was a kind of yuppified version of the strike, which would do little justice to the cause that my immediate family and many of my neighbours' families had been involved in and which would, at best, seek to romanticise the event out of all recognition. How wrong I was!



Peter Wood has produced a truly magnificent book. Painstakingly researched and well documented, in *The Price of a Cigar* he has cleverly woven into the historical events a novel about the effects the strike had on the ordinary working-class community of that time, which gives the book real warmth and substance.

To anyone who is interested in the history of trade unionism and the labour movement: read this book!

To anyone who thinks that the struggle is over: read this book!

To those who believe the way forward for Labour is to seek to break the links with the trade unions: read this book!

To anyone who is looking for a damn fine read or a special present for Christmas: get this book!

I had occasion to meet Peter Wood on the Isle of Dogs recently and I shook his hand, not just to congratulate him for *The Price of a Cigar*, but on behalf of Ted Johns Sr, Tom Murphy, and the thousands of otherwise anonymous eastenders whose story Peter Wood has told so graphically and movingly in his book. ❑

Isolating apartheid

Mike Phipps reviews Sing the Beloved Country *by Peter Hain, published by Pluto, £12.99 paperback.*

THIS BOOK'S CLAIM to tell the story of the liberation struggle in South Africa is greatly over-inflated: there are many vital omissions and the trade unions, for example, hardly get a mention. But as a personal account of Peter Hain's own involvement in that process, it is a lot more interesting.

Hain's childhood in South Africa was especially unusual. As a result of her political activities, his mother Adelaine was a banned person, forbidden to associate with more than one person at a time. At parties she'd have to sit in the kitchen and be visited by guests individually. The house was under constant surveillance and the young Hain found himself deputising for his parents at political events. Police raids on the family home were frequent. One officer discovered a list of names which constituted Hain's fantasy World Cricket XI, and was convinced he'd stumbled on a coded list!

In Britain, Hain became prominent as the organiser of campaigns to break sporting links with apartheid South Africa. The Stop the Seventy (Cricket) Tour was one of the few protest groups to completely achieve its objectives, and the account of this is well worth reading. For the first time South African cricketers began to condemn apartheid, although the impact went far beyond sport. Capital investment in South Africa began to fall and consumer boycotts became a new tactic in isolating the regime.

Hain received a letter bomb for his trouble and faced harassment from the British authorities, including being charged with conspiracy and more absurdly bank robbery. His book throws an interesting light on these events but is pretty unreliable as a more general history of the struggle.

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science

The world's first picket line?

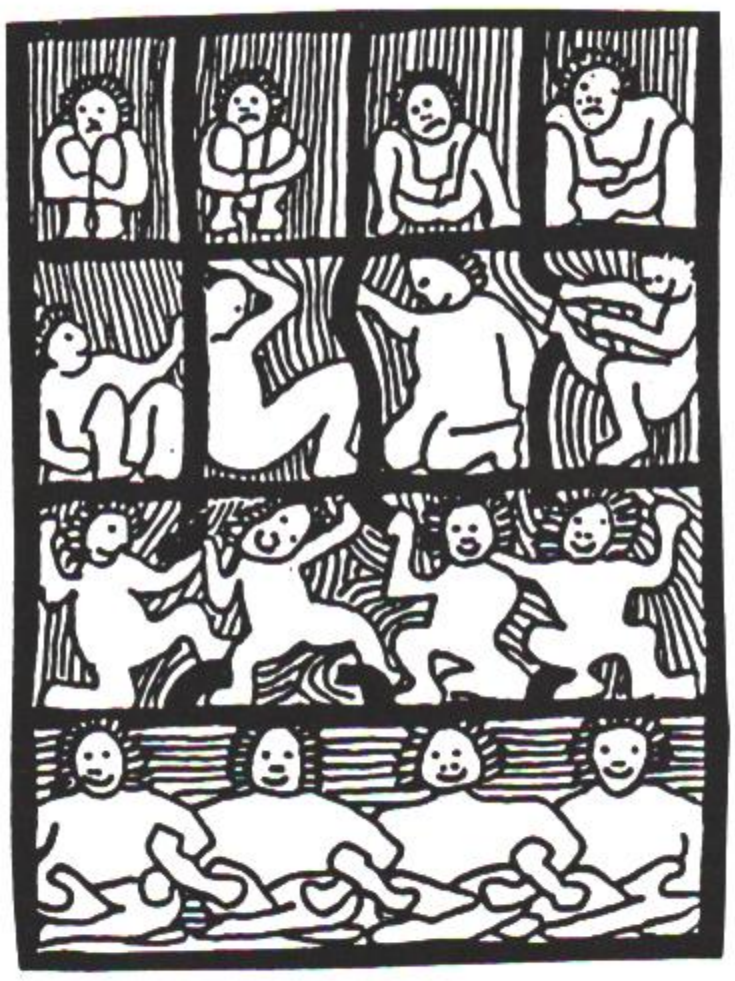
Our science correspondent Dr. Chris Knight discusses the role of women in establishing sexual morality.

