LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

February 1996 price £1 (conc.50p)

inside...

- Socialist Labour Party
- No queer soldiers
- Sierra Leone
- Blair babe's sleaze
- Deaths in custody

Asylum rights in tatters

Demonstration Against The Asylum & Immigration Bill

24th February – assemble 11am Embankment, march to Trafalgar Square

Labour Left Briefing...

...are happy to offer a right of reply to all members of the labour movement and we welcome criticisms and contributions. All the articles in *LLB* reflect solely the opinions of the authors, writing in a personal capacity, unless otherwise stated.

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Contact LLB at PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU. Telephone: 0181-985-6597; Fax: 0181-985-6785. Email via: leelloyd@gn.apc.org.

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Front cover DROS. Photos David Hoffman and Colin Hayward

● Last summer *New Left* and *Labour Briefing* joined together to launch *Labour Left Briefing*. We, along with many on the left, saw this as an important step forward in the cause of non-sectarian left unity.

At the time *New Left* which we supported ran an editorial stating "there is no good reason why the broad Labour and trade union left, including the socialists grouped around the journals, *Labour Briefing*, *Socialist Outlook*, *Campaign Group News* and *Tribune* should not combine to produce one paper."

The majority of *New Left* supporters have now decided to leave *LLB* and we believe are turning their backs on the sentiments which launched *New Left*. We are still very much in favour of trying to build a united left Labour and trade union journal. It is for these reasons that we have decided to stay and help build *Labour Left Briefing*.

Sarah Cotterill, Chris Croome, Tony Dale, Fiona Monkman.

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What's at stake

TONY BLAIR'S embrace of the "stake-holding economy" has exposed as never before the embarrassing intellectual flimsiness of New Labour. Unable to answer any of the pertinent questions about how it will deal with the challenges facing it in government, the Party leadership has sought refuge in a feelgood rhetoric which gets the Party no further in its increasingly urgent task: consolidating a meaningful programme of action for government.

The ambiguity of the new buzzword was demonstrated by the variety of people who rushed to the media to interpret it. The Tories denounced it as a return to corporatism, union power and red-blooded state socialism. The *Guardian*'s Will Hutton denied it was anything like that, but hoped very much that it really was something like the "radical" recipe for change outlined in his best-selling book, *The State We're In*. The *Daily Telegraph* praised it as "Thatcherite". John Edmonds of the GMB saw it as a charter for sweeping legislation on rights at work.

Our leaders were quick to reassure the CBI and the City that Edmonds was all wrong about stake-holding. The front bench went on to the offensive - making it clear that Labour had no plans for any changes in company law and certainly no intention of unshackling the unions.



Stake-holding, it turns out, is not about workers' power or even workers' individual rights - it's about "social cohesion", about a matching of "rights and responsibilities". It is not an accident that Blair chose to unveil his "Big Idea" in Singapore, an authoritarian capitalist statelet which marries social conformism to the free play of global market forces.

The logic of Blair's version of the stake-holder economy seems perilously indistinguishable from that of Thatcher's popular capitalism and the Tories' venerable property-owning democracy. The emphasis is strictly on the individual. The collective is ruled out, and with it any practical counter-weight to the power of capital.

Are the stakes to be held in Blair's brave new world to be equal? Or will a few continue to hold greater stakes than all the rest combined? What form will these stakes take to ensure that their individual holders exercise meaningful decision-making power?

The irony is that there is one realistic means of giving everyone an equal stake in society - and that is common ownership, the very prescription that Tony Blair expunged from Labour's constitution last spring.

Rail against short-termism all you like, but "exhortation" (Alastair Darling's bold new strategy to tame finance capital) won't make a dent in it. Far from facing up to the new "globalised" economy, as Blair claims, his stake-holder philosophy offers no response to its searing inequalities and insecurities or to the huge challenge it poses to democratic power of any kind. Stake-holding in the world according to GATT and Maastricht will be nothing but a means of enforcing workers' obedience to a social contract which employers can flout at will. We have repeatedly warned that a Labour Government that fails to address the urgent requirements of those who have suffered most under Tory rule will end in tears - and the return of a right-wing Tory regime. So a great deal is at stake in the debate about the stake-holding economy, and in the frustrating but still essential struggle within the Labour Party.

WE REGRET TO announce the departure from our Editorial Board (EB) of supporters of *New Left*. When we relaunched our magazine as *Labour Left Briefing* in October, we did so because we believed the Labour left needed a broader, non-sectarian, readable publication. Nothing that has happened has changed that belief, or our commitment to putting it into practice.

Supporters of *New Left* had argued for equal space to present their minority position on Ireland. This was rejected by the EB which offered coverage that reflected *New Left*'s numerical weight on the EB. *New Left* then withdrew from their political, financial and administrative responsibilities in producing the December 1995 edition and subsequently left the EB.

Despite this disappointment, we remain committed to broadening *LLB* and to using our pages to promote both open debate and unity in action across the whole spectrum of the Labour left. We will continue to develop the magazine's pluralism and political independence. We welcome contributions from individuals from all sections of the Labour left. Readers can rest assured that we enter the New Year determined to carry out our pledge to inform, stimulate, entertain, amuse, enrage and involve them.



FIGHT TO DEFEND

Sue Jones gives a round-up of changes to the law and regulations now in the pipeline.

The benefit changes, which were announced by Peter Lilley last October and are due to take effect this month, include:

• the denial of basic benefits (Income Support, Housing Benefit, Council Tax Benefit) to refugees who are appealing against Home Office refusal to allow them to stay. Often they will be left with no source of income as, in many cases, they are not allowed to work for six months after arrival. People who have come to the UK sponsored by relatives who have signed an undertaking to support them will not be allowed to claim any benefits for five years, whatever happens to their sponsor, unless s/he dies.

• the refusal of basic benefits to any refugee who claims asylum after entering. At present, 70% of refugees do this, 80% of them applying within a week of arrival. Nowadays, people from most of the countries with bad human rights records need visas to even get on a plane to the UK.

• benefit cuts which will apply across the board: for those with children, the disabled, the elderly. Appeals will not be allowed.

• the denial of disability benefits to people with disabilities who are not residents or British citizens. For example, even if someone qualifies for attendance allowance because they are so severely disabled they cannot look after themselves, they will not receive it unless they can pass the immigration test.

All these cuts were examined by the Government's own Social Security Advisory Committee, which recommended that not one of them should proceed. Peter Lilley has ignored this advice, just delaying introduction for one month.

At least 36,000 people a year, including many families with children, will lose benefit and probably become homeless as a result of these attacks. Denying refugees their internationally recognised right to safety has been widely condemned.

The Asylum and Immigration Bill is now being debated in a House of Commons Committee. Doug Henderson MP heads the Labour Party team on it. If passed it is likely to come into effect in the summer of 1996.

Peter Lilley's climb-down on some of the benefit cuts aimed at asylum seekers is welcome news, but people will still lose entitlements when their applications are refused, and will be thrown penniless on to the streets.

Strictly speaking it's "if" they are refused, not "when", but the Asylum Bill is designed to ensure that fewer and fewer get refugee status.

There is a wider agenda. The clauses of the bill which deprive refugees of rights to public housing and child benefit allow ministers to define exactly who is affected, and could be used to target anyone who has required permission to stay in the UK. This could be used in the future to withdraw rights from many immigrants, not just those who arrived as refugees.

We have to take a moral stand on asylum, a task made obvious by the cynicism of a Government which blatantly places more importance on trade deals with Saudi Arabia than on human rights. We have to show how this bill attacks all ethnic minorities in the UK, and is designed to use race as an electoral weapon.

- Neil Gerrard MP.

The bill contains:

• powers for the Home Secretary to decide that there is no serious risk of persecution in some countries. As a result, most asylum claims from them will be refused. The current list includes Poland (from which many Roma/gypsies have had to flee because of racial attacks), Bulgaria and Romania (which deny rights to some ethnic minorities), India (from which Sikhs fighting for autonomy escape) and Ghana (which has a record of persecuting political opponents).

• the extension of the "fast-track" appeals procedure, which gives applicants only two days to prepare their cases, to new groups of refugees who have been refused asylum.

• the removal of the right of refugees to appeal from inside the UK if the Home Office believes that they should have applied for asylum elsewhere (the "safe third country" currently being used in the al-Mas'ari case).

• three new criminal offences: entering the UK by deception, which will criminalise refugees whose asylum applications fail; "assisting asylum seekers to seek entry to the UK"; and assisting refugees to seek permission to stay here knowing that they are not entitled to do so. There is an exemption for "bona fide" organisations which assist refugees but no indication who decides which organisations are "bona fide".

• further powers for immigration officers to search premises and make arrests without warrants.

• an obligation for employers to check the immigration status of their employees. This is likely to lead to increased discrimination against all immigrants and ethnic minorities.

• power for the Government to remove the right of "certain classes of immigrants" to go on council waiting lists and to get help if homeless.

The Government has also said that it will seek to reduce entitlement to other local authority services, and to involve more council workers in immigration checks. The Housing Bill due out soon is likely to contain measures on this. ❑

Concert for Asylum Aid

Saturday, 17th February
7:30-11:30

Camden Centre, Euston Rd
Muhamed
Mustafa el-Sunni
El Neel band
and others

£10 in advance, £12 on the door
(0171) 359-4026

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ASYLUM RIGHTS!



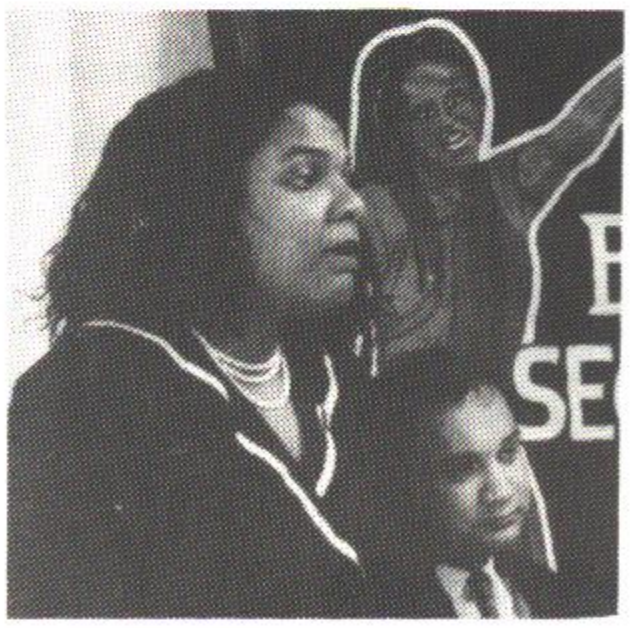
"Economic refugees"?

Solange Valdez of the Latin American Women's Rights Service tells what it's really like to be a refugee.

I HAVE BEEN advising Latin American women and their families in the UK for the past four years. It is a pity that the British Government portrays asylum seekers as threats and burdens. Many asylum seekers are skilful people who will enrich British culture and society with their knowledge, skills and creativity.

The latest narrow-minded epithets commonly used by the Government to describe refugees include phrases like "economic refugees" and "illegal immigrants", and adjectives like "bogus". Are these terms justifiable? According to many newspapers, who describe how "immigrants" come to the UK to live in luxury, they are. These stories are followed by the Government's development of more "effective", "realistic" and "radical" policies to protect British citizens from the "scroungers".

Those who have been on income support know that £46.50 per week does not even meet basic needs. Asylum seekers receive £41.65 (10% less). Most of them will be lucky to have their income support processed after four weeks. The Department of Social Security treats them like animals, openly discriminating against them, asking them to bring interpreters if they want anything, frequently losing their income support claims, stopping their benefits on the slightest pretext and re-instating them only after being pressured by community organisations.



"Jack Straw has committed a Labour Government to repeal of this legislation. This is critical. Labour must not equivocate on racism. Immediately, however, the aim is to stop Howard's Bill becoming law."
- Diane Abbott MP, chair of the Campaign against the Asylum and Immigration Bill.

Eighty percent of refugees are women and children. It is therefore logical to assume that they will be the most affected by the benefit cuts this month. Most of these women and children have already survived sexual, physical and psychological abuse. Is the Government now welcoming them by making it necessary for them to sleep on the streets, beg for food and run the risk of sexual, psychological and physical abuse yet again?

The Government should cease using ethnic minorities as political tools. They are creating problems, not solutions. Community agencies and those who still believe that humanitarian issues are paramount will fight back until the voices and needs of ethnic minorities are heard and taken into consideration. ❑

Amnesty for refugees

Mike Rahman (chair of the National Union of Refugee Organisations and a refugee from Guyana) reports.

THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY has failed miserably in its attempt to use immigration as a vote winner. The pending importation of Mohammed al-Mus'ari has totally exposed their arguments for implementing new immigration controls on top of 1993 laws.

Kenneth Clarke, the then Home Secretary, said that the 1993 act was aimed at "closing all the loopholes". Why then do we need a new set of laws? The present Home Secretary, Michael Howard, complains that more than 80% of asylum seekers are bogus.

Howard accepts that Dr al-Mus'ari is a genuine refugee. But he declares that the rights of political refugees must be weighed against British economic interests.

In this case, and in numerous others, this Government has flagrantly violated the UN convention, which establishes the right of political asylum. Article 1 of the 1951 UN Convention defines a refugee as a person with "a well-founded fear of being persecuted...who is outside his or her country of origin and, due to a fear, is unwilling to return to it."

The vast majority of genuine asylum applicants are only being given Exceptional Leave to Remain. This means that they are only allowed to remain here for one year, on compassionate grounds, which may be extended to a longer period at the Home Secretary's discretion. The indications are that a large proportion of refugees have not had their stay extended and are forced to remain here illegally.

The immediate solution to the problem posed by the thousands of people who have no legal right to stay here is to offer them an amnesty. The campaign, Amnesty for Refugees and Unregistered Migrants, will not in any way compromise the call for the repeal of all racist immigration laws in the United Kingdom and the European Union.

Between January and May 1991 the largest numbers of applicants came from Zaire (3,129), Angola (2,581), Sri Lanka (2,128), Pakistan (1,545), Ghana (1,369), Uganda (1,081) and Turkey (990). Most of these countries have well-documented histories of civil war, repression, or widespread lack of civil and political rights.

The long-term answer is a collective effort by the whole of humanity to work out a global strategy of genuine democratic control of the world's economy, which will lead to full employment, cheap housing, free education and medical care for all. In that way, people will not be forced to leave their homelands looking for a safer and better life.

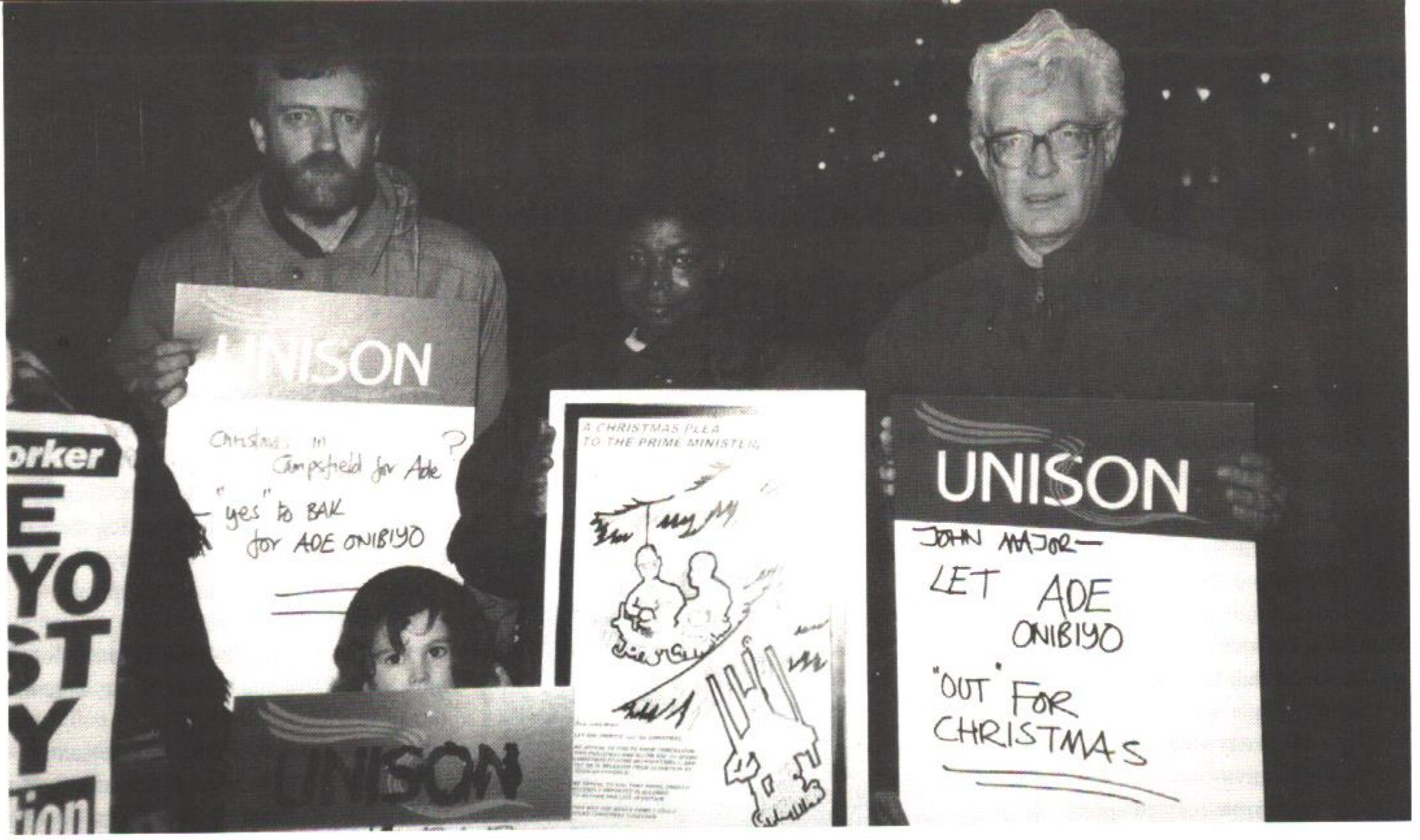


Photo: Ed Hall.

Onibiyo case decision awaited

By Ed Hall, Secretary, Onibiyo Family Anti-Deportation Campaign.

