LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

July 1996 price £1 conc. 50p

save the peace process!

inside...

- Blair's beef blunder
- post worker's action
- Straw's authoritarianism
- US Labor Party formed
- Nigeria

Labour Left Briefing

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LLB is taking a two month summer break. Subscriptions will be extended accordingly.

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Front cover photo: Mal, *An Phoblacht.*

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Blair's British beef blunder

BACKING THE TORY Government in its ludicrous policy of 'non-co-operation' in Europe was bad enough, but attacking it for 'climbing down' over the beef crisis was worse. Clearly that 'good European' Tony Blair, who regularly lectures trade unions on the realities of a global economy, is quite prepared to play the nationalist card when it suits him.

From the beginning, Labour failed to grasp the real significance of the beef crisis. First this was not merely about Government blunders. This was about intensive cattle rearing; the sacrifice of all human and environmental concerns in the drive to maximise profits and the impact of the capitalist mode of production, taken to extremes, on the food chain. And it was about the power of a numerically small vested interest - the agri-business giants - to distort scientific research and shape Government policy. For historical reasons, this vested interest exercises tremendous clout within the Conservative Party. It has been allowed to portray its short-term financial interests as 'the national interest' - and Labour has failed to cry foul.

That the immediate dangers of BSE or CJD are minimal is not the issue. Other countries, European and non-European, have every right to prefer to buy their beef from other sources, as do ordinary consumers in Britain. Of course it is the poor, here and abroad, who end up buying cut-price beef.

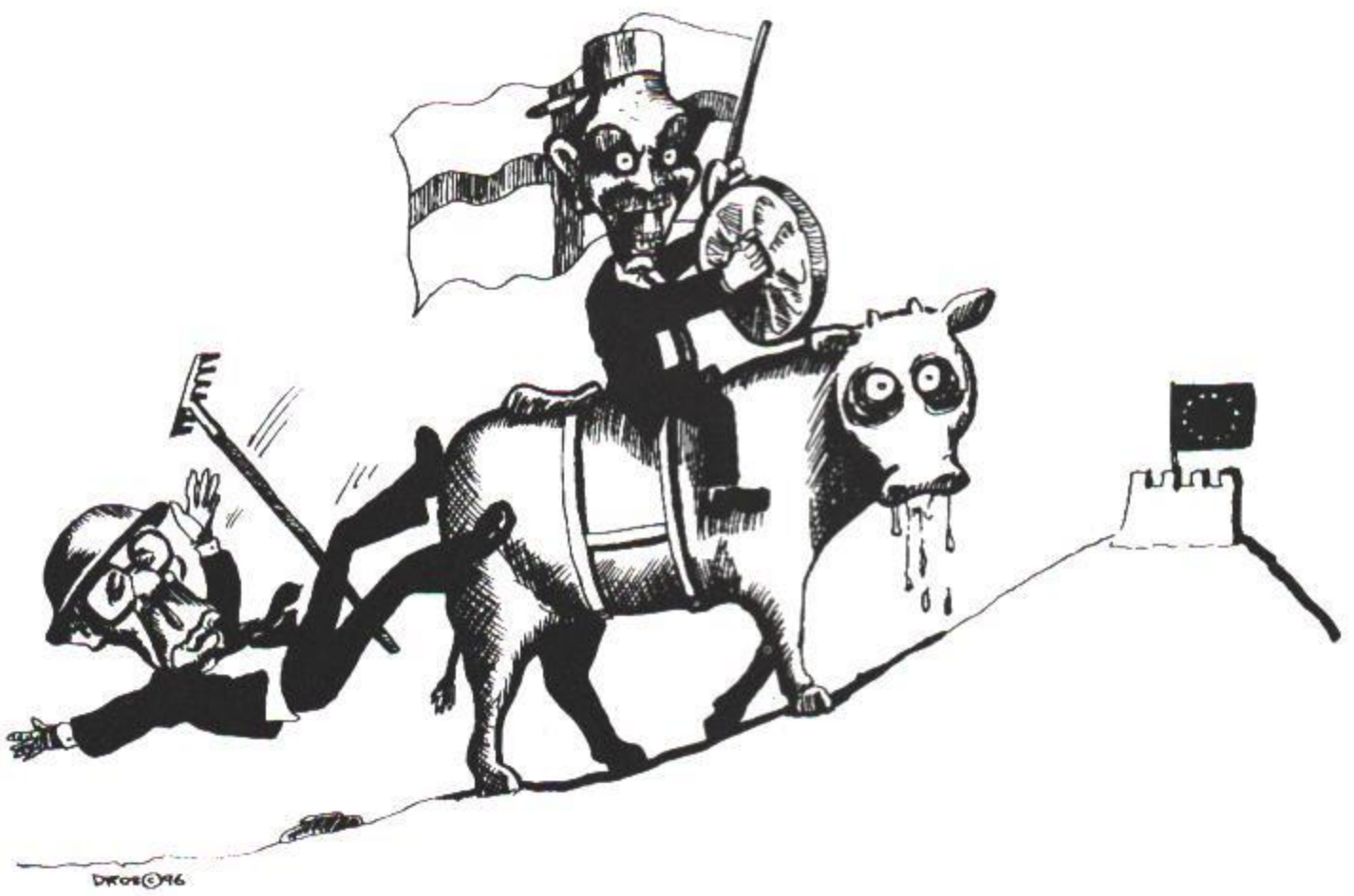
The real message of this fiasco was that capitalism can be very bad for your health and that governments beholden to big business will lie to you about what is or is not safe to eat. Unwilling to suggest that the profit motive could be anything other than a blessing for our species, Blair defended 'British beef'. And Robin Cook, that ardent European so admired by sections of our left intelligentsia, showed yet again that when push comes to shove he takes the course of least resistance, which in this case meant floating with the xenophobic tide.