THE "sex strike" theory of human origins is becoming well-known. Developed by myself at East London University and by Camilla Power and Ian Watts at University College London, it is being widely debated and tested by specialists in human evolution. The Theoretical Archaeology Group is split over it. In Chicago in June, we gained strong backing at a crucial meeting of the Human Behaviour and Evolution Society, the main international organisation of modern Darwinism. A spate of books and articles is now beginning to appear, reflecting the theory's impact. Immense intellectual changes are under way, amounting, I think, to a scientific revolution in this field. Politics cannot explain this success.

Denounced by the academic left, our main backers are in fact "selfish gene" Darwinians who translate everything into the language of "costs and benefits", "investments", "trade-offs" and strategies for "profit-maximising". Theirs is the language of free-market capitalism - and it works. They wouldn't consider solidarity and strike action as factors in human evolution unless forced to by the logic of the case.

So what is our theory? It sets out to explain the establishment of moral rules concerning sex. Accepting Darwinian premises, we may treat the male, on a biological level, as the "leisured sex". His best strategy for immortalising his genes is to get someone pregnant, leaving her with all the baby-producing work. Then, without wasting time, he should impregnate yet another female. In the case of human evolution, as brains were growing larger and babies becoming burdensome, the childcare work left to females was increasing. To make ends meet, mothers had no choice but to resist a dynamic in which males were left unburdened and free to philander. This resistance lasted some 400,000 years, culminating eventually in revolutionary change.

At that point, human language and culture were born. How then did female strategies succeed in changing male behaviour? First came concealment of ovulation combined with continuous sexual receptivity. Deprived of the vital time-saving information, males were now forced to stay with their partners in order to get them pregnant. But with ovulation concealed, menstruation became especially salient as a signal. Indicating imminent fertility, menstruants now attracted special male attention. To non-menstruating local females - those already pregnant or breast-feeding - this posed a



threat. How could they prevent their mates from abandoning them in favour of such evidently impregnateable rivals?

There was a solution. Whenever someone began menstruating, the others had to prevent her from being "privatised" by some dominant male. Sisters and more distant kin rallied round her, bonding with her and presenting a united front, even to the point of sharing the basic signal. If anyone was bleeding, all had to "bleed" together, even if it meant "painting up" with animal blood, red ochre or other cosmetics. The final step was to use the accumulated solidarity not only to attract males, but - whenever meat supplies were low - to send them away periodically. To this end, the sisters would stage a menstrual ritual, signalling "no sex" for a while. To defend themselves against possible harassment, sons and brothers were drawn in. Only when the hunt had proved successful would the "sex strike" be called off. The human revolution was consummated when such performances were staged on a monthly basis, each menstrual ritual beginning at dark moon and ending with a communal feast at full moon. In this way, with women in possession of their bodies, sexual morality was established, laying the basis for the rest of culture, including language.

Archaeological evidence for the mining of red ochre and the manufacture of cosmetics suggests a time and place for this event: sub-Saharan Africa some 130,000 years ago. But what other theories are there? How do our "selfish gene" Darwinian colleagues think language and culture emerged? In fact, they freely admit to being puzzled. Assumptions about free competition just don't seem to work. They are turning to our theory because it speaks their own "industrial relations" language, it's the only theory currently on offer, and its predictions seem to be borne out.