THE ONIBIYO Family Anti-Deportation Campaign were awaiting the outcome of a judicial review of the decision to deport 20-year old Ade Onibiyo to Nigeria as *LLB* went to press. The hearing, on Thursday 11th and Friday 12th January at the High Court, arose from the refusal of the Home Office to allow Ade a further appeal hearing following the deportation in October of his father, Unison member and supporter of democracy in Nigeria, Abdul Onibiyo, who has since disappeared. Abdul first moved to Britain in 1963 and has two British-born children. At the time of his deportation he was employed by Lambeth Council.

Campaigners, including Unison General Secretary, Rodney Bickerstaffe and Jeremy Corbyn, MP fear that Abdul, who was handed over to the Nigerian authorities, has been detained. These fears have been worsened by the unprecedented intervention of the Nigerian authorities, who took advertisements in six national daily newspapers to attack the Onibiyo family. Grant Ehiobache, Head of Information and Culture at the Nigerian High Commission in London went out of the way, in a recent statement to the *Caribbean Times*, to renew this attack on the family for 'denigrating their country and their people'.

Incredibly, the Home Office has argued - in the face of this public hostility from the pariah regime responsible for the judicial murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa - that Ade's claim for political asylum is mere 'posturing'.

Michael Howard and Ann Widdicombe are content that Ade should join his father in Nigeria, whatever the consequences. Ade's only hope is the continuing support of labour movement and community organisations.

Ade's mother Joyce is also under threat of immediate deportation and the Onibiyo Family Anti-Deportation Campaign are appealing for letters of protest to be sent to the Home Secretary, for donations and for letters of support.

Further details are available from the campaign c/o Lambeth Unison, 6a Acre Lane, London SW2 5SG.

Campaigns

● Campaign Against the Immigration and Asylum Bill, c/o CAPA, St Hilda's East Community Centre, 18 Club Row, London E2.
● Asylum Rights Campaign, c/o Michael Feeney, Social and Pastoral Action, Vaughan House, 46 Francis Street, London SW1P 1QN.
● Refugee Council, Bondway House, London SW8 1SJ.
● Labour Asylum Rights Campaign, 21 Lawers Road, Glasgow G43 1BX.
● National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 101 Villa Road, Birmingham, B19 1NH.
● The Stonewall Immigration Group, 19 Clerkenwell Close, London WC1.

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Brixton demands justice



Helen Shaw.

Deborah Coles and Helen Shaw from INQUEST look at the issues behind the disturbances in Brixton on 13th December, 1995 and the continuing scandal of deaths in custody.

WHAT TURNED a small, angry but peaceful demonstration against yet another death in police custody into a disturbance precipitating a short-lived media circus and comparisons with the 1981 uprising? State and police racism, police harassment, lack of accountability, lack of power and marginalisation of a whole layer of the community, poverty and unemployment. In a nutshell, a perception that there is no justice.

Figures on black deaths in custody since 1969

Between 1969 and 1991 there were 69 identified black deaths in custody. Of those 37 were in police custody. Since 1991 there have been a further 42 "identified" black deaths in custody of which 14 were in police custody. There have therefore been 51 identified black deaths in police custody since 1969.

("Identified" denotes the fact that the Home Office only monitor age and gender. Information on black deaths comes from cases referred to INQUEST and from the press. It is possible there have been more than indicated but due to the inadequacy of Home Office statistics it is impossible to tell.)

In 1981 the Scarman report helped create the 'independent' Police Complaints Authority (PCA) and won a commitment to regenerate Brixton.

In December 1995 there were a few liberal newspaper editorials demanding that the Government "create jobs to stop the riots" (*Independent*) and for the PCA to be replaced. There were interviews with activists and academics and exchanges in the letters pages. But the response from the Government and the Opposition was a predictable and bipartisan condemnation of the youth in Brixton and praise for the way the police handled the situation. With the exception of a few committed MPs, Labour played the law and order card with impunity, missing the clear opportunity to raise numerous concerns relating to deaths in custody.

In May 1995 Brian Douglas died after being assaulted during arrest by police armed with the new American style side-handled baton, a few hundred yards away from where Wayne Douglas (no relation) was allegedly beaten before his arrest. After Brian's death there were small, peaceful marches, articles written in the left and mainstream press, public and labour movement meetings, even a fringe meeting at Labour Party Conference.

What happened? Nothing. The 'independent' PCA completed its investigation and passed its report to the Crown Prosecution Service, which has yet to decide anything. Potentially an inquest jury could return a verdict of unlawful killing. But in the last 17 years there have been seven such verdicts. In only one case (Barry Prosser) have criminal charges subsequently been brought.

INQUEST has monitored such deaths since 1981. The number of people from minority groups who die following violent incidents involving the police is disproportionately high. The police remain unaccountable to the public for their actions and are seen by many as being above the law. The only public forum for examining such deaths is the inquest with its many procedural problems: its narrow remit, the lack of legal aid for the bereaved and the lack of prior disclosure of any documentation.

The PCA is not seen to be independent. Witnesses are interviewed by the police about police actions! The quality of the witness statements is often called into question: when solicitors call witnesses forward they usually say more.

At the inquest into the death of Richard O'Brien in Metropolitan Police custody in Walworth Road his family and their lawyers got the impression that the police officer responsible for the 'independent' inquiry was working with lawyers for the Commissioner and the Police Federation as a team. This flies in the face of any claim that this is a 'neutral' investigation.

Unlawful killing verdicts on deaths in custody:

• Winston Rose, black, 1981• Barry Prosser, white, 1979 (prison) • John Mikkelson, black, 1985 (quashed) • Oliver Pryce, black, 1991 • Omasase Lumumba, black, 1993 (prison) • Leon Patterson, black, 1994 (quashed new inquest to be held April 1996) • Richard O'Brien, Irish, 1995

All these deaths raise profound questions concerning racism, negligence and brutality within the police force, prisons, psychiatric and special hospitals and immigration detention centres. A disturbing number follow brutality and gross neglect. Our anger and frustration focus on the fact that there is no effective investigation of these deaths, lessons are not learnt and those responsible are not brought to justice.

For further details and information on how to join INQUEST contact Ground Floor, Alexandra National House, 330 Seven Sisters Road, London, N4 2PJ.

Between October and December last year six more black men died:

• Raja Khan, HMP The Mount, 5th October • Denis Stevens, HMP Dartmoor, 18th October • Brian Augustine, HMP Pentonville, 30th October • Kenneth Severin, HMP Belmarsh, 26th November
• Wayne Douglas, Brixton Police Station, 5th December • Alton Manning, HMP Blakenhurst, 9th December

Arthur's tragedy

Bryn Griffiths
Hackney N and Stoke Newington CLP

ARTHUR SCARGILL is the most courageous, political and militant trade union leader since the General strike. He perfected the mass picketing at Saltley Gate and played the major role in breaking Ted Heath's government. His election as NUM President coincided with the height of Bennism and inspired those of us struggling to democratise the Party. Our failure contributed to the NUM's isolation in the 1984-85 miners' strike.

It is a tragedy that Arthur has volunteered to leave the Labour Party. Standing candidates against Labour is a very dangerous game. Failure will further weaken and isolate a section of the left. Success could be worse, splitting the Labour vote and strengthening the Tories, and would not be forgiven by millions of working class voters who want to see the Tories out of office.

His plan could re-run the failures of the Communist Party and the Independent Labour Party. The former was formed with the political capital of the Bolshevik Revolution in a period of enormous turmoil, but never managed to make a significant breakthrough.

The ILP left the Labour Party in 1932 with over 16,000 members - way in excess of Scargill's optimistic 5,000 target - only to decline into obscurity.

Post-war left splits were even less attractive. Gerry Healy marched the Young Socialists into oblivion and Militant have shrunk since their somewhat unwilling departure.

Everything Arthur says about Labour's policies is true. What is in dispute is his decision to leave Tony Blair a free hand in the political wing of the labour movement.

At first, Arthur seemed to be arguing that the defeat of Clause IV severed Labour's links with its socialist past and that socialists should therefore establish their own party. Now he seems to be questioning whether Labour has a socialist heritage -and he is right about this. Labour failed to back the Bolshevik Revolution, was neutral in the Spanish Civil War and backed the US's wars in Korea and Vietnam. It is a cold war party that has backed NATO and the building of the bomb and sent troops into the six counties.

At no time in its history has there been an argument for joining the Labour Party because it was a socialist party. The primary argument has always been that no socialist could leave a party which had the affiliation of nearly every major trade union in the hands of right-wing social democrats. The argument that the working class is the only



force in society which can bring about socialist change is as fundamental as the one for common ownership. In Britain, trade unions have their organised political expression through the Labour Party. The Party is seen by the most political working class people as their representative in Parliament.

That the trade union link is currently more bureaucratised than previously, flows from the political health of the trade unions themselves. Blair's victories at the 1995 Conference were delivered by trade union leaders, not a new layer of middle class professionals. It makes no more sense for socialists to leave the Labour Party than to leave their trade union or to urge withdrawal from the TUC.

It must seem odd to American socialists, struggling to break the unions from the Democrats and form a Labour Party, that British socialists should want to leave our Labour Party in the hands of people who want to change it into a party like the American Democrats.

Those like Peter Mandelson seek a merger between Labour and the Liberal Democrats and the end of a party of labour. If a referendum on PR delivered a yes vote, weakening the electoral cement which binds us together, and consigned Labour to endless coalitions and then state funding of political parties allowed the weakened trade union link to be completely severed, then there would be a case for an SLP. But it would arise out of the most serious defeat the left had suffered for a generation, taking us back to the turn of the century when major trade unions supported the Liberals.

We must not allow ourselves to become defeatists - the continuing domination of Labour by the right-wing is not inevitable. The Blairites fear that under a Labour Government union leaders will come under pressure to call a Labour cabinet to account at Conference. The union rebellion against the last Labour Government provided the foundations for Bennism. It is our job to stay to ensure that Blair's nightmare comes true.

Such as scenario is echoed in a *Guardian* editorial: "The reality is that the left, even though...weak, remains mostly as committed as ever to remaining in the Party...(and) expects to prosper...particularly if and when a Blair Government embarks upon policies strongly opposed within the trade unions. Experience and some growing evidence suggests that this could happen."

By leaving, Scargill will have sidelined himself from the main terrain of battle against a Blair Government that failed to deliver. He would do well to recall Eric Heffer's words after leaving Labour to join the ill-fated Socialist Workers' Federation: "It is all very well to have political purity but to stand outside meetings selling your journal instead of being inside and putting your political point of view is totally negative". It was true when the SWF collapsed in 1957 and remains true today. ❑

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New Labour's direction cannot be reversed



Those were the days. Photo: Bryn Griffiths.

"TONY BLAIR will have mixed feelings about the formation of Socialist Labour. He will be pleased and then he will feel a little bit frightened..." (Arthur Scargill, January 13th.)

Blair is bending over backwards to persuade the rich and the powerful that they may increase their riches and keep their power under New Labour. Singapore investors and the City of London have nothing to fear from a future Labour Government.

But surely Labour Governments in the past have always ended up managing a capitalist system? Nevertheless victory for Labour at least means a defeat for the Tories, which will encourage people to fight back. That at least is the argument of many good socialists who say "stick with Labour".

They add that an accounting with Blair will come - if he tries to 'regroup' the centre of British party politics with the Liberals, or if he is confronted by powerful class action, or both. Then the Labour Party could still be won from Blair.

Schemas about the future of Parliamentary politics are one thing (Ken Livingstone - *The Guardian*, 18th January 1996). What cannot be denied in the here and now is the overwhelming shift of "New Labour" away from Labour's working class base. Every socialist also knows that the shift is speeding up, whether you look at the Constitution, at policies or at the plans for a future Labour Government being spelled out now by the

Pat Sikorski
RMT Council of Executives

Blair leadership. Is there anybody who still believes that New Labour's direction can be reversed, after Callaghan in 1979, Tony Benn's campaign, the miners' strike and the campaign on Clause IV have all failed to interrupt the Labour Party's regression to Lib-Labism?

LABOUR PARTY

Is there any socialist who still thinks that the bulk of the PLP would not stand with Blair through thick and thin?

All this means that the fight against the Tories cannot stop with just the removal of the Tory Government. Socialists, trade unionists, the poor and oppressed will have to fight the Tories who lead New Labour too. It is time to lift our eyes from the miserable agenda set for us by the Tory/Labour leaders: a change which is no change, in which we are all to build a country for the rich.

Socialist Labour will speak and act with those who are against the Tory Government and the Tories who control New Labour. Whatever view you might have about a prospect of a fight-back inside or outside New Labour, against Blair with his openly stated perspective, it is bound to be a fight to the death. In this context, it would be a crime to delay the reconstruction of a mass party of the working class for a single second longer.

Socialist Labour Party

Here we reproduce selected clauses of the SLP constitution

Clause II - Membership
Individuals and organisations other than bona fide trade unions which have their own programme, principles and policies, distinctive and separate propaganda, or which are engaged in the promotion of policies in opposition to those of the Party shall be ineligible for affiliation to the Party.

Clause IV - Objects
To establish a voting system based on Proportional Representation which ensures that democratic, socialist principles are part of the electoral, representative process at all levels.

Clause XII - Constituency Parties
The Constituency Party shall have an Executive Committee which shall administer the business and affairs of the Constituency Party but which shall be subject to the control and direction of the National Executive Committee and shall not at any time act contrary to, or in defiance of, any resolution of Party Congress.

Clause XIII - Party Branches
The Local Party Branch shall have a Committee which shall administer the business and affairs of the Party on a local basis, but which shall be subject to the control and direction of the Constituency Executive Committee, and the National Executive Committee...

New Labour, old corruption

Our informant in Islington lifts the lid on Blair babe sleaze.

ISLINGTON councillor James Winston, who denounced Liz Davies to the NEC, has been accused of housing benefit fraud in both Islington and Haringey. Police are investigating the allegation. Winston has been suspended from the Party.

As reported in December's *LLB*, Winston was already in hot water for stealing the Town Hall's Red Flag and ordering £1,100 worth of extra food for the Members' Room. Following the persistent failure of Chief Whip Stephen Twigg to deal with Winston's indiscipline, Islington's Local Government Committee Executive has decided to launch its own investigation.

In December, Winston, as Chair of the Urban Regeneration Committee, personally invited Tony Blair to switch on the borough's Christmas lights. This was followed by a splash up dinner at Frederick's restaurant.

Winston, a former squaddie and secretary of Kate Hoey's Democracy Now campaign, turned up in Islington in 1993. With no track record he was promptly selected as a candidate in marginal Barnsbury Ward (home of Tony Blair and Margaret Hodge).

The architect of Winston's rapid rise in Islington was Stephen Twigg, former NUS president and now personal assistant to Hodge. At last April's special conference on Clause IV he gained national publicity for his speech attacking Arthur Scargill. Utterly ruthless and boundlessly ambitious, Twigg is now standing for Council Leader, but his well-documented promotion and protection of the discredited Winston may cost him dear. Certainly, Tony Blair will be unamused at finding himself associated - thanks to Twigg's manoeuvering - with an alleged fraudster.

Meanwhile, outraged at his betrayal by former allies, Winston has become something of a loose cannon on the Council, denouncing the high-handed ways of its New Labour masters. Watch out for more revelations of Blairite sleaze in Fleet's Street's favourite rotten borough.

New Labour, old racism

Shortly before coming to Islington to switch on the Christmas lights, Blair was sent a list of others invited to the ceremony by Council officers. His office was happy with all the various individuals and groups but one - a choir from the local Chinese Community Centre.

Blair's office told Council officers: "Mr Blair does not want to be photographed with these people."

A half hour later, Chris Smith, MP for Islington South, phoned up to repeat the message. "Tony does not want to be photographed with these people."

Wither John Smith House?

Paul Morris, Sutton CLP, reports on Labour's new media centre.

THE SCENARIO is this: Tony Blair will await the public funding of political parties and then ditch the unions, to formally lead the Social Democratic Centre Party and leave the unfashionable working class to fend for itself politically. Labour's new media centre is the first step upmarket.

The reason so many of the Party faithful have been pestered in recent months by telephone calls from pledge-seeking paid volunteers is that the Party has taken a two-year lease on two floors of the comparatively prestigious Millbank Tower for a reputed £2 million. This will be Labour's hub for the next general election.

It seems a lot of dough to spend on an image boost but savings have been made, principally by the decision not to erect old-fashioned partitions and going 'open plan' - an innovation from the late sixties!

The press office have quickly taken all the window seats along with Blair's own office entourage; both await the arrival of the policy briefing department who, until now, had little to do, having been starved of any policies to brief anyone about.

The rip-roaring success of the centrally administered National Membership Scheme has prompted the idea to relocate a number of the same staff to Millbank to organise the new 'Operation Victory' general election campaign from a central base.

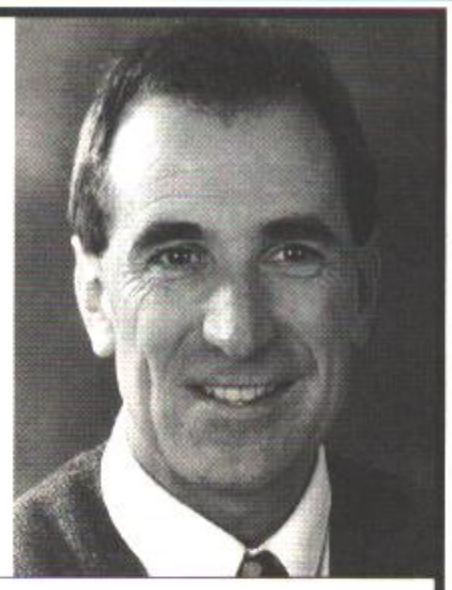
Who will be left at Walworth Road? The fund-raising and membership departments will remain there for the present, but it is assumed that any victory speeches will be made from the new press conference centre, which will be situated on the floor below the open-plan offices at Millbank Tower. Here the cabinet-in-waiting will be based, daily press conferences and interviews will be held and the full intentions of the Labour Party in power will be revealed to an impatiently waiting world.

The refurbishment of the building itself has created jobs, which is not a bad thing. Perhaps the main lesson from the new membership scheme is that more of the new technology should filter through to the CLPs where it is needed.

So the Multi-Media Palace is now upon us. Unless some half-radical meat in the way of policies, is put on the bones to whet the appetite of the electorate, then the state of the art accommodation will become nothing more than an expensive damage limitation centre.

1996 leadership crisis!

by Alan Simpson MP



SO ARTHUR SCARGILL has left the Labour Party and formed one of his own. There are some who will celebrate, but I feel quite sad. Arthur hasn't always been the easiest person to work with - and he's never been the world's best listener - but he was dead right about the Government's plans for the mining industry. Ignoring his warnings and splitting the union consigned the mining industry not to a fate worse than death, but simply to death itself.