Just what was the point of decrying the beef deal as a 'rout'? Is 'national pride' more important than the health of millions across Europe (including those in Britain) however small the risk? Is scoring a cheap political point over a doomed Tory Government more important than stemming the tide of xenophobia?

As so often, Blair, like his henchman Straw, wrongly assumed that the know-nothing bigots spoke for the people. In fact, the public reaction to the beef crisis has not been at all what either the Tories or the tabloids had hoped. Yes, many people in this country hanker after the old imperial greatness; but many others live in the real world where Britain is just one country among many and where international co-operation for environmental protection is assumed to be a good thing.

The Tories have been forced to shy away from an all-out Euro-battle because the public won't wear it. In that context, Labour's denunciation of the beef deal seems not only unprincipled but also impractical. Blair has placed the Party to the right of the Tories on a defining issue not only for economic policy but also for the whole culture of political discussion and the very temper of British society.

Nor is Blair's beef blunder merely an aberration. In the *New Statesman*, Kim Howells penned an extraordinarily uncritical paean to economic 'competition' and an unfettered private sector. Among the more bizarre arguments he advanced was that what the country needs is 'access for our companies in European and world markets, which means that the European Commission had better get off its Armani-clad bottom and start sorting out the protectionists in Germany and France.'



But no one should be surprised that those who not long ago insisted that Labour back the deflationary, anti-poor, pro-business Maastricht treaty, who painted left critics as 'little Englanders', should now be the first to fall into line when the bugle of national chauvinism sounds. This contradiction is at the heart of Blairism which seeks to pander at one and the same time to the international business elite and to the most backward elements of the British electorate.

On his trip to the US in April, the leader promised that people on what he called 'middle incomes' would pay no more tax under a Labour Government. Blair's appeal is not to the 'middle class' but to the rich. Of course, the New Labour apologists will tell us that everyone wants to be middle class these days; the leader must address their aspirations. But according to MORI, 63% of the British population defines itself as 'working or lower class'. And these are the people who stand to benefit most from an upgrading of universal benefits and increased investment in infrastructure and public services. Blair's line seems to be to offer tax cuts to the rich - and social authoritarianism, spiced with nationalist posturing, to the rest. ❑

IRISH PEACE IN JEOPARDY...

Time for new ceasefire

On Saturday 15th June the IRA bombed Manchester leaving over 200 injured. The area bombed by the IRA is in the heart of Manchester Central constituency. Many of the injured will be central Manchester residents who in elections vote for the local Labour Party. Manchester Central Constituency Labour Party has recently had extensive discussions on Northern Ireland and the peace process. At the end of March after the IRA bombing of London the CLP passed a motion expressing "regret at the breakdown of the IRA's ceasefire" calling for "the reinstatement of the ceasefire" and stating "John Major shares responsibility for the ceasefire breakdown for not making quicker progress and for placing preconditions in the way of all party talks".