What scientists most require of a model is testability. We can offer this. If our theory was correct, we wouldn't expect a hunter-gatherer culture anywhere in the world where marital sex was thought good for hunting luck. We'd expect pre-hunt ritual celibacy. Likewise, menstruation should be a focus of immense ritual attention and linked, symbolically, to the blood of animals. We might expect the earliest archaeological evidence for "art" to consist of red colouring materials for use in body-painting. Cave art should celebrate the ritual potency of women and associated game animals rather than, say, marital or family life. Religions should focus on shared blood as the basic symbol of communion with things sacred. Such detailed predictions render us vulnerable to falsification. We could, in principle, be proved wrong. Very possibly we are wrong. But it is this testability which distinguishes science from political ideology.

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CORRESPONDENCE

Your letters are welcome but please keep them under 250 words. Please send a PC floppy if possible.

Write to:

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I enjoyed hearing Alan Simpson at the Campaign Group Rally in Blackpool. I found his analysis fresh and positive. He is always looking for the positive and suggests clear strategies (to my way of thinking anyway) about how we can actually move our agenda forward and persuade people in practical terms why they should be supporting it. I guess I sound anything other than idealistic with this view, and probably would prefer to be using more forceful arguments in getting our points across. Unfortunately although my principles have remained unaltered my approach has changed, which until hearing the likes of Alan and Cathy Jamieson (who wrote in last month's *LLB*), I felt maybe I'd lost the plot and become a sheep of the leadership. I guess that's what being Deputy Leader of a council in the South East (Tendring District Council) does to you. Anyway its good to know that we are looking at a strategy for the left and not simply putting up with speaking out against what's been going on during recent times. That's not enough for me, I prefer action to words, which is why I decided to sacrifice myself on the altar of local government in the first place.

Darren Barrenger,
Brightlingsea

The OMOV reforms in the Labour Party are irreversible. The clock can't be turned back to the somewhat imperfect participatory democracy that characterised traditional Labourism. OMOV does make it more difficult, but it does not prevent the left from successfully campaigning for votes.

If we are to influence or transform New Labourism in the future, the socialist left needs to prioritise Party democracy. Democratic campaigns should centre on two key objectives.

First, when Party organs (e.g. the NEC) are elected by OMOV, a proportional voting system should be used. Not only is it intrinsically more democratic, but it is more important that socialists be actually represented and involved in Party organs than to think that there will be some magic day when we will sweep the board and the Party will be ours.

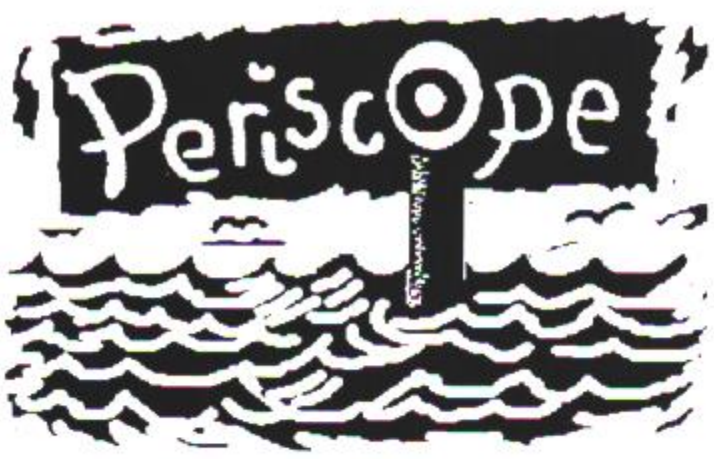
Second, we must challenge the pernicious practice by which the leadership abrogates democracy through politically motivated expulsions, CLP suspensions and candidate non-endorsements (e.g. Liz Davies). We should campaign for the NEC and other such committees with exclusionary powers, to be proportionally representative and to have the power of disciplinary exclusion only if 5/6 of the committee concurs, the minimum proportion of a jury needed to convict in an English criminal trial.

We need to take the buzz words of democratisation and modernisation from Blair and give them some reality.

Peter Bowing,
Hungary

Sue Lukes's review of Liz Davies's pamphlet (November LLB) angered me with its lofty style. Who the hell are Wolf and Paglia? Middle-class educated women have a duty to impart their knowledge in a way we can all understand. Terms like post-feminism mean little to most ordinary women. (Me, I'm still trying to cope with post-modernism!)