But Arthur's decision to form his own party is a daft one. He won't take people with him - no Labour MPs, no trade unions, not even the NUM. And I'd like to be a fly on the wall when he explains his "we'll stand a candidate in every seat" policy to Dennis Skinner in Bolsover. Dennis is not known for suffering foolishness gladly and might have a word or two to say to Arthur on his political judgement.

Even if Arthur had run out of patience with Labour, the timing, tactics and style of his departure make it easier to feel embarrassed than angered. He'd have been better going for Terry Venables' job as England manager. No one else seems to want it. And you could have had the joyful symmetry of a leader looking for a new set-up matched with a set-up looking for a new leader -a marriage made in heaven. The lack of any particular knowledge of football wouldn't have been an obstacle. Graham Taylor managed it for years.

But Arthur hasn't been alone in the "crisis of leadership" which has dominated the start of 1996. Just when you thought it was safe to go out on your own again, the shadows lengthened, darkness fell, the coffin lid lifted and out climbed Margaret Thatcher. She's looking wonderfully embalmed these days, but still knows where to look for the jugular. Her targets were everywhere: her successor (who was going soft on the joys of suffering), "no-nation Conservatives" (who would sell off Britain's birthright to an unaccountable bureaucracy in Brussels) and New Labour (which was dragging politics into some indefinable middle ground dominated by spin-doctors). It was all good knockabout stuff, until the sun came up and the lid went down again.

Of course she was unfair. Fairness was never one of her qualities. It was Thatcher who turned Britain into a quango state by privatising boards and governing bodies which began to run our lives for short-term profit (and fat salaries). It was Thatcher who handed Britain over to European bankers and into the ERM. It was Thatcher who removed controls on the speculative movement of money and sent us spinning into the global casino economy. These are the hallmarks of the Thatcher legacy. My only confusion is why anyone in their right mind would want to fight a battle over who should claim to be her natural successor. But this is the battle which has broken out.

For the Tories the battle is partly over Europe. It isn't simply about whether you are a one-nation, two-nation or no-nation Tory. The issue (which we all stubbornly refuse to address) is whether a single currency within the terms of the Maastricht Treaty would saddle Britain with permanent unemployment and a collapsing economy. The alternative is probably a federal system of European government with increased European taxation to replace the investment Britain would lose in the Maastricht free-for-all. This is such an important debate that not only do the Tories refuse to have it, Labour and the Lib-Dems do too.

Being in this muddle is also part of the Thatcher legacy. It's no good her diving in at the deep-end and (posthumously) claiming she was pushed. The legacy cuts deeper than this. Britain's real problem is that we have lost faith in the collectivity of ourselves, our future and society. It isn't the fear that Thatcher sold it, because we could simply take it back, but the fear that it might simply have died on us.

I don't believe this for one moment, but I can see how the fear takes root in a political arena in which parties and leaders fail to be honest about how much of a mess we are in, and fail to be clear about the steps and costs involved in getting us out of it. This is the sense in which Arthur is right. Love him or hate him, you will have no doubt about where he stands.

South-west Scotland and Cumbria Socialist Campaign Groups

Socialist Conference

Saturday, 17th February 1996
Church of Scotland, Chapel Street, (Off Lowther Street) Carlisle
10.00am - 5.15pm

Alex Smith (MEP South of Scotland), Liz Davies,
Katy Clark (P.P.C. Galloway), Michael Hindley (MEP South Lancs),
David Hopper (North East Area NUM), Dennis Skinner (MP Bolsover)

Tribunal decision rocks all-women shortlists

Liz Davies roundly condemns the recent Industrial Tribunal decision against Labour's all-women shortlists.

WITH CRUEL irony, the recent Industrial Tribunal case which has thrown all-women shortlists into doubt was brought under section 13 of the Sex Discrimination Act 1975, the Act which was originally designed to help women overcome inequality. The Tribunal held that Parliamentary selections were an opportunity for employment. Since there is no provision for positive discrimination in English law, it was held to be unlawful to discriminate against men by restricting the selection to women only.

The ruling raises profound questions. For one thing, many feminists have argued for years that positive discrimination in jobs where women are profoundly unrepresented (such as Parliament) should be lawful.

Another question is the role of an MP: whether the position is seen as a job or an opportunity to represent the local electors and Party. Although MPs are salaried and therefore in employment, they are in a unique position. No concepts of unfair dismissal or redundancy apply to them. It is accepted that they do not have job security as their employment is determined by the will of the electorate. Effectively, the democratic interest of ensuring that MPs are accountable to the electorate prevails over the usual importance of providing individuals with job security. Why should not a similar interest in making Parliament representative prevail over the discrimination laws?

Moreover, all-women shortlists do not prevent any man from standing for an MP's job. They only affect candidatures of a particular party. If there has been any job discrimination it is the institutional sexism of all the parties which has prevented the electorate from being able to choose a woman as MP in many areas in the country. The idea that employment legislation should prevent the efforts of a party to increase the number of its female candidates is a travesty of the spirit of the law.

Contrary to media myths, the idea of all-women shortlists was not the brainchild of John Smith but was passed at the 1993 Conference after years of campaigning by the Labour Party Women's Organisation. The 1993 proposals were themselves a considerable compromise. We had argued for all women shortlists in every vacant or winnable Labour seat, not just 50%. We correctly predicted that a 50% rule would lead to resentment, division amongst CLPs and political manoeuvring.



Where it all began - Annual Conference, Brighton, 1989. Women delegates invade MPs' seats. Photo: Leesa Herbert.

Inevitably, all-women shortlists are controversial. The 50% rule meant that all women shortlists were more likely to be imposed on constituencies such as Slough who seemed likely to select a left male candidate. Leeds North East, on the other hand, volunteered for an all-women shortlist. The CLP wanted to ensure that local Party members could vote politically in the selection contest, safe in the knowledge whatever the political result, a woman would be chosen to fight the seat. The right-wing press, showing its ignorance of Labour Party politics, portrayed all-women shortlists as an extreme left-wing feminist measure championed by Tony Blair against the wishes of Party members. In fact, the majority of women so far selected are if anything, on the right of the Party. However, when Leeds North East selected a left-wing woman (myself) - she was refused endorsement by the National Executive Committee.

What will happen now? Blair in July announced that all-women shortlists had come to an end of their usefulness, although we are still far away from 50% of the PLP being women. In the light of this, he may well decide not to appeal against the Industrial Tribunal decision. After all, stroppy left-wing constituencies such as Slough have already been dealt with and local CLPs can still encourage their members to vote for women. Men may be able to apply in selection contests, but if the CLP is interested in selecting a woman, it can ask members not to nominate the male applicants, and ensure that talented women are encouraged to put their names forward.

Ultimately, the importance of all-women shortlists, whether mandatory or voluntary, is not to further the careers of aspirant (usually middle-class) female politicians. Its importance is to ensure that the women's agenda - child-care, women's safety, reproductive rights, discrimination in employment - is raised in Parliament. The loss of all-women shortlists might be a setback to this process. But the real guarantee that women's issues are central to a Labour Government are strong feminist policies passed at Party Conference, and women representatives prepared to fight for those policies who are accountable to grass-roots women in the Party. ❑

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Fight for Labour Party democracy

Mike Davies, from Leeds North East CLP, puts forward his prescription for halting the slide towards dictatorship in the Party.

In my view, Tony Blair aims to destroy democracy in the Labour Party. He seeks to take away the power of Conference, reduce Constituency Parties to insignificance and make the Parliamentary Party totally subservient to the leader. The project is to turn the Party into a passive machine that does what the leader says.

Blair is in a hurry. Having neither policy nor principle, a Blair-led government cannot deliver. After the next election they can expect a honeymoon period no longer than a year. Then both electorate and Party will realise they've been conned. So Blair will try to use the next two Conferences to make his hijacking of the Party irreversible.

Three rule changes key to the fight-back are outlined below.

a) Stop the NEC forcing through last minute resolutions.

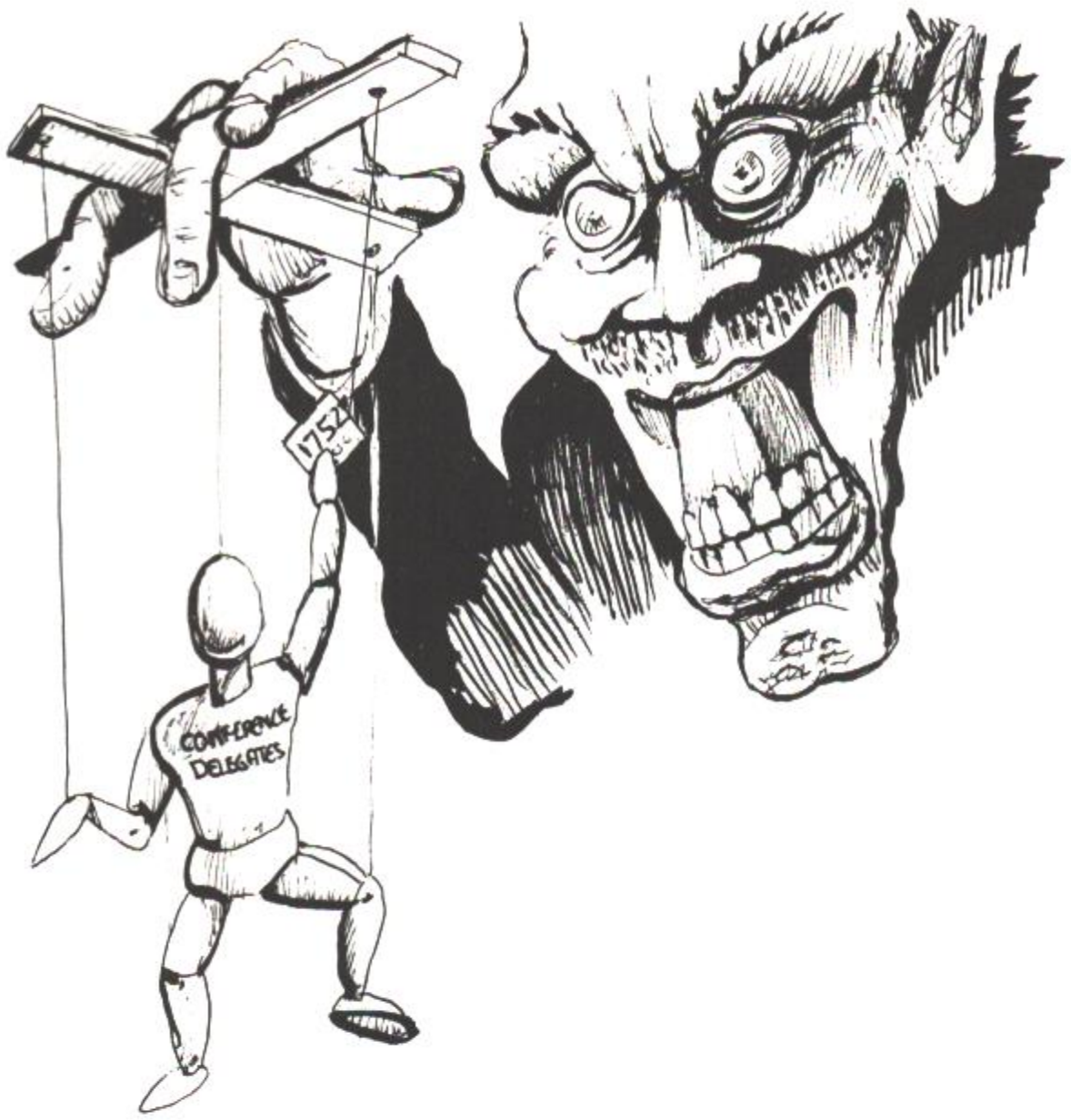
The existing rules are intended to prevent anyone bringing last minute resolutions to Conference because CLPs and affiliates would not have time to consider them. The NEC is supposed to act as "gate-keeper" to prevent this happening. Instead the NEC blatantly abuses its power by producing hugely significant, complex and lengthy rule changes or policy motions at the last minute - like the 60 pages of new rules bounced through the last Conference. The NEC publishes such motions only days before Conference.

The NEC also uses the rule to keep off the Conference agenda any motion or topic it doesn't want. The following change would leave such decisions up to Conference.

Amend Rule 3C2.6 to read: "No business which does not arise out of the resolutions on the agenda shall be considered by Party Conference unless its consideration is approved by an affirmative vote of at least two thirds of the votes cast.

Any matter which is the subject of normal or emergency resolutions from ten or more Constituency Parties or affiliated organisations and which does not appear on the agenda shall be put before Conference for a decision, as above, on whether it should be considered.

Any matter which is not the subject of motions from ten or more Constituency Parties or affiliated organisations may, on the recommendation of the NEC or the Conference Arrangements Committee, be put before Conference for a decision, as above, on whether it should be considered."



b) Stop the blocking of properly elected candidates.

Up to last year it was assumed that the NEC's power of endorsement of a prospective candidate was just a "long-stop" safeguard against a faulty selection process. Instead the NEC used it to veto Liz Davies on purely political grounds. There was no suggestion that the selection procedures were in any way flawed. The following would make it clear that the NEC could only withhold endorsement if there were proper grounds.

Amend Rule 4A.7 to read: "The selection of a Parliamentary candidate shall not be regarded as completed until the name of the member selected has been placed before a meeting of the NEC and his or her selection has been endorsed. Such endorsement shall be withheld only on the grounds of material breaches of the selection procedure or of a breach of rule by the member selected. If the NEC is satisfied that there is prima facie evidence of a breach of rule by a member selected, the NEC shall have the right after such investigations and interviews with the individual as are reasonably practicable and appropriate to withhold endorsement.

Until such endorsement has been received the member shall not be introduced to the public as a prospective candidate.

If the NEC is satisfied that there is prima facie evidence of a breach of rule by an individual who has been endorsed, the NEC shall have the right - after such investigations and interviews with the individual as are reasonably practicable and appropriate - to rescind endorsement of such an individual as a Prospective Parliamentary Candidate."

c) Prevent the NEC putting forward unamendable resolutions.

The leadership is continually reducing the power of Conference over Party policy and rules, A key element has been the growing practice by the NEC of presenting significant and complex policies and rule changes as unamendable - 'take it or leave it'. The ability to amend motions, policy documents and proposed rules is vital if Conference is to retain any democratic decision-making power.

Add Rule 3C2.8 as follows: "Any resolution placed before Conference, including reports placed before it for approval, shall be capable of amendment by the Conference". ❑

Time to realign in Parliament?

Dan Carter, Lewisham East CLP, argues that left MPs should re-think how they organise.

AT THE RISK of being branded part of the "great moving-right show", I feel that in the aftermath of Party Conference and with the next general election in view, it is time for the Labour left to re-examine its Parliamentary groupings. The Socialist Campaign Group has had some limited success, even recruiting a few of the newer MPs like Neil Gerrard, John Austin-Walker and Lynne Jones who may not have been expected to join. But it is clear that the next election will bring few new members - either because socialists like Liz Davies have been barred from standing, or because those one or two who are sympathetic are wary of meeting strong resistance from their local parties.

At the same time as the SCG risks stagnation, with a number of its older members entering what will probably be their last election, the Tribune Group of MPs has lurched to the right, following the purge of the Hain/Berry types. The Tribune Group, now run by out-and-out Blairites, bears little resemblance to the line maintained by the paper. At a time when the leadership won every single vote at Party Conference, and when many CLPs are lurching to the right, we have to ask, are we maintaining our purity at the expense of wider class - or at least Labour Party - interests?

Are our revered SCG MPs such as Diane Abbott and Dawn Primarolo really so far to the left of Peter Hain, Roger Berry, Richard Burden and David Winnick that it justifies maintaining a separate Party grouping? The left Tribune MPs' position in their own group is as unreasonable now as it was for those left-wingers in the early 1980s who left to set up the Campaign Group. We can either let them drift off individually or form a small new grouping (perhaps not so small) or offer them a life-raft and a chance to join a new reformed group of the left.

Or rather, we can't, but we can at least open the debate with the SCG. If no political common ground can be found, we can always cast Peter Hain and his friends adrift, back into the doldrums of Party politics where we found them.

The question to ask ourselves is what were the key decisions at this year's Conference. Setting a minimum wage; scrapping nuclear weapons; the right of CLPs to select their own candidates; and education. And which side were the left Tribunites on? By and large, the same as us. The fact is, the debates in the Labour Party have shifted to such an extent that we have had to applaud the actions of Hattersley (on education) and McNamara (who resigned his front bench position over Ireland and the trade union link) over recent weeks.

If we could work effectively with some of the left Tribunites, they would soon come to realise that we do not all have two heads and forked tails. Members of their CLPs would realise, as some are obviously doing already after the SCG's increased vote in the NEC elections, that there is a point in being part of an organised left again.

Changes in the Party require bold challenges; we must have the confidence in our ideas that we can win people over to our viewpoint. The debates on Clause IV and the union link over the past year have brought us some new allies and shown the level of dissatisfaction that some Party members - old and new - have with at least some of the policies Blair is imposing on the Party. We don't need to compromise our views in order to involve more people in debate.

The future of *LLB* requires us to reach out to a wider audience. The future of the Party left requires it also to reach out to a broader spectrum. If we are to have any real chance of defeating Labour's surge to the right, we need to take risks and invite more people to our next party. Who knows, they might even bring along some bottle. ❑

Fight for socialism in the Labour Party!

Join the Socialist Campaign Group [Supporters' Network]

Send £5 (£2 unwaged) to SCGN, 3 Blades House, Kennington, London, SE11 5TW. Cheques to "SCGN".

The Network now has nearly 50 local groups affiliated. Make sure your Labour left caucus plugs into the Network by sending £10 to the address above.