The motion called for Sinn Fein's inclusion in any talks. "The peace process can only move forward with the consent of both communities. All sides need to keep talking to keep the peace process alive. there needs to be a move to all party talks. No party, including Sinn Fein (SF), should be excluded from any talks."

Criticism was also levelled at Labour's front bench. "In the present crisis situation it would be irresponsible for Labour to continue with its bi-partisan policy of giving full

Tony Dale
Manchester Central CLP

backing to the Tories every twist and turn on the Irish peace process. Labour should keep talking to all sides including SF. This Labour Party believes the Parliamentary Labour Party made a serious mistake in not voting against the Prevention of Terrorism Act. Finally we support any moves by the labour movement in Northern Ireland for united political action in support of a just and lasting peace and in defence of jobs and services."

The IRA's reply to efforts by the Manchester labour movement to support the peace process is the bombing. Manchester has traditionally been sympathetic to the cause of a united Ireland and has a big Irish population. That this bombing can be part of a campaign to liberate Ireland is beyond belief. The effect of this and other IRA actions will be to reduce support for demands to admit SF to talks.

In the aftermath of the bombing an Irish pub in Middleton, just outside Manchester, was attacked and an Irish centre in Cheetham Hill received a series of threatening and abusive calls.

SF received an increased mandate in the recent elections in N.Ireland. Many people turned out to vote SF in the hope that a bigger mandate would help get them access to the talks by increasing pressure on the Tory Government and by strengthening the position of those inside SF and the IRA who want a new ceasefire. The impact of this increased vote for SF has been destroyed by the Manchester bombing.

The Manchester bombing is the logical outcome of the IRA's latest military campaign. No longer do Republicans believe they can win a war against the British military. Therefore at present the military campaign avoids clashes with British army units and looks for high profile actions to attract big publicity.

This military campaign is going nowhere. The central obstacle to a united Ireland is the desire of a million Northern Irish Protestants to remain in the UK. From the SF and the IRA's position the present campaign is completely counter-productive. The IRA's actions are lifting any pressure on the Tory Government to include SF in the talks. John Major's mishandling and bungling of the opportunities presented by the IRA's 18 month long ceasefire cannot justify the London and Manchester bombings. The danger is the next bombing could go badly wrong leaving scores of innocent people dead. The time has come for a new ceasefire. ❑

LLB editorial statement

The Canary Wharf bombing signalled a tragic end to the IRA ceasefire. It was the prevarication of John Major with an eye to the Westminster arithmetic and his bipartisan support from Blair that wrecked the ceasefire brokered so carefully by Adams, Hume, the Irish Government and Irish Americans.

The Manchester bomb illustrates the further dreadful consequences of allowing the peace process to unravel. We stated at the time of the end of the ceasefire that socialists in Britain should focus on one question - what can we do to help bring about peace in Ireland?

Today, after Manchester we must ask the question again with increased vigour. If the peace process remains at its current impasse more Manchesters and worse are likely to happen. The consequences of an end to the loyalist ceasefire would be incalculable.

Many in Britain will respond with condemnation and calls to isolate Sinn Fein. Nothing could be more mistaken. If there is any truth in the reports of splits within the Republican movement such an approach would strengthen the militarists. In contrast it is the politics of dialogue and negotiation that strengthens and nurtures the Adams wing of the Republican movement.

Politicians in Britain have not learnt the lesson of the Hume-Adams initiatives - dialogue and negotiation can achieve more than years of the sterile politics of condemnation.

LLB is unequivocal and enthusiastic in its support for a renewed ceasefire but the point is to create the conditions to make it possible.

For those in the Labour Party that means we must tackle that greatest of enemies of peace - bipartisanship. In the run up to Labour Party Conference we must argue that to promote the peace process Labour must break with John Major.