Linda Clarke,
Wood Green



'Dodgy' Disney

A Virginia Based anti-abortion organisation the **American Life League** has called for videos of the Lion King to be withdrawn. League spokesperson Rodney Miller said that a four year old boy had seen the letters 'S-E-X' take form one after another in a cloud of dust raised by Simba the Lion when he jumps off a cliff. The observation was reported to the League by the boy's aunt. 'It's kind of iffy' said Miller ' some people see a cloud, kind of wavy lines. It's hard to see even if you slow it down'. The Life League also alleges that there are risque scenes in two other Disney cartoons. In Aladdin there is an audible message: 'good teenagers take off your clothes' and in the Little Mermaid a man at a wedding becomes visibly sexually aroused. And there were we thinking that old Uncle Walt was just your typical right-wing union busting scumbag.

Accident in the making?

News reaches us that Labour Parliamentary Candidate (and former LCC chief) **Paul Richards** - fortunately the candidate for unwinnable Billericay rather than marginal Basildon, as reported in a previous *LLB* - is to carry out a 10,000 ft parachute jump. Let's hope there are no socialists packing the 'chutes that day, Paul!

EU trades 'fraudulently'

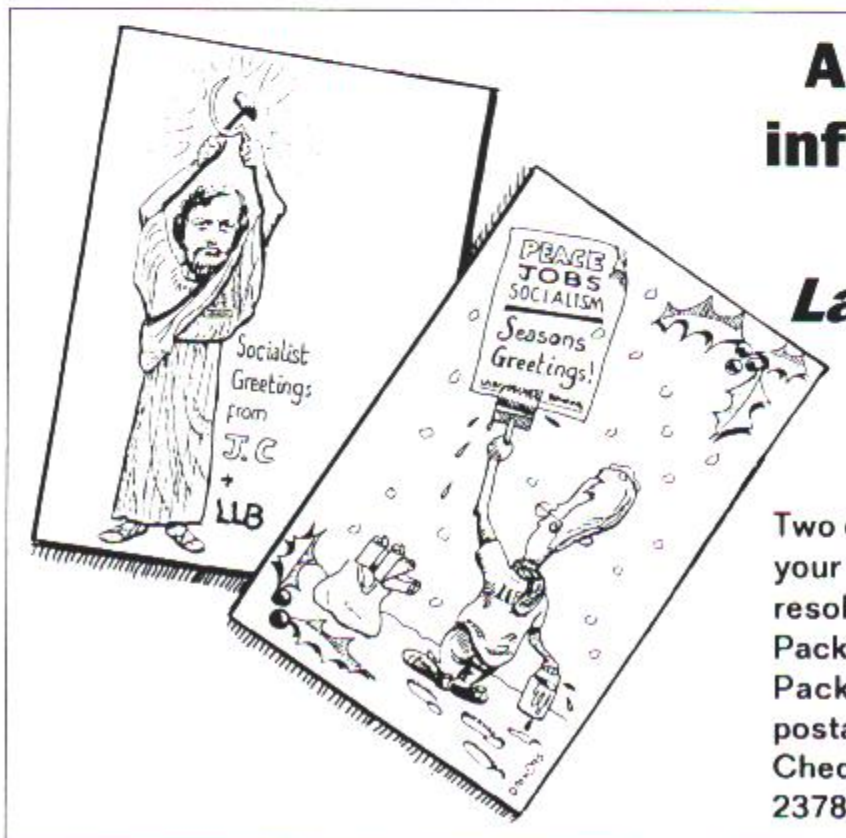
The **European Court of Auditors** is to announce that it cannot certify the legality and regularity of the European Union's payments - because it has found so many discrepancies. The dodgy olive groves and non-existent herds of cattle have been joined by the disappearance of £3 million - designated to help governments combat farm fraud. Where else could you go on spending £55 billion a year when your auditors have rejected your books?

Blood Ties

Gordon Brown told the *Sunday Times* that "business is in my blood" and cited his mother's experience as a company director.

His mother was none too pleased. "I would have hardly called myself a businesswomen." And his father added, charitably, "I think he was trying to show he was not just an academic."

It is rumoured that the Brown family were visited by New Labour's rapid rebuttal team in the dead of night. No casualties were reported - except the truth.