Walsall councillors expelled

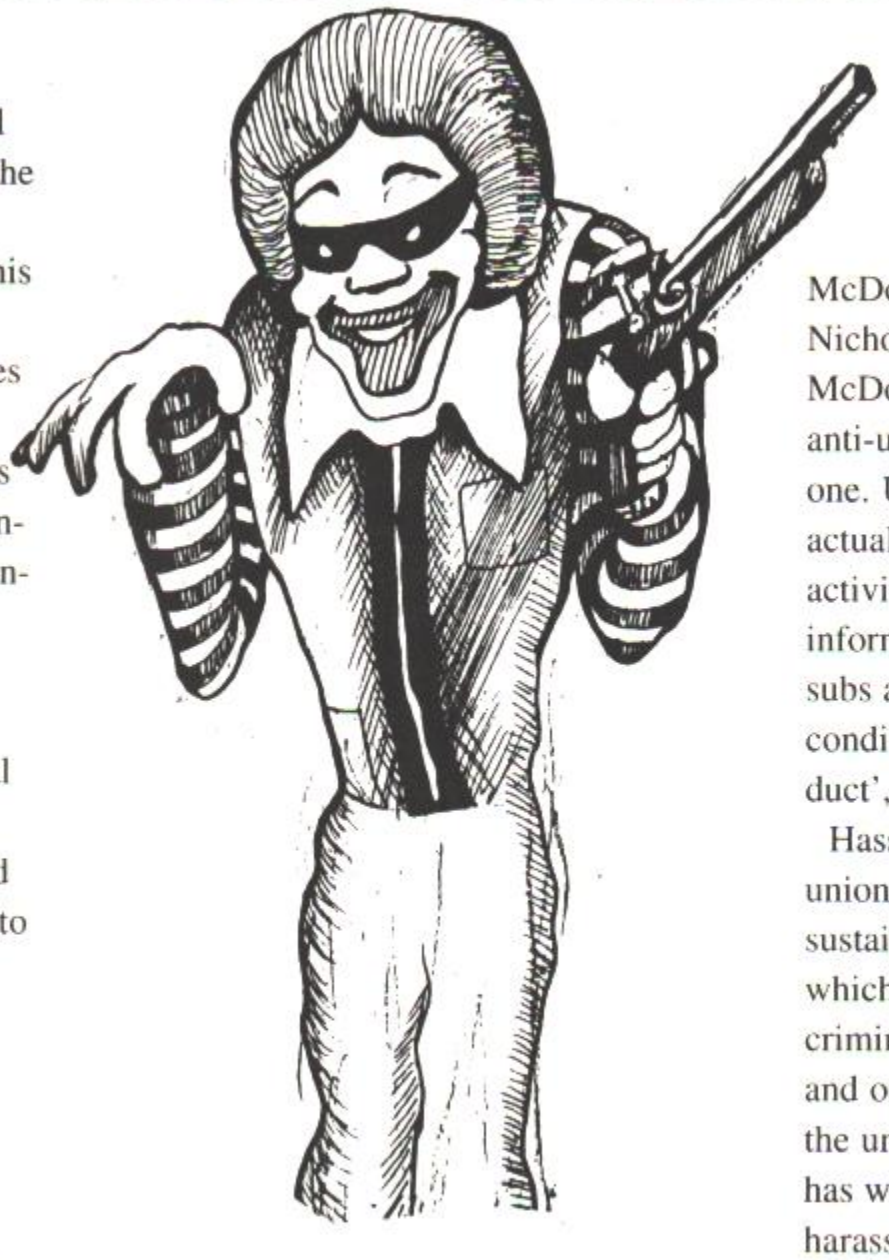
WALSALL COUNCILLORS have reacted angrily to their expulsion by the Labour leadership, which was announced before the NEC met to look at the issue.

Council leader Dave Church and his colleagues had been suspended from Party membership in November but subsequently won a local Council vote 20-19 to keep their positions. The Party leadership then announced the councillors' expulsion to the press before formally notifying the members or referring the issue back to the NEC.

The December NEC was told that by forming a separate group on the City Council after they had been suspended they had excluded themselves. An attempt by Dennis Skinner to bridge the gap, given the danger of the Tories taking over the Council, was overwhelmingly defeated.

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Burger bandits blasted



ON 12TH DECEMBER, 1995, the McLibel trial - which began in June 1994 - became the longest libel trial in British history. It is scheduled to last well into the summer of this year.

Scores of witnesses have testified on issues ranging from the environment, health and safety to anti-trade union activity. Witnesses have stated that McDonald's creates environmental havoc: large-scale exploitation of non-renewable forest, the inhumane treatment suffered by animals under intensive factory farming and dangerous food products, especially the use of pesticides and artificial growth hormones.

In the UK the company has been convicted on numerous occasions for offences related to young workers. 12th October marked the third anniversary of the death of Mark Hopkins, a worker electrocuted in a Manchester store. During the McLibel trial, McDonald's were forced to disclose a previously confidential internal report into Hopkins' death. Its conclusion was damning - "Safety is not seen as being important at store level" - and as a result the Hopkins family is demanding a new inquest into the death (which had been ruled as accidental).

Maureen Hopkins (mother of Mark) said: "I want every McDonald's worker to stand up for their rights, which is why I am backing this support campaign 100%. In this way, Mark's death will not have been in vain."

One of the claims made in the "What's Wrong with McDonald's" fact-sheet is that McDonald's is anti-trade union. Sid Nicholson, UK Vice-President of McDonald's, stated that the company was not anti-union and all staff had the right to join one. Under questioning he admitted that the actual carrying out of any 'overt union activity' - including distributing union information, organising meetings, collecting subs and informing a union of working conditions - would be deemed 'gross misconduct', a summary sackable offence.

Hassen Lamti, a current employee and union representative in Lyons, spoke of a sustained, vicious campaign against him in which he was harassed, wrongly accused of criminal activities, framed for armed robbery and offered a substantial bribe to renounce the union. His branch is now recognised and has won over 20 court judgements to stop harassment and illegal business practices. Five managers were arrested for attempting to rig union elections.

Contact the McLibel Support Campaign at: 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX. Tel./Fax: 0171-713 1269.

Water, water everywhere ...nor any drop to drink

AFTER PUBLIC ANGER last summer when some water companies threatened to cut supplies because of water shortages - most notably Yorkshire Water - we had the reverse this winter - with water, water everywhere leaking from the system, with Yorkshire Water again taking the prize with the highest leakage levels in the country.

At least a quarter of all public water supplies are lost through leakage, mainly from water companies' own networks. Yorkshire was quoted as saying that though the company had hit its investment targets, there were no statutory targets on leakage - and argued that there would be helpful. Surely it does not need external pressure before tackling a leakage level of 26%.

A recent Private Member's Bill, backed by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, seeks to improve water conservation. It includes targets for the Secretary of State for the Environment to set leakage targets for water companies. The Bill is unlikely to get anywhere.

There is clearly something fundamentally wrong in lurching from one season to another with companies threatening to cut off supplies if it's too hot or too cold. Other countries with much colder climates manage to invest enough to ensure systems don't crack in the winter. There are also wide variations in performance between companies here, with some conserving water through investment and getting through dry spells without threats of cut-offs.

Yorkshire Water has so far managed to get through without actually cutting off supplies - but only by using tankers to bring water from other regions, at a cost yet to be seen. Even this was done only because of public anger. The alternative would have been the use of standpipes.

The water industry regulator - OfWat - has started an inquiry into the companies' performance and is considering introducing compensation for customers with interrupted supplies. But this would only be around £10 a day, with a probable maximum of £100.

Since the industry became privatised, attitudes have changed. We are now told water is a product, not a public service and people want some form of compensation when things go wrong.

Although water may now be considered a commodity, people have deep feelings about those services essential to everyday life, such as that it is wrong to those supplying them to make huge profits, at vast salaries and still more from share options. When the Director of the Institute for Public Policy Research proposed turning the companies into mutual societies it was a much more practical suggestion than anything coming from Labour's front bench. But it is a fudge - public opinion polls show a majority want water taken back into public hands.

Against queer militarism

Peter Tatchell decries the gay establishment's flag-waving, assimilationist campaign for queers in the military.

THE GAY lobbying group Stonewall recently renewed its call for the end to the ban on lesbians and gay men in the armed forces. This just demand for an end to homophobic discrimination has become an increasingly unjustifiable endorsement of the military and everything it stands for.

The military is undemocratic, unaccountable, discriminatory in its actions and has been used as an instrument of suppression. Above all, it is a straight institution defending a society ruled by heteros, as well as by capitalists. It serves straight interests and upholds the macho straight values of violence and homophobia. Everything about the military is inimical to queer freedom: hierarchy, domination, aggression, conformity and authoritarianism.

Moreover, the military is an instrument of state power. In defending the state, the military also defends the state's repression of queers: the unequal age of consent, the arrest of gay men for victimless cruising, the denial of legal recognition of queer partnerships and the lack of redress against homophobic discrimination in housing and employment.

Lesbians and gay men have a right and even a responsibility to refuse allegiance to a homophobic government and its homophobic military apparatus. Faced with unjust laws that discriminate against homosexuals, queers are duty-bound to deny legitimacy to the straight governing elite and to withdraw all consent and co-operation from government institutions such as the armed forces.

We homos (and our straight allies) have no obligation to defend the phoney democratic system that denies us equality. Instead, our consciences should direct us towards subverting and destroying the hetero institutions that oppress us.

What's more, to do the bidding of those who victimise us betrays the cause of queer freedom. That's why all queers everywhere have a responsibility to refuse to collaborate with the military and help strike a blow for homo emancipation and for the liberation of other people who are struggling against oppressive militarism.



Photo: Leesa Herbert.

● Peter Tatchell's new book, *We Don't Want To March Straight - Masculinity, Queers and the Military*, is published by Cassell, £4.99.

Slogans without substance

A leading penal reformer criticises Labour's macho outbidding of the Tories on crime.

SINCE THE LABOUR leadership began dismantling the theoretical framework of socialism, it has been left with a void in criminal justice policy. The shadow Home Secretary has filled that vacuum with slogans.

If you have no idea what might be causing crime it is hard to come up with coherent policies to prevent it. Labour's ability to address this issue is limited to soundbites.

The prison system is a good example. No one can doubt that there is a crisis, with prison numbers rising and budgets being cut. Labour MPs are responding with shrill criticism of the Tories, but fail to explain that there are people in prison who should not be there. Prison should be a last resort, but Labour leaders bemoan the fact that children cannot be locked up more easily and invent new ways of imprisoning 'incompetent' parents.

Youngsters - disenfranchised and economically powerless - are an easy target for desperate politicians. Young men hang around on the streets, excluded from schools and unable to afford entertainment unless they resort to fundraising by crime.

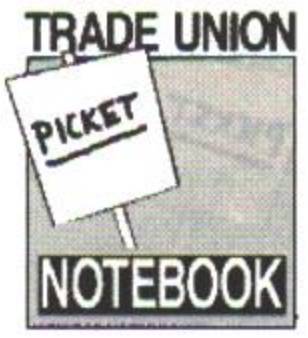
The context of much of this anti-social behaviour is ignored. In South Wales there are boys who have never seen their fathers in employment. They face a bleak future with few personal or economic resources. The prisons in Cardiff and Swansea are full of teenagers, many on remand awaiting trial.

Labour leaders eagerly participate in the macho competition of seeing who can be toughest. The intellectual calibre of the crime debate is debased to a competition between Jack Straw and Michael Howard as to who can invent the most heinous punishment for errant children.

It is dangerous to pretend that the heavy-handed use of the criminal justice system can create a more orderly society. It can make things much worse by squandering vast public resources, diverting attention from real issues and pretending that something is being done while making a few people's lives a misery.

The Labour Party must present a clearly thought-out view of how and why anti-social behaviour happens. Slogans and trick phrases will not be enough. People inside the Party know that the emperor has no clothes. Those outside the Party see the leadership dressed in the jackboots of the reactionary right.

Car unions ballot for action



The New Year saw pickets at Vauxhall factory gates and wildcat stoppages at Fords. Steve Smith spoke to shop stewards at Luton and Dagenham about a rise of worker confidence in the motor industry.

THE LAST FEW months have shown encouraging signs that car workers are beginning to recover their confidence and some of the industrial muscle they once shared with other key workers in pre-Thatcher days.

Ford's pre-Christmas pay deal with its 26,000 workers led to unofficial walkouts. Stalemated negotiations at Dagenham led to a one-day suspension of production and a ballot on official action throughout Fords is now under way. Obstructive anti-union laws will delay the result until well into February.

Vauxhall's three-year pay deal to their 7,000 workers was overwhelmingly rejected by mass meetings at Luton and Ellesmore Port on January 4th. Since December, the unions have banned overtime, implementing their demand for a 37 hour week by ending shifts early - effectively, a two-hour a week strike. Their stand has led to Vauxhall increasing their offer from 3% to 4.5% and a one-hour cut to 38 hours.

Though the TGWU is awaiting the result of a ballot at Vauxhalls, any further escalation is thought unlikely following a vote by AEEU workers at the Luton factory. They represent a third of the workers and voted against further action.

A leading TGWU branch official at Luton told *LLB* that the Vauxhall management can't get it into their heads that after ten years of accepting everything thrown at them, on January 4th the workforce said no. It's not simply about a wage deal, they are not prepared to be pushed around any longer.

Behind the scenes, the official said, management has been frantically trying to reverse the result by sending three page letters to union members' home addresses signed by personnel director Charlie Golden, threatening them with loss of jobs. They are filming people on the picket line and the police are everywhere. It's getting nasty.

The AEEU result was disappointing because they cannot afford to have workers divided and the TGWU now expects a management backlash against its members.

At Fords in Dagenham Pete Singh, a TGWU shop steward, told *LLB* that frustration had been building for years as workers increased productivity and efficiency but all they got in return was a slap in the face. Now they are telling stewards they want a 10% wage increase and two hours off the working week. The wildcat strikes are out of the union's control. Other car companies have made better offers and the steward was confident of a vote for industrial action.

Local government pay dispute

By Chris Croombe, Sheffield Unison.

A dispute over pay in local government looks likely after the employers responded to the union's claim for a minimum of £4.15 an hour, a substantial flat rate increase for manual workers and £1,000 for APT&C workers. Employers stated that "..anything beyond an increase worth about 2% of the pay bill would be very difficult to cope with".

There are further meetings due to take place with the employers on 29th January and 15th February and the pay rise is due from 1st April. The employers side has indicated that they wish to make their final offer on 15th February and that "most authorities strongly prefer any available money to be distributed as an even percentage increase".

With average earnings increasing at 3.25% and inflation at 3.1% it seems quite likely that the employers side might offer a figure between 2 and 3%. If this happens it would be a mistake for local government workers to see this as a reasonable offer.

Successive under-inflation pay rises have eroded pay levels and there are huge numbers of school meal workers, cleaners and other manual employees earning under £4.15 an hour.

Unison, which is the majority union for white-collar workers, has not had a serious dispute over pay since 1989. For years claims involving flat rate elements have failed to deliver substantial improvements for the lowest paid members. It is therefore vital that branches seek to ensure that regional and national committees - which will determine the direction of the dispute - are not allowed to accept any offer short of the claim.

This year's local government pay dispute could be the first opportunity for united action between white-collar and manual workers. For the first time we have (almost) a single claim and a single settlement date. If the members of Unison who voted for the merger of NALGO, NUPE and COHSE expected anything from the new big union it was united action to realise our collective strength.

As anyone who has seen Unison's television advertisements will know, a large number of ants can move a polar bear. If the union puts the same vigour and enthusiasm (and money) into a campaign for industrial action as it has into its recruitment campaign this will prove that the ants in the branches can move the polar bears on the Service Group Executive.

An effective campaign for a decent pay deal in local government will do more than any number of adverts to persuade the tens of thousands of non-members to join the union.

TRADE UNION

PICKET

NOTEBOOK

Victory for Edinburgh postal workers

Two Edinburgh postal workers describe how they beat back job cuts and court intimidation.

ON November 20th, 25 postal workers at the Portobello delivery office in Edinburgh walked out on unofficial strike. They were protesting at management's unilateral changes to working conditions and the strategy of replacing full-time jobs with part-time workers.

The action of this small group of staff sparked off a tremendous show of solidarity by postal workers right across Scotland. Within an hour almost every delivery office in Edinburgh had joined the dispute, only too aware that what was happening in Portobello today would happen in their own offices in the future.

The issue of ending second deliveries had been the subject of a successful call for a national ballot for industrial action by Scottish branches at a special conference of the CWU the previous week. The CWU, Scotland & Northern Ireland Division had already initiated ballot procedures and Royal Mail had been given the seven days notice in line with legislation. Ballot papers were due to be delivered on Friday 24th November with a "yes" vote almost inevitable. There is little doubt therefore that the actions of management were designed to undermine the official procedures by forcing unofficial action. Knowing they had neither the industrial muscle nor the moral arguments to win a dispute they decided their only hope of success was the now familiar Royal Mail tactic of recourse to the courts. On three occasions they attempted and failed to win the support of Scottish courts. Their initial action on Tuesday 21st November was based on the fact that the CWU were not doing enough to repudiate the unofficial action. Had they been successful then this would have opened up the opportunity for sequestration of union funds as well as court action against individuals.

What Royal Mail should realise is that the more they use the courts, the more expert union officials and indeed rank and file members become in combative tactics.

The union nationally and locally had indeed repudiated the action, both in terms of instructions to return to work at mass meetings and in the form of individual repudiation letters. An already incensed workforce chose to 'ignore' these instructions.

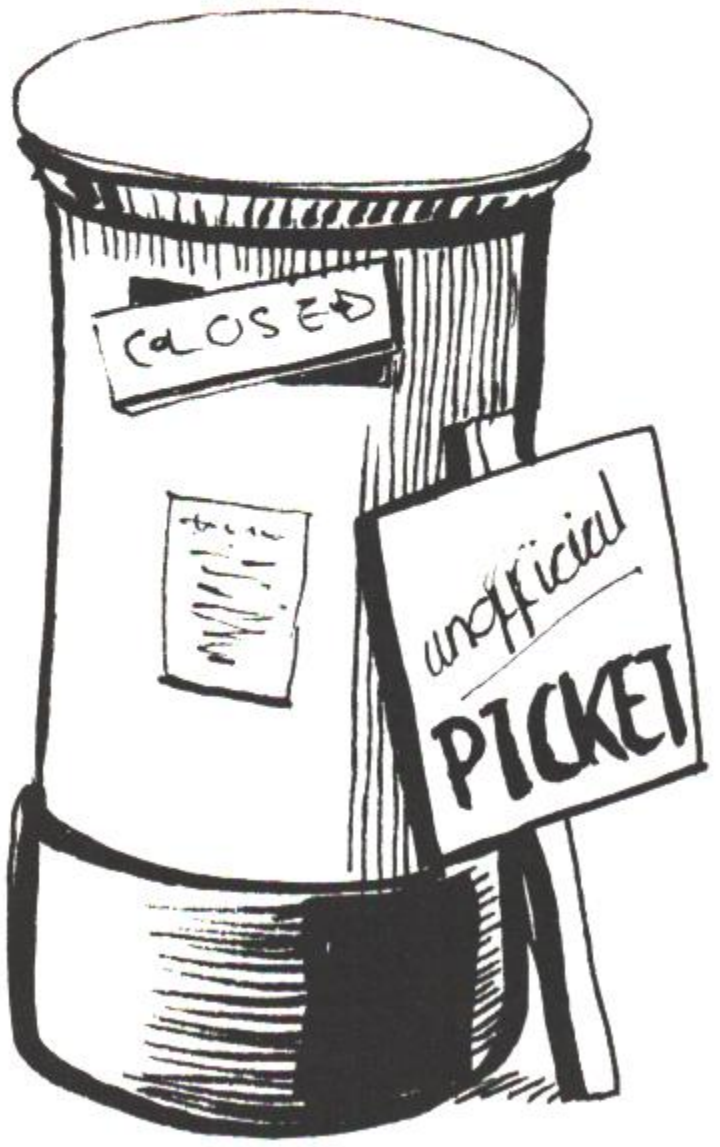
Whilst Royal Mail were spending their time and our money in the courts the anger was mounting and more offices were joining the dispute. By Wednesday the main sorting offices in Edinburgh and Glasgow had walked out, bringing virtually the whole of the Scottish postal service to a standstill.