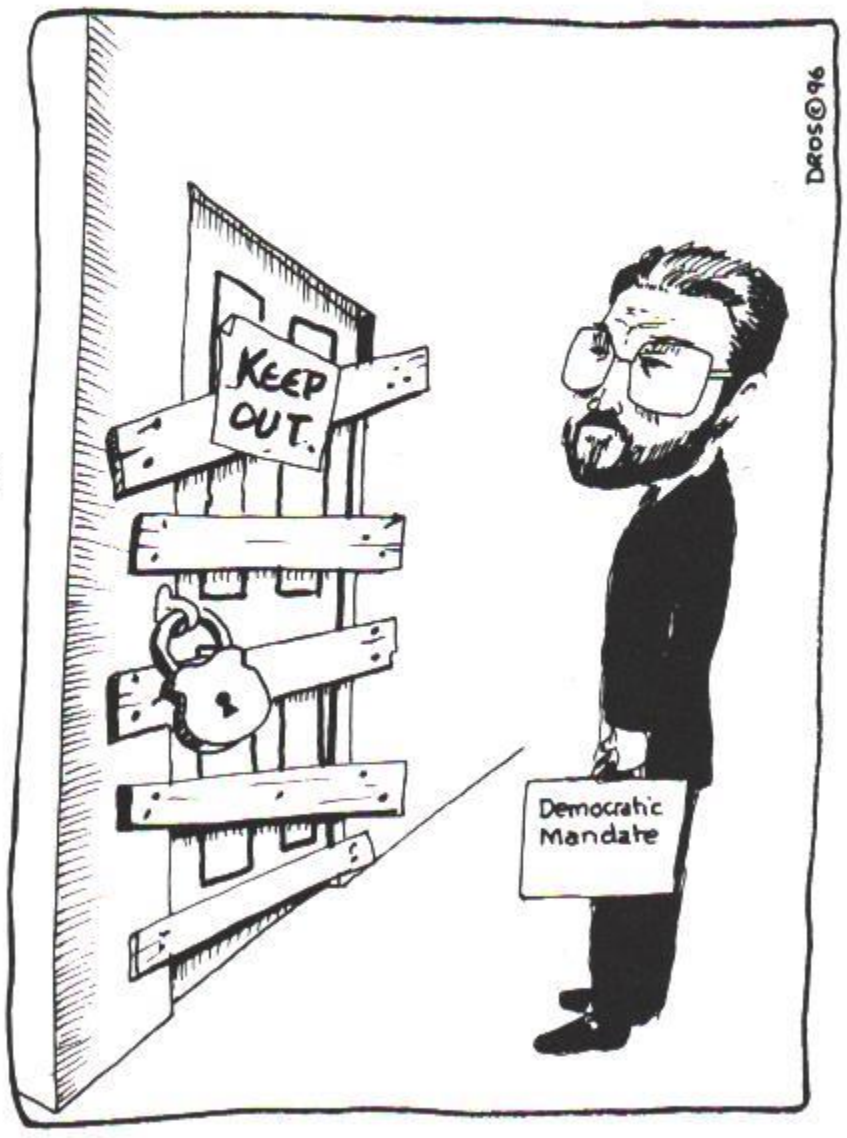
We must do all within our power to ensure that Sinn Fein's impressive mandate at the recent elections is recognised in full. Sinn Fein must have an unconditional place at the peace talks. The current talks are a farce as it is impossible to talk peace without including all the parties concerned. ❑

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How does 'Manchester' help the peace process?

WHO'S TO BLAME ...?

***LLB* questions Bobby Lavery, Sinn Fein (SF) councillor for North Belfast on Belfast City Council and former member of the British army.**



BL: When the Forum Elections were announced (and scheduled for 30th May) I had some very severe reservations about SF taking part - there should have been a nationalist boycott - but the opportunists in the SDLP won the argument. Once they declared against a united nationalist front we had to run to defend our vote.

The long delay over the abstention debate meant that we were eventually set on an election footing quite late. The initial feeling was that this was not going to work. However, when we started canvassing, the reaction was great. There was a very strong feeling against John Major's treatment of our organisation and the peace strategy. On the morning after the vote when the results came out I couldn't believe it. In north Belfast we had a sweepstake for the nearest to the vote. Most of us were well below the final figure.

***LLB*: What did you make of the vote for the loyalist PUP?**

BL: I was disappointed by the turnout for the PUP. I see them on a learning curve, a long way down that process, but they should be engaged.