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A Christmas story

Keith Veness, Islington North CLP, dispels the myths of Christmas.

ARE YOU sick of the bible thumping of shadow cabinet members spouting about their newly-proclaimed belief in God? As one wag put it, Jack Straw believes it was not the money changers who were driven out of the temple, but a group of squeegee bandits offering to wash Jesus' chariot! As we approach the festive season, we can expect priests, pundits and politicians to drone on about 'discovering the true meaning of Christmas'.

In fact, the whole festival has been hijacked by 'Christians'. The Jewish resistance leader Jesus was certainly not born on 25th December in the year zero. Due to counting errors by early Church fathers, the now agreed date was most probably 4th October in either 6 or 7 BC of our current calendar. 'Jesus' is a Greek rendition of the name 'Yeshua' (Joshua), so the man in question would have been named 'Yeshua ben Yoseph'- Joshua, son of Joseph. His mother would have been 'Mariam', the Hebrew equivalent of 'Mary'. Nor is a virgin birth quite the miracle it's cracked up to be. The word 'virgin' was routinely applied to young women who had not menstruated before conceiving - unusual but hardly miraculous given that girls often married at 11 or 12 years of age.

There are many much larger faults in the Biblical story. The classic texts read out by generations of school kids at ghastly nativity plays about 'the whole world being taxed' are chronological rubbish. King Herod had passed away at least six years before. Tiberius was Emperor of Rome, there was no 'poll tax' and certainly no need for Joseph to return to his town. In any event, a Roman census would not then have applied to the self-governing protectorate of Palestine. The whole scenario is a later invention to fulfil an Old Testament prophecy! The 'Three Kings' are not even mentioned in the Bible - 'wise men from the East' is the exact phrase. The actual word would have been 'Magi', the priests of the Zoroastrian religion based in Persia and Kurdistan, but widely respected throughout the Middle East and almost certainly the source of the Jews' belief in one God.

The biblical 'Jesus' was not born in Bethlehem and 'Nazareth' is a misrendering of 'Nazarene', someone zealous for the Jewish law. The modern day Nazareth was not established by Christian Arabs until the fourth century AD, a post-hoc justification.

Lastly, the whole chronicle was actually invented by the fertile mind of Saul of Tarsus, then involved in a power struggle for the early Church with the brother of Jesus, James 'the Trust'. Needing a gimmick to out-organise his more orthodox opponent, the old holy birth-death-rebirth story was wheeled out. Hardly original (Osiris, Dyonysius, Mithras and other Middle East deities already had similar credits), it nevertheless enabled Paul to set up his own gentile church separate from the Jewish Christians.



Since then, the Church evolved into a force intertwined with state power, first in Rome, then Byzantium and eventually most of Europe. Ruthless in exterminating all religious opponents - including other varieties of early Christianity, like Arianism and monophysitism - it created a dour and repressive culture that frowned on any enjoyment that was independent of Church and state - particularly any with sexual overtones.

As a result, the old traditions of seasonal celebrations of a pagan or secular character survived amongst common folk throughout Europe and the Middle East. In the lands with warm summers and cold winters, the most popular celebrations centred on the Spring Equinox, when days became longer than nights. This still survives as the great Kurdish festival of 'Newroz' or New Day. In colder climes, spring came later and May Day was a more common date for celebration. However, in Northern Europe, the real 'big bash' of the calendar was the Winter Solstice (around the end of December) when the longest night was passed and hope was reborn.

The last beasts were slaughtered, making it a blood festival - 'Gule Fest' in old Norse, hence Yule Tide. Unable to suppress this, the Church had no choice but to co-opt it. Even more bizarre, the early Christian saint, St Nicholas of Patera (in modern day Turkey) was transformed into 'Santa Claus', then merged with the old Slavic and Norse 'Frost Giant' to become the ridiculous chubby elf with air borne reindeer - our very own Father Christmas! So December 25th is not a Christian festival and is the property of pagans, atheists and other decent people. Let's complete the process of the last century by pushing all the religious claptrap out of it and having a proper people's festival.

Give presents, send cards, go to football matches and over-consume food and drink - just don't let anyone kid you it belongs to the bible thumping minority - let them have a day off on the 4th October (JC's real birthday) if they must!

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