Then the Hamilton delivery office were able to come out on 'legal' action supported by 100 pickets from Edinburgh and an STUC Rally.

The growing mood of solidarity and confidence of winning the dispute turned to anger when Royal Mail decided to pay CWU members by Giro rather than direct to bank accounts - this would require some members to pay bank charges on bouncing standing orders. Feelings were running so high on this issue that the members decided they would pay a visit to West Port House in Edinburgh, the divisional HQ of Royal Mail. The scenes outside were described by one newspaper as reminiscent of the miners dispute, as members vented their anger and called for the resignation of senior management. Managers cowered inside the building refusing to leave until the demonstration was over!

Negotiations suddenly began to make quick progress and a deal overwhelmingly endorsed by the membership was agreed, with management's plans suspended pending national negotiations. So far, the dispute has cost Royal Mail and taxpayers an estimated £9 million. This is public money that has been wasted because of management's insistence on using the legal system to solve industrial problems.

However the battle to safeguard full time jobs is far from over. National negotiations must produce a deal that protects delivery standards across the country, not only for the sake of our jobs but for the good of the world's best postal service. There is no doubt that a massive victory has been achieved but this was only one battle - the war goes on. ❑



Trade Union News Discussion Forum

The meaning of the French strikes

Guest Speaker:
Francine Bavay of the
French Communication Workers Union (SUD)

Monday 5th February 1996 - 7.00pm
Room 12, Friends Meeting House
(opposite Euston Station)

LLB page 18

Fire fighters take action

FIRE FIGHTERS ALL over London are fighting a proposed ten per cent cut in funding which will lead to the shut down of four fire stations altogether, as well as the loss of 650 jobs over the next 2 to 3 years. The London Fire and Civil Defence Authority (LFCDA), which is the only elected all-London body, is opposed to the cuts, the second swathe in five years, but argues that they have been forced on them by the Government's cut-backs and there will be no forced redundancies.

It is true that London has a high rate of turnover, mainly because of retirement due to injury and ill health. Recently, hearing tests have been introduced into the regular health check-ups and many fire fighters have had to leave the force due to the effects of their work on their hearing. But overall the cutbacks mean a reduction in jobs in London and may damage the slow progress towards equality of opportunity. The London force is already understaffed by around 200.

A minimum of two fire appliances are required to attend all but the most trivial of calls in London. Many fire stations will be left with just one after the cut backs have taken effect. Given London's increasing traffic problems, lives are bound to be at risk as a result, because the second appliance will need to come from further away. If the station next door is already out on a call, long delays may result.



London fire fighters must mobilise in order to save jobs.

There is a definite bias in the way in which cuts are to be implemented. They are overwhelmingly in working class areas, where high rise flats make fires more - not less - dangerous, and in multi-racial areas.

The fire fighters are due to ballot on a proposal for four nine hour strikes and are planning to lobby the LFCDA on the 22nd February against the cuts. They want the Labour Party to support them and help build a fight to ensure the continuing safety of Londoners and oppose yet more job cuts.

USDAW elections

CONTROVERSY HAS ARISEN over USDAW Executive Council's decision to bring forward by one year elections for president and Executive Council. The EC claims that by opting for the earlier date, it will get Government money to fund the poll. But under union rules the new EC would take office immediately, in April 1996, despite the fact that the old EC's term of office is not due to expire until April 1997.

No rule change has been introduced for this procedure, nor for a new EC requirement that candidates for General Secretary will in future need 25 nominations instead of a single branch nomination as at present. Union President Audrey Wise argued before the decision that union rules were being broken and she would seek legal advice. Many see the EC decision, by 9 votes to 7, to adopt this new procedure as designed to give preferred candidates a head start.

Showdown for Sullivan

LEWISHAM LABOUR Councillor and Chair of Personnel, Dave Sullivan, is finally set to answer to the local Party for his recent over-zealous conversion to the free market. Former left-winger Sullivan is no stranger to controversy and scandal in the local Party, but has shocked even his own supporters with his role as a director of private company Serviceteam, who are in dispute with the GMB in Wandsworth.

Following the defeat two years ago of proposals backed by Sullivan and a clique of Labour right-wingers, for the 'externalisation' (i.e. sell-off) of Lewisham's DLO, Directeam, Sullivan has joined former Directeam boss, Mushtaq Maliq, and a couple of other managers poached from the Council, to establish 'Serviceteam', a private company set up to bid for Council work. With backers rumoured to include trade union figures, Serviceteam seems at first sight to be the embodiment of the Blairite dream, a private company with a social conscience committed to quality services.

Or perhaps not... Having bought out the company with the refuse contract in Wandsworth (thereby inheriting an industrial dispute) Serviceteam has shown its true colours by sacking four GMB stewards in response to a one-day strike. A fellow director explained the basis of this enlightened approach to industrial relations: "Like many other companies facing this type of wildcat action, we had to deal with the ringleaders."

Council workers and trade unionists in Lewisham may not be encouraged to vote Labour when they see that the Labour Council's Chair of Personnel is associated with this sort of old-fashioned union busting - and Sullivan may face some tough questions at the next meeting of the East Lewisham GC, at which the dispute will be discussed. However, the real question is whether Sullivan's Labour group colleagues will have the courage and integrity to tell him to choose between his Committee chair and his obvious ambitions to become a minor capitalist.

Hillingdon strikers need support!

LOW PAID cleaning workers on strike at Hillingdon Hospital for the past five months are standing firm despite attempts by Unison negotiators to reach a settlement with Pall Mall management. Pall Mall sacked the strikers when they refused to accept a twenty per cent wage cut.

Following the union's failure so far to spread strike action at Hillingdon, Unison regional health official Godfrey Eastwood has written to Pall Mall urging a settlement. The strikers are calling for the action to be spread - and for a one day stoppage of the entire hospital.

Strike leader Malkiat Bilku has stated that " There will be no settlement until we get our jobs back on the old terms and conditions. Our contracts must be honoured". Another striker said: "What we want is a letter to go round to the people inside calling them out on a one-day strike". However, the strikers have even been told they cannot hold a Unison branch meeting.

Jon Rogers
Lambeth Unison "A"

The strikers have won considerable support across the union, and the conduct of the dispute has been the subject of heated debate at the national health committee. A London wide demonstration in support of the strikers is proposed, and the strikers need messages of support and donations from union and Labour Party branches.

Messages of support: Unison, Hillingdon NHS Trust Branch, Unison office, Hillingdon Hospital, Pield Heath Lane, Uxbridge, Middlesex.



Photo: Paul Mattsson.

Job Centres strike continues

Firm support for their 9 per cent pay claim from rank and file members of the Civil and Public Servants Association (CPSA) has forced notoriously right-wing General Secretary Barry Reamsbottom to call out an increasing number of offices in the employment service.

Desperate measures from management - including a £500 bonus to scabs in Leytonstone, East London - have failed to stem the enthusiasm of strikers, many of whom are involved in their first dispute.

Labour CCT sell-out imminent?

As rumours spread that Labour's Local Government Conference will witness a comprehensive retreat from any commitment to remove compulsory competitive tendering (CCT) in local government, white-collar housing workers are the latest to feel the effects of CCT.

In Lambeth the hung Council is overseeing some of the most draconian attacks upon the conditions of Council workers, unjustly blamed by all three parties for the Council's financial and managerial shortcomings. Senior managers brought over wholesale from neighbouring Southwark (where they have a proven track record of provoking disputes) are proposing a number of changes to contracts, including removing entitlement to sick pay for the first three days of each period of absence.

In spite of these massive attacks, two neighbourhoods are set to be handed over to a housing association, and the Council is also trying to simply flog off estates around the borough. Unison members in Lambeth Housing agreed on Wednesday 17 January to ballot on strike action. If the front bench do set out to rescue CCT at the Local Government Conference they will be confirming that the 'stakeholder economy' excludes those whose stake is that they do the work on which everyone else's stake depends!

AEEU victory

The Engineers Union, the AEEU, has elected a left-wing president for the first time in a generation by a comfortable majority of 74,060 to 50,564 votes. Davey Hall, backed by the oppositionist *Engineering Gazette*, takes over from hard-right Bill Jordan, who is joining the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions.

Court service strike

Civil servants in the Court Service, part of the Lord Chancellor's Department, are taking part in extensive industrial action to protect their jobs from the Government's Private Finance Initiative (PFI). PFI is part of the trend to make it as easy as possible for the private sector to take over Government work.

When it became clear that CCT did not result in the private sector winning the majority of contracts, the Government introduced PFI, which formally removes the need for internal competition. All projects involving capital expenditure of £1 million or more must be offered to the private sector; only if they are not interested is the Civil Service allowed to do it.

After members of CPSA and NUCPS (now PTC) voted for a one-day strike across the Court Service, PFI was restricted to the Information Services Division. Members of both unions struck for five days in December and three at the beginning of January. Branch officers reported excellent support from members and sympathy and concern from the public passing the ISD office in Westminster. As *LLB* went to press, members were meeting to discuss plans for a further five day strike in February.

MSF Presidency

So desperate is the Blairite leadership of MSF to find a candidate for this year's presidency that they are putting up MP Robert Ainsworth. He needed Blair's permission to stand, as he is a whip. Given the importance of the whips at a time of waver-thin Tory majorities, the left in MSF sees this as a thank you to Roger Lyons for delivering on the block vote and Clause IV. The position of president is almost a full time post in itself. The left will be calling for one person, one job!

Please send all your trade union news to:

Trade Union Notebook, *LLB*, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

Dockers fight goes global

500 DOCKERS in Liverpool, the last British dock where trade unions are still recognised, are taking their fight against redundancies and de-recognition around the world, with growing success. On 15th January the Israeli dockers union became the latest union to threaten action in support of the Liverpool dispute. In the US, members of the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) on the east coast have been refusing to unload scab cargoes.

Following the visit of three Liverpool dockers to the US in December, the American shipping company Atlantic Containers Ltd (ACL) was forced to agree a written statement that it would withdraw from using Liverpool docks unless the dispute was resolved. On 18th January the dockers called on ACL to honour this commitment and pledged to continue their international solidarity work.

The dockers have also built huge solidarity action in Liverpool, where there have been almost weekly demonstrations supported by thousands and a women's support group has been set up. A petition of 100,000 signatures was handed into Downing Street by Women of the Waterfront in early January. 100 dockers leafleted Sheerness port also owned by Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. The company has been using scab labour in Liverpool, recruited from Sheerness.

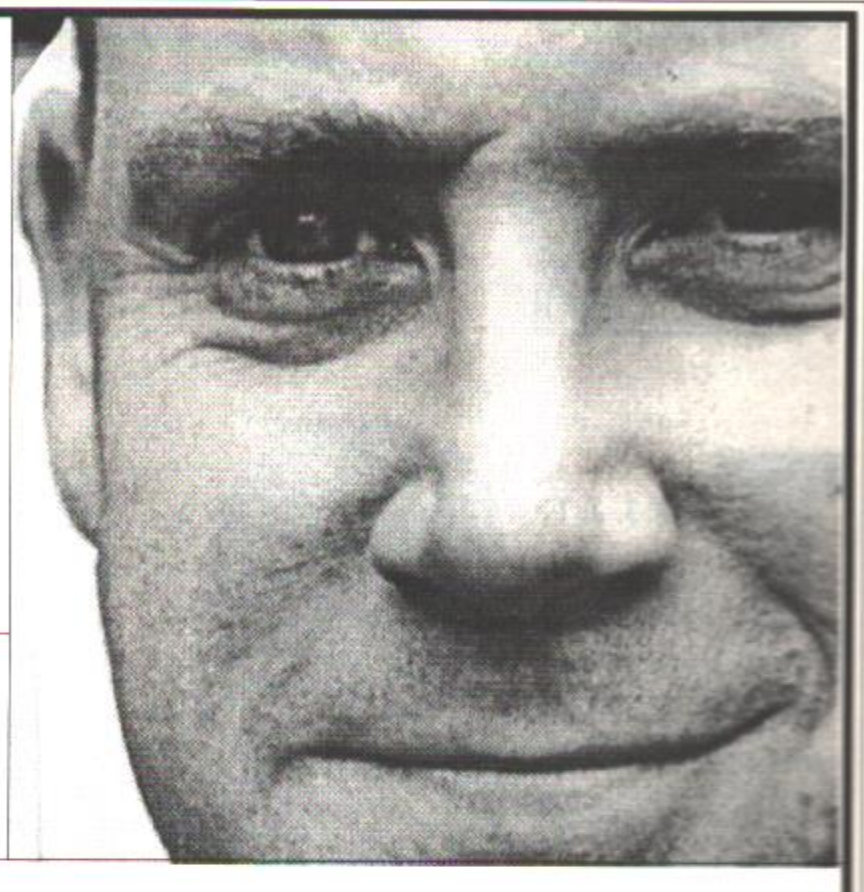
Although the TGWU has not officially recognised the strike, help has been given to the hardship fund and Bill Morris has spoken at rallies. The NUM has also given support and RMT has given £5,000.

Support is now being sought from other parts of Britain and Dockers' Charter groups are being set up in London and elsewhere. The dockers are organising an international conference in Liverpool in mid-February.

Up to date information on the dispute is on the Internet at LabourNet UK c/o chrisbailey@gn.apc.org. Send messages of support and donations to Merseyside Port Shop Stewards, 19 Scorton Street, Liverpool L6 4AS.

Leading with the left

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



Fair shares for all

SO WE'RE ALL going to be stakeholders now, are we?

Funny that. I would have thought that Tony's definition of a stakeholder would be the waiter who serves up the prime fillet in his favourite Islington restaurant. I don't think that I can really go for that, but if there's a vacancy for a kebab-holder I reckon I could be in with a chance.

● I've just had leaked to me the latest NHS price list which is under serious consideration at Tory HQ:

Adenoids - You pay through the nose.
Haemorrhoids - Will cost you a pile.
Circumcision - No charge as yet, but you'll be required to leave a tip.

● After the Party Conference in October I really didn't think it would be possible to come across a phonier environment - not until the Geoff Martin world tour rolled into Las Vegas just before Christmas that is.

So I'm strolling down the Strip when I happen upon a picket line outside the monster-size Frontier Hotel. As I'm checking out the details of the dispute pinned up on the fence one of the pickets asks me whether I'll be crossing the line.

My response, something along the lines of "I'd rather be marooned on a desert island with Ann Widdecombe", is understandably met with a bemused smile. Anyway, I spent an hour or so chatting to the strikers, who have been out on the stones for over FOUR YEARS protesting new contracts.

Five thousand miles from home and I'm chewing the fat with the local Teamsters official on a picket line bang smack in the middle of the Strip with the temperature up in the 90s. Venceremos comrades!

● I want to use a small chunk of this column to express my sadness at Arthur's decision to bail out of the Labour Party and set up the SLP. There's not one of us on the socialist wing of the movement who, confronted by Mandleson and the Mods' wackiest lurches to the right, haven't wondered what the hell we're doing in the same Party.

However, the fact remains that despite the Mods' expressed desire to ditch the union link they haven't managed it yet and that means that the battle to defend that link and the battle for socialist policies will flare up again within the Party after the election.

That's when we'll need the likes of Arthur with us on the Conference floor - not outside pressed against the railings fighting for space with the SLP.

● Finally, the *LLB* Editorial Board have exercised the full weight of their centralised power and have instructed me to include a piece in this column about the new political fund arrangements in Unison.

Right, pay attention because this is very complicated.

Those ex-NALGO members who pay into the General Political Fund, thereby sponsoring Tory MPs, can now opt to pay into the Affiliated Fund, which sponsors Labour MPs (eg. a Mr J. Corbyn of Islington). The transfer forms can be obtained from your branch secretary or your regional office.

You crazy old fence sitters out there can even opt to pay into both funds! If you think that both political funds are total bollocks you can opt out all together, but I should remind you that there is no reciprocal arrangement with the Natural Law Party.

TRADE UNION PICKET NOTEBOOK

J. J. strikers standing firm

THE J. J. Fast Food workers fight for reinstatement and union recognition has now lasted for almost three months. The case of the 45 workers, sacked at the end of October for joining the TGWU, went to Industrial Tribunal on January 16th. The union is highly confident that it will win the workers' claims for unfair dismissal. Boss Mustaafa Kaamil - who has lost much custom - is under considerable financial pressure as a result of the workers' action. The few trucks now leaving the warehouse are usually half empty. Many scab workers - unable to cope with the conditions under which they have to work - have left.

The pickets and other protest activity organised by the workers and their supporters have had the effect of driving away Kaamil's customers and putting enormous pressure on him to reach a settlement, and forced him to negotiate with the union and the workers' representatives. Concerns over doubts about the safety of the food - which is being handled by inexperienced scab workers - has led to local authorities cancelling or reviewing their contracts with the firm. Harrow Council has already cancelled its contract and Southwark Council is in the process of doing so. However Enfield Council - J. J. Fast Food's main customer - continues to do business with the firm despite complaints from local parents and approaches from the sacked workers. On January 22nd the support group and workers lobbied Enfield Council Labour Group over the Council's continued dealings with J. J. Fast Food.



Photo: Colin Hayward

Contact: J. J. Fast Food Workers Support Group c/o 72 West Green Road, London, N15 5NS. Tel: 0181-802 9804.