***LLB*: How do you read the 116,377 votes for SF?**

BL: I believe that this vote is a clear public acceptance of the SF analysis, an endorsement of our strategy and that there should be no disarmament. In fact, soon after the election we met with some visiting officers of the South African army who stated their view that decommissioning was a non-starter and one highlighted the flaw when he noted that "anyone with a little know-how can make a bomb."

***LLB*: What's the prospect of all-party talks?**

BL: I don't think that the British Government is prepared to confront the Unionists at present and that's what is needed. But it will happen. They are ignoring our electoral mandate.

***LLB*: How does the bomb in Manchester and the shooting of two Gardai in Co. Limerick assist the peace process?**

BL: Now there's a great question. I don't know! I was saddened by both events, especially the death in Ardare. The saddest thing about it all is that the British Government, who can stop it, is not doing so. The IRA is a totally independent organisation, but you're quite right to ask SF why. We don't have the answer. But as long as the British army remains in Ireland, Irish people have the right to take up arms to oppose them. We are at a moment in history that a total cessation of violence from the IRA is possible - it could happen - there are a few hurdles left. We are heading there slowly. But the British Government needs to show and keep good faith, something it failed to do when the last ceasefire was called and for the 18 months it lasted.

I'm not going to engage in condemnation - that's not a game I play. I'm in the business of conflict resolution. Would my condemnation have made the loyalists who killed my brother change their attitude?

That death and the other violent acts are part of an ongoing war that was created by an outside force. The proper response is to ask the question why?

Gerry Adams

The bomb attack in Manchester and the killing eight days earlier of Garda Jerry McCabe have clearly caused personal anguish to the family and friends of Garda McCabe and to those injured in Manchester, as well as grave political difficulties...Sinn Fein has made its position absolutely clear on both these incidents. Obviously, these difficulties need to be addressed and overcome...I am asked if Sinn Fein supports the armed struggle of the IRA. I want to see an end to all armed actions. Some members of Sinn Fein, like those in other parties, may have a different view, but Sinn Fein policy on the conflict is contained in our peace strategy...Sinn Fein does not advocate armed struggle. We are totally and absolutely committed to democratic and peaceful methods of resolving political problems...The gulf of distrust which now exists must be bridged. In all of this Sinn Fein is seeking no special favours. We are imposing no preconditions. We seek only the opportunity to engage on the same basis as everyone else in a process of democratic negotiations.

Gun restrictions: will they be enough?

Dan Carter draws some conclusions from Dunblane.

IN THE WAKE of the Dunblane tragedy - as of Hungerford nearly a decade before - some politicians have called for restrictions on guns. The Cullen inquiry has been established, with legislation planned for the autumn.

Public reaction - even bearing in mind that such events produce extreme responses - and a need to challenge the gun culture so prevalent in society, point to the need for real action.

Firstly, why should there be any private possession of firearms? It could be restricted to those who need them for work, such as gamekeepers, farmers, and vets. Those who shoot at gun clubs could leave them behind at the premises. After all, any such 'arsenal' is unlikely to be a target for paramilitary groups who could hardly be better armed than at present.

Secondly, the power of the gun lobby over Parliament needs to be challenged. After Hungerford, all real changes were blocked after 30 MPs were mobilised to protect people's "right" to bear arms - enshrined in the US constitution, but not here. Such organisations as the British Association for Shooting and Conservation and the British Field Sports Society have a considerable hold over the Government as seen in the perpetuation of blood-sports in this country against the wishes of the majority of people, and indeed of MPs. The House of Commons maintains a firing range with its own weapons - for just 30 MPs and 30 peers.

Thirdly, if private possession is not banned, at least there should be a massive tightening of restrictions on licences - unlike in France, no competence tests have to be taken and there are no upper or lower age limits for licensing shooters. With a second-hand shotgun for £30, a five-year licence for £43 and a locking cabinet for £100, you can be well equipped for under £200 - less than the price of a fourth-hand, clapped out Ford Cortina. The Firearms Consultative Committee's recommendation that a suitability test for licence holders should be investigated was ignored by the Government. Licence applications could, as a first step, be submitted to a doctor.

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, the gun culture that runs through society, from Prince Philip's shooting of everything that moves through gun-toting police series on television, to children buying replica weapons, needs to be challenged. In the countryside, gun ownership should be the exception rather than the rule and the Government should promote humane (and more scientific) methods of so-called pest control than simply blasting any type of wildlife that inconveniences farmers. Restrictions should be put on the conversion of farmland (often subsidised 'set-aside') and privatised Forestry Commission woods into money-making shoots for businessmen from the city who have no weapons training and no real interest in the countryside they are pumping full of lead shot.

Whatever happens, the lesson of Hungerford and Dunblane should be learnt and real restrictions on gun ownership and use introduced, rather than waiting for another tragedy.



A.G.M.

Preparing for a Labour Government:

"What kind of left do we need?"

Saturday 26th October, London.

Posties show real teamwork

Leonora Lloyd reports: Postal workers achieved the biggest 'Yes' vote for industrial action since the Tories enforced postal ballots before strikes. There was a 75 percent turnout and nearly 70 percent of those voting called for industrial action. This and the response to the first one-day strike show the strength of feeling against management proposals which would leave nearly a quarter of Royal Mail workers worse off.

For many years now postal workers have worked a 6 day, 41 hour week. They want a shorter working week and a recognition of their steadily increasing productivity over the last 15 years. Many jobs have been lost in that time in the name of rationalisation.

LLB spoke to a spokesperson from the London Regional Committee of the CWU who underlined the workers' anger at management's response to the claim; they want to restructure the job completely by abolishing the Postman Higher Grade and having just one postman/woman grade working in 'teams', all doing all the jobs. The union would lose what little control they have over the work situation.



Friday 21st June picket. Photo: Paul Mattsson.

Each team would be given tasks assigned by management which they would be required to finish in the shortest possible time. Individual job descriptions and the little bit of protection they give against exploitation would disappear not to mention the possibility of promotion. Within the team, the workers would in effect be supervising each other, as if one of them was off sick or perceived to be 'slacking', it would affect the rest of the team's ability to finish the task in time. The plan proposed by the employers includes constant 'improvements' - increased exploitation - in the time work is expected to be finished - but not increased pay, of course.

Also on the agenda is the end of the second delivery - except in the highly lucrative business areas, of course, where the Mail is also up against most competition from the private sector and modern technology. That means heavier deliveries and postal delays for ordinary people.

Management claims that Royal Mail faces increased competition from private services, fax, e-mail and other modern forms of communication. They also threaten that the Government will open up what remains - in theory at least - a monopoly to more competition. But, as the spokesperson told *LLB*, the reality is that the volume of traffic is increasing; in fact, modern technology, such as the use of mail merge, is leading to more business to business and business to customer mail (usually known as junk mail).

Royal Mail is the cheapest and most efficient in the world. In 1965-6 it made profits of around £500 million. After the result of the vote for industrial action was known, the employers seemed prepared to make some concessions, including protecting the pay of existing staff.

The CWU leadership is anxious to come to terms as quickly as possible but to settle would mean that new staff would be worse off, leading to divisions within the work force.

Asylum seekers' Appeal Court ruling

Sue Jones reports: Five months of destitution and homelessness for many asylum seekers was brought to an end by the Appeal Court on 21st June. They ruled that the decision by Peter Lillie to wipe out the rights to basic benefits of anyone who applied for asylum after arrival in the UK, or appealed against a Home Office decision to refuse asylum, was unlawful. 8,000 people had been refused benefit since February, many losing their homes.

Families with children given handouts from social services were expected to feed two children on £17 a week. Others live on nothing at all, getting food from day centres if they can walk to them. The judges laid into the Government, calling the measures draconian and "unacceptable in any civilised society."

Chris Smith MP representing the front bench, welcomed the ruling, saying the Party had condemned the cuts as unjust. True, he had done: but Keith Bradley MP, shadow minister for Social Security, took a different line. On May 2nd he wrote:

"You asked specifically whether Labour would restore the right to receive benefit to the groups of asylum seekers affected... If we can demonstrate that the saving from local authorities and from expediting the (asylum) application process would outweigh the claimed £200 million saving from the measure, then we will in Government immediately restore the right to benefit for asylum seekers."