Canada: everyone's on strike!

THE PICKET SIGNS said: "A line in the sand". But at the huge CAMI auto plant east of London, Ontario, it was a line in the snow no one was crossing on December 11th.

CAMI - a joint venture of GM and Suzuki - was one of the targets of a one-day general strike called by the Ontario labour movement to protest against anti-labour legislation and social service cuts planned by the new Conservative premier, Mike Harris.

Working men and women braved the freezing weather to picket - and not just union workers. Parents with children, high school and college students, welfare right groups and others joined the day of protest. University final exams were postponed and sporting fixtures cancelled.

Canada's largest union, the Union of Public Employees, the Ontario Public Service Employees Union and the Auto Workers organised the strike, which was joined by many other unions.

On London's main road, nothing was moving as members of the Amalgamated Transit Union picketed a bus depot. Down the street, pickets turned away a manager going in "just to do the payroll". The mail sorting office was closed. Public employees picketed the London Psychiatric hospital, but allowed essential services to continue.

The strike was organised following cuts in basic services and the autumn budget. Health care is taking the biggest blow, with $1.5 billion cuts in Medicare and 12 hospitals due to close, and maybe a further 25. The elderly are now having to pay for their medication. There are reductions in education spending, rises in college fees and cuts in child-care subsidies. Workfare programmes are to be introduced.

There are attacks on trade unions, with American style legislation for ballots before recognition. Twenty percent of workplace health and safety inspectors will be laid off. The Health and Safety Agency is closed and Ontario's minimum wage is frozen. Meanwhile, tax rebates for the rich are promised.

Most corporations in the area are US-owned and they are driving the attacks to ensure Canada becomes more like the US in terms of worker and union protection, health care and education.

The protest was supported by around one hundred bus loads of workers from all over Ontario and by a few Americans as well.

There was not total unity, with the United Food and Commercial Workers staying at work. UFCW members supported the rally but said they had 'no beef' with their employers.

Strike leaders are planning similar action in other Ontario cities, leading - they hope - to a one-day province-wide general strike.

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Nigeria : the crisis continues, but so does the struggle !

Sean Coyne writes: The execution of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists turned the international spotlight onto Nigeria and the murderous Abacha military government. It revealed a regime propped up by petro-dollars where most live in conditions of squalor while a few live a life-style characterised by conspicuous and decadent consumption.

The corrupt Abacha regime, obsessed with securing its tenure, uses the most brutal methods to maintain control. Despite the bleating of the Foreign Office, it continues to be systematically armed to the teeth by the British Government and others.

Decades of divisive military rule and institutionalised corruption have created a massive vacuum in the body politic of Nigeria. Discredited politicians hauled out of retirement by Abacha to oversee the transition to civilian rule are the frontline apologists for the regime and have lined their pockets anew in readiness to 'do their patriotic duty and serve the country when called to do so.

The liberation of Nigeria will not be easy. The central task is to rebuild a popular, democratic opposition based on the active involvement of women, civil and human rights activists, trade unionists, environmentalists and all those demanding reparations for the pillaging of the national coffers.



Ken Saro-Wiwa.

A recent conference in Plateau State in Northern Nigeria represented a major step forward. Hundreds of courageous activists drawn from a wide range of organisations discussed how to build a united opposition.

The conference was a model of democracy. A large trade union delegation found common cause with other activists. All understood the need to build an opposition based on democratic principles, willing to test its unity in practice. The conference recognised the need for extending the solidarity campaign initiated by the Congress of South African Trade Unions and its Alliance partners to other parts of the world, and for the isolation of the Abacha regime.

The conference was a timely reminder that despite the rottenness at the centre of military power in Nigeria, there are thousands of people deeply committed to democratic social transformation. They deserve our enthusiastic support.

US Labor Party to be formed

Fred Whitehead of US radical publication, *Labor Notes*, looks at the latest successes and difficulties in building an American Labor Party.

FOR SEVERAL years now, Tony Mazzochi, former President of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers Union, has been promoting the idea of a US Labor Party via Labour Party Advocates (LPA). In comparison to past efforts, LPA have achieved some notable successes: a few smaller national labour unions have endorsed the project including Mazzocchi's own oil workers, the railroad maintenance of way (track repair) union, the United Electrical, and west coast Longshoremen. It also appears that LPA is drawing some support from rank-and-file militants and some regional union officers in places like the striking "war zone" of central Illinois. Support is also noticeable in the San Francisco area.

Interest in the idea of an American Labor Party has increased as a result of Clinton's betrayal of union interests. In particular, the two major parties collaborated to support the free-trade NAFTA treaty, which has deepened the devastation of US industries with large-scale factory closures and a job flight to Mexico.

LPA now projects its transformation into a proper Labor Party at a national convention to be held in Cleveland on June 6-9th. However, leading up to that event LPA has prohibited local chapters from endorsing any political candidates and from taking any political stands, thus making it difficult for LPA to have an impact on the Presidential election. It seems that the LPA's leadership is aiming to adopt the British Labour Party's recent tactics of working out policies from the top down. But while LPA has a useful newsletter, there is no mechanism for circulating programmes or platform proposals.

Similarly, the LPA's convention will have British-style rules for electing convention delegates, with most coming from unions which have endorsed LPA or which contribute financially. However, there are no real plans for the creation of "CLPs". This reliance almost entirely on union affiliates could create problems - few unions have endorsed the LPA, and none of them is a "major player". The leaders of these unions remain supporters of the Democrats.

Also, only about 13% of American workers belong to a union. This is a slim basis on which to build. Outreach to environmentalists, women and racial minorities, is not yet a priority for LPA.

In spite of this, the general crisis of American society is getting so severe that it is possible for a Labor Party to be forced to evolve beyond traditional unionism. For instance, a new leadership was elected to the American Federation of Labor - Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in September, in the first contested election in a century. This new leadership has proclaimed its support of militant action and organising the unorganised, but so far is unwilling to go beyond the Democrats on the political front.

LLB page 23

France waiting for a new flare-up?

An uneasy lull has followed the wave of strikes that overwhelmed France at the end of last year, writes Andre Cortes

THE DEATH of former socialist President Francois Mitterrand, in January, has overshadowed social conflict. But the potential for more conflict is enormous. "The plain is dry, and the smallest mistake could ignite it." commented *Le Point* (30.12.95).

President Jacques Chirac has announced that the main planks of the Juppe plan to reform the welfare system will stay. Economic success depends on an end to "budgetary laxity". This means raising charges, lowering benefits, and centralising fiscal control, even if concessions have been made on public sector pensions. Chirac's strategy stems not only from an attack on social spending, it is also constrained by the process of European integration begun by his predecessor.

Mitterrand believed that France's interests lay in European unity. He was the pillar behind the 1991 Maastricht Treaty. This committed the signers to the principle of "an open market economy with free competition".

For the head of the European Commission, Jacques Delors, this came with a social pact, represented by the Social Chapter of the Treaty. George Ross, in his study of Delors, comments that Maastricht was designed to "bring capital on board" for economic growth to save the "European model of society". (Jacques Delors and European Integration 1995). Trade was to be freed-up, and competition rules applied to end state monopolies. A common currency required the convergence criteria that force states to bring budget deficits and public debt to the lowest average.

As Jacques Santer has taken over the reins of power in the European Commission, free-marketeers, such as Leon Brittan, have argued for labour market flexibility and dropping any social dimension. Only cost-cutting measures, they argue, can restore competitivity in the global economy. The French state-sector is threatened with denationalisation; flexibility enroaches on the "statut" (legal status) of employees. For France, the convergence criteria mean a 13.2% reduction in public expenditure. With a growth rate envisaged at 1.7% or 1.3%, France is in a downward spiral of reduced state spending, and rising unemployment.

The Maastricht Treaty was passed by a slim minority in the French referendum of 1992. Tight budgetary controls on health and social security hit a system run by the "social partners" including union representatives. Not surprisingly an attack on this arrangement, in the name of the contested principle of European competitiveness, meets resistance.

The Communist-led Confederation Generale du Travail (CGT), and the business union, Force Ouvriere (FO), were not slow to show their hostility to the Juppe plan. Though unions organise under 10% of the workforce, they have been able to mobilise millions. In Bordeaux the streets rang to the sound of more demonstrators than in 1968.

The influential Group of 10, one of a number of cross-union bodies, has already called for renewed moblisation of employees to fight Juppe. The giant marches, and strikes, from the Railways (SNCF), to the electricity company (EDF), have been boosted by joint action by various "co-ordinations". New leaders such as the CGT railwayman, Bernard Thibault, have come forward. Less directly tied to the Communist Party than it used to be, the CGT has been able to embrace this emerging militant generation.

The movement against Juppe has also created divisions on the left. The modernisers in the Confederation Francaise Democratique du Travail (CFDT), have called for a "constructive dialogue" with the Government. Their leader, Nicole Notat, is backed by intellectuals from the Fondation Saint-Simon, and the journal *L'Esprit* - France's Blairites.

A larger group of intellectuals have backed the movement against the proposals. Pierre Bourdieu supported striking train-drivers at the Gare du Lyon. Bourdieu defended the "existence of the public service" against "the uncontested rule of the market".

Both right and left-modernisers consider that European integration requires weakening the part of the state that benefits ordinary people. They consider private provision of welfare, in civil society, to be better than the tax-financed distribution of benefits for all. The influence of these ideas is now weakened. However, the left is hampered by its small size in the National Assembly, and fragmentation. While the Socialist Party has sympathy for the strikers it has no alternative conception of Europe. For the unions and the left, the CGT, the Communists, the ex-socialist Mouvement des Cityones, and the alternative left groups, many problems remain. Further spectacular disputes will probably break out. More is needed. A genuine strategy to create a democratic collectivism and a Europe that proposes the international socialisation of public services and industry (from transport to health) has yet to be developed.

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POUM activists in Ken Loach's *Land and Freedom*.

Spain's defeated revolution

Tony Dale responds to Bryn Griffith's sympathetic portrait of the POUM in the Spanish Civil War.

Controversy on the left has surrounded the POUM's decision to sign the Popular Front's electoral platform and join the coalition government in Catalonia. Bryn, looking at *The Spanish Civil War: The view from the left*, defends the POUM's decision to sign the Left Electoral Pact. But Andy Durgan's article in the book argues that while the POUM had to vote for the Popular Front, they should not have endorsed its pro-capitalist programme by signing the Electoral Pact and by joining the Catalan coalition government. This seems to me a better assessment. There was a real desire among workers and peasants for fundamental socialist change. The workers and peasants had taken control of the many factories and large estates owned by Franco's supporters. The army had joined Franco's revolt and militias had been formed by the workers' organisations to fight the civil war.

The Popular Front acted as a counter-revolutionary force behind anti-fascist lines. The Communist Party played a central ideological and organisational role as they followed Stalin's orders to stop the revolution. His desires for an alliance with Britain and France meant destroying the revolution and making Spain safe for capitalism. The Popular Front's actions to protect capitalism did a lot to demoralise the workers and peasants and helped pave the way for Franco's victory.

The POUM were pulled in two directions - to defend workers and to preserve anti-fascist unity. This led to confusion and the POUM's inability to defend the workers fully in May 1937 in Barcelona, when the Stalinists and the Popular Front assault guards went in to evict workers from the Telephone Exchange and other buildings under workers' control. Barcelona workers responded with a spontaneous general strike and barricades in the streets. But after a few days the POUM and the anarchist trade union, the CNT, failed to push home their advantage and led a retreat. The POUM was banned soon after and faced vicious repression with members being murdered by the Stalinists.

These weaknesses in the POUM's policies have been highlighted in Felix Morrow's *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Spain*.

The early years of the POUM need to be looked at too. The POUM's origins in part go back to the Communist Left in Spain, a group built by Andres Nin as one of the biggest sections of Trotsky's Left Opposition.

In 1934 Nin's group had the opportunity of entering the Socialist Party. The left had control of the Socialist Party youth organisation and many sections of the Party. Caballero, the leader of the Socialist left wing, had condemned the Communist Party for reformism and the Socialist youth paper had openly called for Nin's group to join. Instead of joining the Socialists, Nin's group negotiated a merger with a dissident Communist group, the Workers and Peasants Bloc, to form the POUM in 1935. The Socialist left gradually came under the influence of the Stalinists. Its youth organisation merged with the Stalinists in 1936. The POUM's "sectarianism" to the mainstream workers' movement was as much a problem as its later softness on the Popular Front. ❑

Sri Lanka's unreported war

THE LAST FEW months have seen the worst attack the people of Jaffna have had to face. "Operation Liberation" has led to half a million Tamil people fleeing in terror from Government forces. Having walked for days without food, hundreds of thousands are now living in the open. The economic embargo, implemented since 1990 by the Sri Lankan Government, has meant that these refugees are facing starvation.

The Government of Chandrika Kumaratunga, which came to power last year promising to solve the ethnic issue through dialogue, has degenerated into racism and war-mongering. Preconditions to peace talks were agreed by the Government early this year, including the lifting of the embargo. But they have not been met and the Government has yielded to the military.

The armed forces' hatred of Tamils can be seen in the Navali Church incident: the air force dropped leaflets on the population in Jaffna - warning civilians in the rebel-held peninsula to seek refuge in Temples and Churches "to minimise the chance of death or injury in air strikes". They then dropped several bombs on St Peter's Church in Navali, killing more than 120 people who had taken refuge there.

Britain has lucrative deals with Sri Lanka. The Government gives about £8 million aid to Sri Lanka each year, sells arms and provides military training. The International Tamil Foundation is calling for world pressure to end this misery for the Tamils.

Contact: Campaign Against State Terrorism in Sri Lanka, c/o Church of the Ascension, Royce Road, Manchester M15 5FQ.

Sierra Leone's phoney war

***LLB* interviewed 'James', a Sierra Leonean socialist twenty four hours after the military leader of Sierra Leone, Captain Valentine Strasser, was overthrown in a coup led by his Deputy. At the age of 26, Strasser has retired to Guinea. The new regime has yet to spell out its intentions.**

Q: What is life like now in Sierra Leone ?

A: It is a beautiful country. Tropical, with abundant vegetation and rain. It has five million people. Hundreds of thousands have been displaced or killed in the civil war. Now two-thirds of the population live in the capital Freetown under very difficult circumstances. The war is primarily a phoney war between the military regime and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). The policies of the RUF are unclear. They are a small force with an awesome capacity to wage war, particularly in the rural areas.

Q: Why do you say it is a phoney war ?

A: I do not underestimate the terrible death and destruction., but much of the carnage allegedly carried out by the rebels was perpetrated by military elements disgruntled because while they were in the bush their senior officers were living like princes. The regime uses the threat of the rebels to silence all opposition. To expose the facts would be treason.

Q: Are the RUF a progressive force? Do they have any support?

A: I put my life and those I love at risk by answering this question. The RUF may have had good intentions: for democracy and against corruption and exploitation but it displays a ruthless disregard for life. It has a lot to answer for as it has murdered countless people in rural areas and exhausted the nation's resources in this pointless war which they could have settled peacefully. The war gave them access to fantastic wealth. Sierra Leone should not be poor. It has diamonds, gold and other precious metals. Most diamonds are smuggled out by the military. The Strasser regime turned into a caricature of the regime it overthrew because of corruption. Living standards have plummeted whilst the war provided a market for the arms trade.

Q: What are the prospects for peace ?

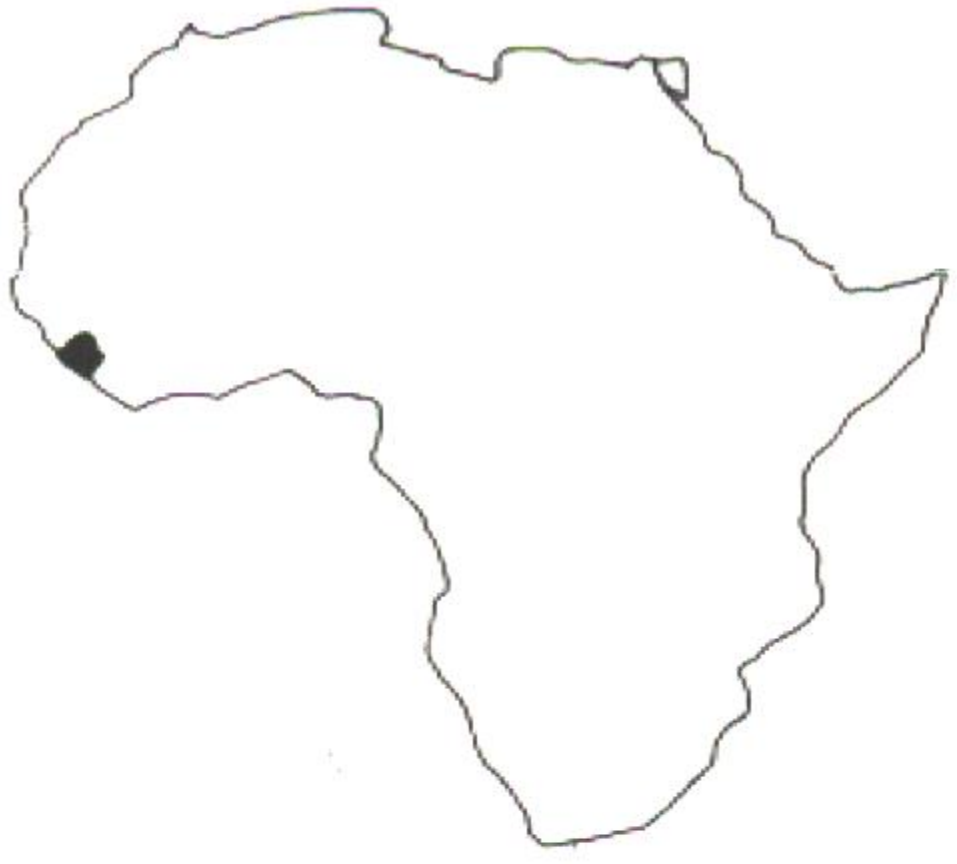
A: Elections were due this month. There was significant agitation for peace and democracy which the military had serious doubts about containing, given the splits and general demoralisation of ordinary soldiers. In Freetown nearly one hundred organisations (unions, students, market traders, women's groups, lawyers and churches) formed a coalition for peace and they refused to be intimidated. They have had thunderous rallies and have become a real force for change. Both the military and the RUF have agreed to listen to their demands.

Q: How did the Strasser regime hold on to power for so long if the army was decomposing ?

A: It became dependent on foreign forces from Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and elsewhere on the West Coast; Vietnamese and eastern European 'advisors', and a battalion of Nepal Gurkhas. Strasser could not trust his own officers. The worst is the activity of about 300 ruthless South African mercenaries. They are employed by Executive Outcomes (EO) which has offices in Johannesburg and London. EO works for the regime but is paid by De Beers, the South African diamond magnate, to `protect' the diamond mines for the regime. They want to ensure that De Beers is the only bidder for the mines following privatisation. The mercenaries are brutal and very well equipped. They have `taken out' whole villages because they were supposed to be rebel enclaves and have acted as Strasser's bodyguards. Multinationals capitalise on the selling off of the nation's wealth by prolonging war. The withdrawal of all foreign troops is an essential prerequisite for peace.

Q: What about workers' living standards ?

A: Inflation is incalculable: our currency is worthless. The mines are not operating. There has been an explosion of the low wage informal sector. Agriculture is virtually non-existent. Schools, hospitals and the limited social services have collapsed. In the cities, people often sleep six to a room. Fresh water and electricity are luxuries. children can strip MK47s blindfold but cannot read or write.

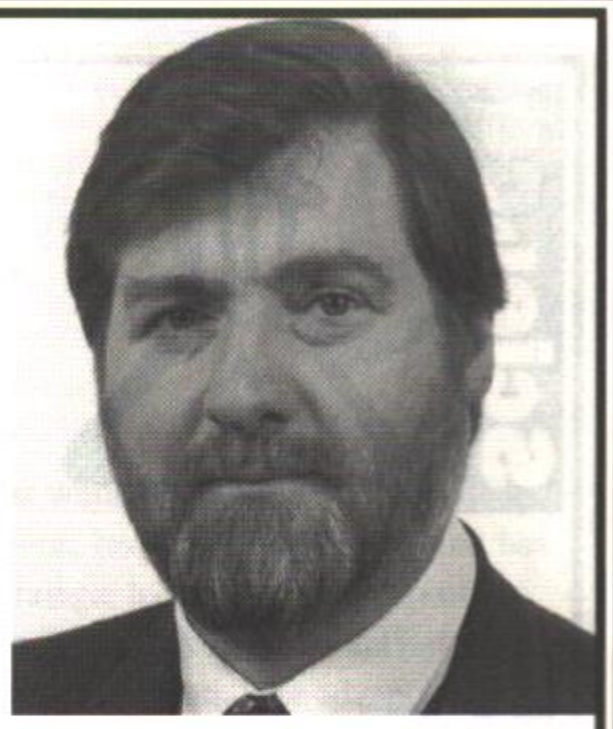


Q: What do you think the immediate future holds for you ?

A: Reconstruction and reconciliation is a priority. It will have to be established from below. The elections can put this centre-stage. An elected government with a mandate can begin demilitarisation. We have to assert people power. We must never allow ourselves to believe that military regimes, who present progressive demands when they seize power, will act in the people's interest. I have no illusions. The IMFs and the De Beers will always be able to influence the government. All change is a struggle between contending interests - those who have, and those who have not. I am optimistic as every day we see solidarity: people sharing what little they have. Our people have not become dehumanised but quite the reverse! Coalitions have been built which a few years ago would have been impossible to imagine. We have seen their capacity to mobilise. Workers are still organised, often against incredible odds. It's a miracle. The unions have campaigned hardest for democracy. The workers' movement has refused to die: it is growing! ❑

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Who wants the Euro?



Prospects for a single European currency are not going to improve in 1996, argues Michael Hindley, MEP.

FOR A WHILE now attention has focused on the Paris-Bonn axis when discussing the moves towards a single currency within the European Union. Most commentators seem to agree that Europe was the one area where Francois Mitterrand was actually consistent. Mitterrand, though disappointing all those dreams awakened by his victory in 1981, never varied from his - and the French political elite's - desire to get their hands, at least indirectly, on the German economy via a single currency.

The Bundesbank controls Europe, and only Germans can be on its board; but if the D-Mark is subservient to the ECU (or the EURO as a multi-million pound propaganda campaign by the EU at taxpayers' expense will soon start trying to persuade us to call it), then at least the European Central Bank will have French directors too.

However, a central bank and a single currency are certainly not in the interests of those who use or work in public services - given this path leads to accepting crippling monetary criteria laid down at Maastricht. Hence the spending cuts which caused the recent and soon to be repeated strikes in the public sector.

In 1996 the focus will shift to Italy and Ireland, who are next in turn to have the presidency of the EU. For both, the desire to join a single currency is greater than their ability to do so. The Italians were angry last year when Theo Waigel, the German Economics Minister, said that Italy would be unlikely to join a single currency in 1999.

A cursory reading of the press would allow anyone to make that judgement, but what was so shocking was that a responsible politician would let the cat out of the bag like that. The incident signalled that Germany intends to have a single currency in 1999; the only doubt is whether the single currency will be the EURO or the D-Mark.

Italy faithfully played the good European because the Italian establishment would prefer to have the rest of the EU pay for the 'backward' south rather than to have to pay for it alone. Italy is pulled two ways. Its elite - now run by a non-elected prime minister and former representative on the Monetary Union Committee, Dini - want 'in' to keep alive some vestige of influence, even though this means running the risk of civil strife as the monetary squeeze hits public spending.

On the other hand, since dropping out of the ERM and allowing its currency to find a more natural market level, the Italian economy has recovered, like the British economy, based on its exports becoming cheaper. Ireland, which takes over the baton in the summer, has a somewhat similar agenda; in return for being granted loads of Euro money, Irish governments have gone along with the Federalists and so far, despite massive pressure on the Irish Punt, have gone along with a single currency.

Economic sovereignty means little in a country of three million. Practically speaking, any organisation which guarantees six Punts back for every one put in, which realistically reflects the amount of money Ireland is granted by the EU in comparison to the amount of money it contributes, is a good idea.

In addition, European monetary union is preferable to the Irish political establishment than being part of the sterling zone. Better domination from Brussels, where there is the pretence of partnership, than continued and irksome domination by the Bank of England. However getting Ireland's huge national debt under control by 1999 can only worsen the staggering level of unemployment.

This all means that 1996 will only move us rhetorically nearer to a single currency. But as people rebel against the conditions necessary for it throughout the EU this year, there is a chance we can move off the disastrous course set at Maastricht.

The Beijing declaration and reproductive rights

THE OUTCOME OF the Fourth World Conference on Women last September was a Declaration and Platform for Action, which simply aims to "ensure equal access to and equal treatment of women and men in education and health care and enhance women's sexual and reproductive health as well as education."

Opposition to legalised abortion from fundamentalists and extremists meant that any demand for its decriminalisation throughout the world as the best way of ending unsafe practices was left out of the platform. In Britain, the National Abortion Campaign is launching a campaign for abortion on request.

For further information, phone (0171) 923 4979.

Science

Fighting the new irrationalism

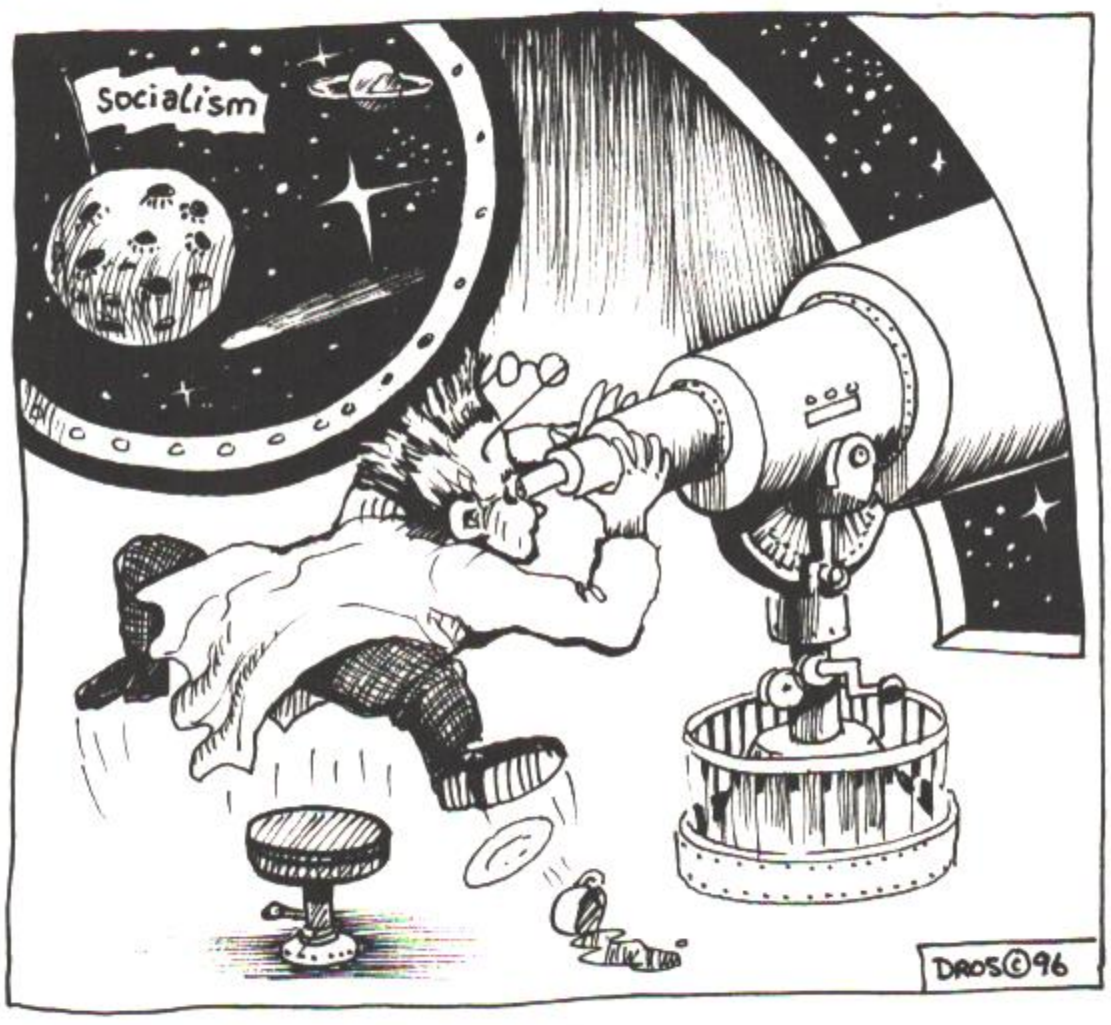
Our science correspondent Dr. Chris Knight (senior lecturer in Anthropology, University of East London) defends Richard 'selfish gene' Dawkins.

MYSTICISM IS becoming respectable. *The Sunday Times* has just joined the tabloids in providing a regular horoscope. The Queen Mother's favourite astrologer - one "Roly Poly" - reports that Princess Diana and Tony Blair both have their moon in Aquarius. This is astonishing, since on 12th January, 1996 Uranus went into.... Aquarius! Doesn't this portend that Blair is soon to "do for the country what Di has done for the monarchy"?

Meanwhile Richard Dawkins, having spent 1995 bashing God and Church, has opened the new year with an assault on related brands of superstition and quackery. He claims that Britain's growing army of star-watching charlatans are on to a good scam, gaining "respect" proportional with their accumulating riches. Tabloid readers learn how chauffeurs whisk court astrologers to fashionable restaurants where head waiters fawn over them. If royalty trust them, how can they be wrong?

While astronomers predict eclipses to within seconds, astrology's predictions, Dawkins points out, are bunk. Just a harmless bit of fun, then? Not really. The immensity of the universe is too awe-inspiring and beautiful to be debased in this way for quick takings. Such profiteering, to Dawkins, is like using Beethoven for commercial jingles. He urges that those cynics who profit from others' gullibility should be charged with offences under the Trades Description Act and jailed for fraud.

LLB readers might have expected Britain's best-known militant atheist to be popular on the left. But not so. The academic left long ago categorised Dawkins as among the most dangerous intellectual enemies of all. Late in the 1970s, a number of left-leaning worthies unfortunately read the title of Dawkins' groundbreaking book, *The Selfish Gene*. Noting that the words "selfish" and "gene" occur together, they concluded - in rare intellectual unanimity across the western academic world - that Dawkins must be peddling Thatcher's view of humans as inescapably, *genetically* selfish, in which case welfare and other interventions would violate natural law.



Marxist organizations such as the Socialist Workers' Party espouse this attitude even today. Before packed audiences at this party's annual event, "Marxism", scholarly specialists in insects and dolphins are still branded "Social Darwinists", lumped together with eugenicists, sexists and racists. Quotes from German Nazis about the Master Race are read out from the platform, "proving" just how vicious Richard Dawkins really is. Dawkins himself vigorously repudiates racism and all attempts to use Darwinism in justifying it.

His latest book, *River out of Eden*, shows how astonishingly closely related, genetically, humans of all skin colours are. Ironically, selfish gene Darwinism arose precisely in *opposition* to the "group selection" fallacy - the now-discredited idea that traits (such as aggression) evolve because they are "*good for the race*".

The *scientific* truth is that a gene has to be "selfish", or it is not a gene. In replicating, it has to replicate *itself*, not the genetic competition. Any compromise on this point, and it is soon out of business. To grasp the logic, consider Dawkins' own analogy of a *cultural* blueprint - such as the project for a wholly capitalist planet, or a socialist one. Either idea will survive only if it "selfishly" inspires replication of sufficient copies of itself inside peoples' heads. On this level, the socialist project must fight its own corner as ruthlessly as any opponent. Suppose there was a novel "mutation" within socialism. Suppose socialists then embraced a new and "kinder" logic, motivating them to argue not only for their own ideas, but also (more "generously") for the opposition's. In a cruelly competitive world, socialism would soon be extinct.

Genes then, like rival political ideas, cannot afford to be nice to one another. Even a blueprint for loving kindness must fight "selfishly" for its own survival. To say this is not to advocate Thatcherism. Dawkins stresses: "Nature is red in tooth and claw. But I don't want to live in that kind of world. I want to change the world in which I live in such a way that natural selection no longer applies".

In this light, Dawkins and his colleagues have found it hard to fathom the left's hostility to them. Why all the fuss? Not all "selfish gene" biologists are socialists. But as zealots for science, the more politically active among them are consistent, courageous iconoclasts and anticlerical radicals, exposing the idiocies of bishops, royals and court astrologers alike. In an age of increasing irrationalism and superstitious resignation, the left in all logic should rally behind their godless banner. ❑

Professor David McLellan
(author of The Thoughts of Karl Marx and Ideology*) reviews*
Democracy Against Capitalism, Renewing Historical Materialism
by Ellen Meiksins Wood (Cambridge University Press, 1995).

Review

THIS IS AN inspiring book for those on the left who feel that the idea of socialism is ebbing away. As the title suggests, Wood explores the concept of democracy in both the ancient and the modern world, and raises questions about how democracy might go beyond the limits imposed on it by capitalism. But more than this, Wood attempts to renew the critical understanding of historical materialism by redefining its basic concepts in original and imaginative ways.

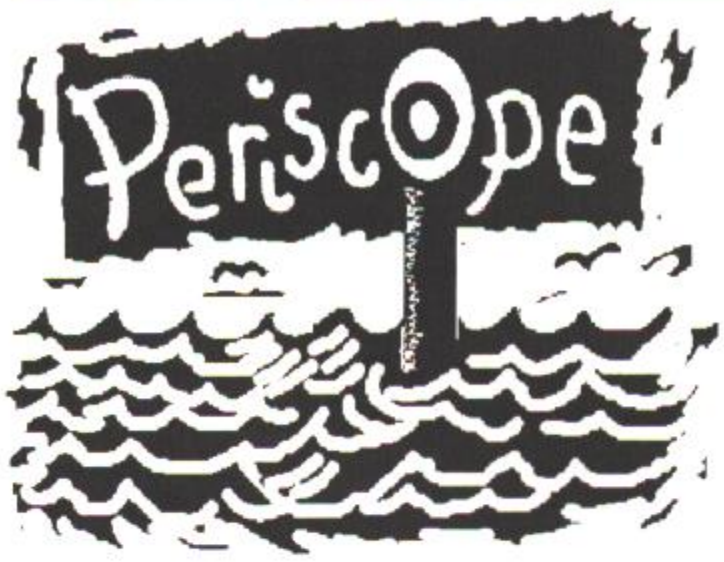
The book is an amended and supplemented collection of articles published over the last decade. It begins with Wood identifying what is distinctive about capitalism and the historical process that produced it. She is particularly good on the mistaken way in which capitalism is seen as the 'natural' culmination of the historical process. Her tracing of how capitalist practices and values are rooted in the relatively recent past restores not only its historic context but also its contestability.

Wood then examines one of the defining characteristics of capitalism: the separation of the political and the economic in society. She concludes that the transfer of 'political' powers to the economy and 'civil society' (of which the current mania for privatization is only the most striking example) has profound implications for the nature of the state and citizenship.

Wood's main thesis is that while capitalism has advanced democracy, it has also strictly limited it. Thus the greatest challenge to capitalism would be an extension of democracy beyond its narrowly circumscribed limits. This enlarged conception of democracy arguably here becomes synonymous with socialism.

However, Wood argues passionately against the replacement of socialism by an indeterminate concept of democracy. For her, the dilution of diverse social relations into catch-all categories like "identity" or loose conceptions of "civil society" represents a surrender to capitalism's ideological mystifications. Wood is not against pluralism and recognises the importance of the politics of, for example, race and gender. But she insists that while oppression may have equal moral claims, because class exploitation has a more strategic location at the heart of capitalism it may have a more universal reach, a greater potential for advancing other emancipatory struggles too.

The concluding message of this encouraging book is that democracy needs to be conceived as an economic as well as a political category - thus reversing the priorities of capitalism. If democracy were to become the driving mechanism of the economy, it would become emancipatory rather than, as at present, mystifying and frustrating. The democracy that socialism offers is one that is based on the reintegration of the economy into the political life of the community, which begins with its subordination to the democratic self-determination of the producers themselves. Some will say that Wood's ideas are utopian, but she is distinctly less utopian than those who believe that capitalism - however "social" - will ever produce a truly democratic and just society.



LLB - a disclaimer

The Guardian reported that **Emma Nicholson** had some reservations about joining the Conservative Party originally. But the boorish behaviour of the Marxist husband of a friend who came to dinner and was sarcastic about her avocados made her mind up. All male members of the *LLB* EB would like to deny responsibility.

Camden veto Sinn Fein

Camden Council has barred Sinn Fein from renting offices in Holborn even though it has a policy of supporting a united Ireland.

Initially, Council officers agreed to lease the party a property in Theobalds Road, but this was overturned after chief executive **Steve Bundred** referred the issue to Council leader Richard Arthur and local MPs Frank Dobson and Glenda Jackson.

Former Camden Labour Councillor **Angie Birtill**, chair of the Forum, said, "Sinn Fein is a legal organisation...therefore any attempt to deny them the right to rent premises is a denial of a civil right."

Steve Bundred was appointed last month to the £90,000-a-year job of chief executive. In a previous incarnation he was a GLC councillor, vice chair of its police committee, and a stalwart of the left who placed the cause of Ireland high on his list of priorities. His invitation to Gerry Adams to speak at a meeting in London in 1982 caused particular controversy.

Hopeless Hatty horrifies health conference

The calibre of Labour's front bench team was demonstrated by shadow Health Minister **Harriet Harman** at the Labour Party Health Conference in Skegness last November. Harriet's failure to grasp her economic brief when she was on the shadow Treasury team was legendary; would she find health more within her capability?

The conference was attended by Party members with a special interest in health. Many were health professionals with a wealth of expertise. They were stunned when Harriet's speech consisted of a catalogue of the Tories' crimes - telling the audience everything they knew. Irritation turned to outrage when Harriet swanned off after her speech, when the discussion began. Uproar followed with several speakers attacking her contemptuous attitude. Still, contempt for Party members probably comes naturally to the woman who expects them to support her decision to send one of her children to what is a grammar school!

Sky's the limit

The first concrete benefit to **Rupert Murdoch** of his recent liaisons with **Tony Blair** has come in a monopoly row over BSkyB. In November **Richard Caborn**, Labour's shadow minister for competition and regulation, demanded that the Monopolies and Mergers Commission investigate B Sky B's "pay-TV" monopoly. He was immediately slapped down by **John Prescott**. The demand was withdrawn.

Windbags for the Tories?

Neil Kinnock, never one to pick the best advisers, was caught out in Brussels recently. He went to speak to the Tory MEPs, as EU Transport Commissioner. The event turned out to be a fundraiser for the Tories. Fortunately, knowing Kinnock's history, it probably lost money.

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CORRESPONDENCE

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

Write to:

Labour Left Briefing
PO Box 2378
London E5 9QU



Arthur Scargill is right to say that socialists cannot expect anything from the Labour Party. *LLB*'s response is nothing short of hysterical.

Ken Livingstone's piece was illogical: you have to fight inside the labour movement in a first past the post system. Scargill is definitely not suggesting going outside the labour movement and to equate the labour movement with the Labour Party is nonsensical. Livingstone's optimism regarding the next Labour Government has no foundation.

Alan Simpson is equally devoid of ideas. The left has been hanging on to a strategy of 'wait until after Labour has been elected' since 1900. But his idea for a new analysis of capital and class is long overdue.

Liz Davies has the honesty to suggest that all the terrible things that have happened in the Party may constitute "...a fundamental break with Labour's social constituency and with the broader labour movement", implying that socialists may need to leave the Party at some point. But she also says let's get Labour elected first.

The problems with Scargill's paper are more fundamental than the superficial responses in *LLB* suggest.

First, Clause IV was the only "sign" that the Party was committed to "abolishing capitalism" and the Communist Party was never in the Labour Party - it was refused affiliation when it applied in 1920.

Second, he equates socialism with trade unionism. The trade unionists who formed the Labour Representation Committee in 1900 constituted the right-wing majority. The Party has always been a coalition of reformers and socialists, with the former in a permanent majority.

Third is Scargill's insistence on the new party being a "class" party called Socialist Labour Party. Socialists have never been too sure of their understanding of a class analysis of capitalist societies. And what's wrong with the name Socialist Party?

Despite these serious reservations, Scargill is to be congratulated. It is not now, and never will be, the right or wrong time to start a new Socialist Party. Ralph Milliband suggested it over ten years ago. Why not do it now?

Paul Allender
London

It is apt for our left-wingers to admonish Arthur Scargill, for they are the ones who betrayed him (along with all the rest of us). Arthur is the cleverest and most decent of us all and should be running the country. Whereas he hasn't ever even been nominated as a candidate.

If we really wanted to win we would get hold of Mr Scargill and thump him till he agreed to stand - in Gedling, say. We former Gedling colliers have had ample time to reflect that he was right in 1974, he has been right about everything ever since, and we are now about to make him right to set up a new party.

It doesn't have to be like this.

Guy Benians
Hove

Over a number of years the Labour Party has moved steadily to the right, following the Tories in every policy. Over the last year this process has accelerated. The Labour Party has abandoned all commitment to common ownership and, by constitutional changes within the Party, has effectively removed all methods of challenging this, reducing the Party to a leadership support group.

These developments take place in a context of relentlessly increasing attacks by the Tories on the welfare state, black people, single mothers, and trade unions. An opposition party is needed which tackles the Tories' system rather than simply following it into power, and which campaigns more widely than issue-by-issue, important though that is.

Several suggestions have been promoted. For example, Arthur Scargill has written a contribution to this debate. Local discussions are already taking place, notably where industrial struggles are to the fore. It is important that this debate embraces as many people as possible who have a commitment to promoting socialism and putting them into practice through all means available.

People in this country are desperate to kick the Tories out of office. However people want this because they are desperate to restore public services. This requires a shift in wealth and power, from those who have done well out of the Tories towards those who haven't, and a commitment to reverse the damage done by the Tories, not to accept their system while assuring the public that it will somehow be managed more nicely.

In short, we need to develop socialist policies, campaigns and political representation as an alternative to New Labour and its prospective Lib-Dem coalition. To end the 17 years of Tory misrule we need to say "there is an alternative". Then 1996 will see a real victory for the people of this country.

John Nicholson
Manchester

Either Paul Richards is suffering from selective amnesia or there is an imposter masquerading as him at labour movement events. Whatever the case, a dead ringer for Paul Richards, calling himself Paul Richards, approached me at Labour Youth Conference earlier this year with a quote for *Briefing*. "Tell your readers", he said, "now we're winning on Clause IV, it's the union link next!" *Briefing* had just gone to press, so I gave the story to *Tribune* instead. It would appear that this throwaway remark made by his mischievous double has got the real Paul Richards into trouble.

A third possible explanation might be that Paul Richards is just a lying spineless hypocrite who lacks the courage to stand by his remarks.

Paul Field
Canterbury Labour Club

SOCIALIST PIANIST/SINGER FOR HIRE
RING:
01226-727473

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I read the responses of the Editorial Board, Ken Livingstone, Liz Davies and Alan Simpson to Arthur Scargill's discussion paper on "A Future for the Left?" with keen interest. However, this was mixed with a realisation that all but Livingstone appear to have failed to consider all the potential scenarios during the term of the next Labour Government.

The Labour Party is committed to holding a referendum on electoral reform for the House of Commons during its first term. This commitment was overwhelmingly endorsed at the 1995 Conference, with delegates like myself massively outnumbered.

When, or if, a referendum is held (and I hope it is not) I believe that the pro-reform campaign will be successful as the electorate will be increasingly fed-up with the leadership of both mainstream political parties and the failure of a Labour Government to deliver real reform.

Once electoral reform is in place for general elections the argument for sustaining the 'broad church' of Labour will collapse, especially when one understands the leadership's strategy of taking Labour into some sort of alliance with the Liberal Democrats.

This strategy is built upon the leadership's understanding that they will need Liberal Democrat votes to marginalise left-wing Labour MPs and to ensure the centre left wins an election under PR.

What socialists in the Labour Party will have to wrestle with mid-way through a Labour Government is whether to stay in a party that has failed to deliver social reform and ignores the demands of the left. Or, alternatively, to seek to create a new socialist party that can perhaps secure the pivotal, third party status that electoral reform engenders.

That will be the difficult choice that faces us all in eight months time. Scargill is too early with his suggestions, but Ken Livingstone touched upon the possible future in his *LLB* article.

What is certainly not the issue is that we should stay in the Labour Party in perpetuity, to stop New Labour getting total control of the real estate and associated goodwill!

Geoff Lumley
Isle of Wight

The *Spectator* is a nasty, vicious publication. I do not understand how anyone who supports the *Spectator* line would possibly want, with integrity, to be a Labour MP, unless it is just to cause trouble and conflict within the Party. Yet flicking through a 1980 back file of the house rag of the Tory right, I noticed a number of articles penned by a young barrister calling himself Anthony Blair. I gather that this man has since been adopted as Labour's Prospective Parliamentary Candidate for Sedgefield, and trust that Clare Short will now be campaigning for his endorsement to be overturned.

David Osler
Islington

I see that your football correspondent scored an own goal again when he dismissed in advance the Campaign for a Democratic and Fighting Unison's vote in Unison's General Secretary election. He must have choked on his cappuccino when he heard the results.

On a serious note, the shock to all of us on the left was the strength of Peter Hunter's vote. His campaign was organised with the help of the Catholic Church; his platform was clearly anti-abortion, homophobic and racist, yet he received 93,402 votes. This result reveals that there is a significant right-wing layer in our union which is at the moment unorganised.

With 151,893 votes, Bickerstaffe failed to obtain half the votes cast. This obviously was a disappointment. The lack of a national fight-back against privatisation and the sell-out on the NHS pay have led to the disillusionment of activists and members, which his vote reflects.

Roger Bannister, the CFDU candidate, got 58,052 votes - more than a third of those cast for Bick. This indicates that he was a credible candidate and that there is genuine support for a fighting national strategy for action against Government attacks. The SWP candidate came a distant fourth.

We should support Bickerstaffe when he stands up for our union's policies against Blair (e.g. minimum wage or Clause IV). But we must also put pressure on him to organise, now and under Labour, action in defence of jobs and conditions. That is why the CFDU is important.

Fred Leplat
London CFDU Convenor

Why is *LLB* giving a platform to Geoff Martin? His vitriolic attacks on Unison's left hardly qualify as "A lefty look at life". Martin's bitterness is not surprising. He backed Bickerstaffe for General Secretary of Unison. Despite having the whole weight of the bureaucracy behind him, Bick got 48% of the vote, not the predicted 80+%.

Hunter, the unknown right-winger, came second with 29%. His campaign offered a low-key populism counterposing pay and conditions issues over political causes.

Unison's leadership have failed to deliver, leaving the field wide open for Hunter's attacks. Martin raises the hope that if Bickerstaffe breaks with Blair a future Labour Conference could possibly agree to a public sector pay rise. Our members can't wait that long.

Hunter attacked Unison's support for the self-organisation of women, blacks, gays and lesbians and the disabled. Bickerstaffe in fear turned against self-organisation. Will Martin follow his leader? Will *LLB* support this turn?

The candidate from the CFDU gained 18% of the vote, higher than we expected at this stage of our development. This is despite having a split left vote. The SWP scored 5% and many genuine lefts supported Bickerstaffe (don't confuse Martin with these genuine lefts). If the whole left had united behind the CFDU we would have overtaken Hunter and seriously challenged Bickerstaffe.

The CFDU has established a solid base on which to build both an effective opposition and a future alternative leadership. Martin's problem is that he wants neither.

Paul Wozny
Deputy Branch Secretary
Hampshire Unison

As one of the "toy town" revolutionaries attacked by Geoff Martin, I would like to respond. Geoff sees these issues through the distorted mirror of Unison's Affiliated Political Fund (ie not the whole union). So he lumps together the votes for the two left candidates with that of the far right Peter Hunter. Why? Because they are "anti-Labour Party candidates".

This crude amalgam reeks of Stalin's show trials. Next Geoff will be saying Roger put glass in the food served in the Unison HQ's canteen! This analysis becomes even more bizarre as Peter Hunter is rumoured to be in the process of joining "New Labour" and will soon be part of Geoff's beloved APF.

What the election demonstrated is that the Unison bureaucracy represented by Bickerstaffe is being squeezed from both the left and the right. The 58,000 votes received for Roger Bannister and 15,000 received by Yunus Bakhsh represented an advance for the left. They were votes for member control, democracy, self-organisation and a real fight against low pay and cuts.

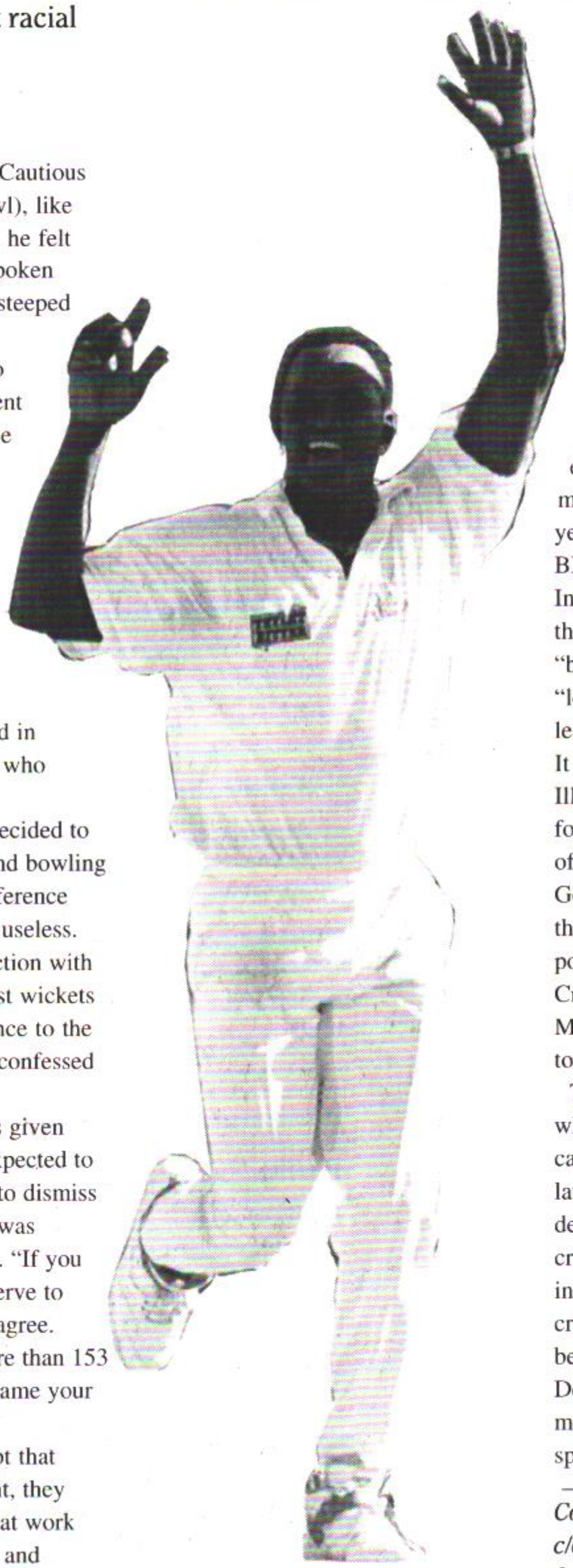
The result proves that Bickerstaffe has a weak mandate, with large minorities to his left and right. Geoff should join those of us in Unison who are trying to build a left that will be democratic in its operation and will be based on activists from all of the old partner unions. His abusive, dishonest and negative style is not helping this.

Mike Tucker
Secretary, Southampton Unison (Local Government)

LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

Race before wicket

Mike Marqusee lifts the seam on cricket's latest racial imbroglio.



FOR A DECADE Devon Malcolm kept his counsel. Cautious and mild-mannered (except when running in to bowl), like many professional cricketers, both black and white, he felt that discretion was the better part of valour. Stroppy or outspoken individuals enjoyed few chances of advancement in a game steeped in hierarchy and deference.

So the provocation must have been extreme for Malcolm to imply, in an article in the *Daily Express*, that his maltreatment by England cricket manager Raymond Illingworth might have something to do with racism.

Back in October, Malcolm had left for South Africa in confident vein. He had just won substantial damages from *Wisden Cricket Monthly* for its publication of Robert Henderson's article claiming that black players were unwilling and unable to give their best to the England cause. There were promises of fast pitches and memories of his nine wicket haul against the South Africans at the Oval in 1994. In the townships he found himself lionised and in Soweto he was singled out for praise by President Mandela, who dubbed him "the destroyer".

Within days of that honour the English tour management decided to put the black man back in his place. Raymond Illingworth and bowling coach Peter Lever held an extraordinary pool-side press conference whose only purpose was to tell the world that Malcolm was useless. Apparently, they had decided to try to change the bowling action with which the 32 year old Malcolm had taken more than 100 Test wickets and were peeved at the fast bowler's understandable resistance to the idea. Even a die-hard Tory authoritarian like E.W. Swanton confessed himself appalled at such clumsy management.

Dropped from the side for most of the series, Malcolm was given little chance to bowl himself into form, but was somehow expected to come up with the goods in a moment of crisis. His inability to dismiss the tail-enders in South Africa's first innings at Cape Town was publicly blamed for England's loss of the Test and the series. "If you can't bowl out the last pair with the new ball, you don't deserve to win," declared Illingworth, and Mike Atherton appeared to agree. Neither were prepared to concede that if you can't score more than 153 in the first innings on a reasonable pitch, you ought not to blame your bowlers for losing the game.

While most English cricket pundits were prepared to accept that Malcolm had been badly treated by the England management, they have rejected out of hand his suggestion that racism may be at work here. With uncharacteristic speed and decisiveness, the Test and County Cricket Board has repudiated Malcolm's comments and fined him £10,000 for making them.

In doing so, the TCCB may well have violated the 1976 Race Relations Act, under which it is illegal to victimise an employee for making an allegation of racism. Certainly, any impartial investigation of Malcolm's claim would examine the racist remarks made by Illingworth over the years, including assertions on BBC television that West Indians "don't think" about the game, that they have "bigger shoulders" and are "looser" and therefore need less training than the English. It would also consider Illingworth's strong support for the sanctions-busting tours of South Africa led by Graham Gooch and Mike Gatting and the "Yorkshire-born-only" policy of Yorkshire County Cricket Club that led Malcolm, raised in Sheffield, to play for Derbyshire.

The Malcolm affair confirms what the Hit Racism for Six campaign has argued since its launch last summer. Racism is deeply rooted in English cricket and has many friends in high places in the English cricket establishment. Our best hope is that now that Devon has shown the way, more black cricketers will speak out.

Contact Hit Racism For six c/o the (excellent) cricket fanzine Johnny Miller 96 Not Out, 9 Whitehall Park, London, N19 3TS.

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