In other words, forget injustice or human rights, it is cost that counts. We can only hope that Jack Straw does not get the message: shooting children out after bedtime must be cheaper than policing them... Other shadow cabinet ministers have expressed concern about the increasing involvement of the courts in determining policy.

This ruling is the first attempt by these judges to incorporate some notion of basic entitlement to essential human rights to food, shelter and warmth into the British legal framework. It appears to be a principle too radical for the Labour front bench. The campaigners must take the credit for convincing the judges that they could only serve the public interest by taking this stand. And *LLB* readers should offer the Appeal Court their critical but unconditional support.

Mixed ability teaching: why Tony Blair is wrong

Nicola Baker, east London teacher

"MIXED-ABILITY teaching is for some people as much an ideology as the principle of comprehensive admission itself." Tony Blair.

Blair's recent speech on education represented a significant shift in Labour Party policy and an attack on the long-held beliefs of many of its members and the foundation on which the Party stands. Labour has already capitulated to Tory demands for the content of teaching to be revised; it supports the National Curriculum and its largely right-wing content. Must it now cave in over the defence of teachers' rights to do the job the best way they know? For many of us, the best way is through mixed-ability teaching.

Good mixed-ability teaching is about learning. This happens in a variety of ways. Teachers may adopt a collaborative approach, whereby students learn from the resources given to them and from each other. Through this method students develop learning skills. Furthermore children who are encouraged to collaborate on tasks often motivate each other enabling brighter students to forge ahead while at the same time showing less able students what they can do rather than reinforcing what they cannot. Far from the "well-meaning but damaging attitude" as Blair expressed it, this is actually the view of experienced and committed teachers who have achieved considerable success with this approach.

Currently most teachers operate mixed-ability teaching and learning by differentiation. The former is a process of enabling students of all abilities to learn and progress at different levels whilst working on the same content, in the same classroom. This is done in a wide variety of ways: most importantly by additional teacher support such as language support for bilingual learners or support for those with special needs.

Differentiation is expensive and difficult to do well, involving high levels of resources and good teacher training. It requires teachers to know the levels and potential of every student they teach and vigilance about assessment and its relation to the learning process to enable students to make progress within the mixed-ability classroom.

Setting and streaming students is a far easier method of teaching, allowing lazy teachers to teach to the middle, rather than developing resources to meet the needs of individuals. It also provides opportunities for schools to make cuts, with support teachers being especially vulnerable but its greatest drawback is the inevitable "sink group" that nobody wants to teach. In most inner-city comprehensive schools, this would comprise largely of isolated beginners of English, some students with specific learning difficulties and the biggest group of underachievers - white working-class boys. All the anti-racist practice in the world would not prevent the resentment that would be created amongst this group and its inevitable consequences, inside and outside the school gates. This would wipe out years of good practice built up in schools where the mixed-ability classroom also means mixed race, culture and gender.

Blair is therefore wrong when he asserts "equality must not become the enemy of quality". Returning to setting and streaming is increasing neither quality nor equality.

Fighting cuts at the College of North East London

Dave Palmer reports: The management at the College of North East London (CoNEL) plans to make 15% cuts (£2.47 million) by September, by far the largest made by any FE college in the country. Sixty-two lecturing and other jobs are to go and a site is to be closed to sell off.

In England 151 colleges face cuts next year. CoNEL has had a reduction of £1.4 million (10%) in its annual allocation for 1996/7 from the Further Education Funding Council.

Last year the college made £0.9m cuts with 38 redundancies, six of which were compulsory. Management continues to attempt to force staff onto new contracts.

As a result of these cuts, hundreds of places will disappear on courses . The already limited child care provision is to be slashed.

CoNEL NATFHE has demanded that: an independent enquiry be initiated by the college governors and FEFC into CoNEL's financial crisis; the Principal resign; and that there should be no compulsory redundancies. The college has reserves of at least £2.2 million, making compulsory redundancies unnecessary.

The future of CoNEL now seems in question. This college should belong to its community, not to Government-appointed governors.

Balloting over strike action cannot be completed until the summer break - meaning it will only be possible to go on strike in the summer at the beginning of the new academic year, when any compulsory redundancies have gone through.



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Defend free education: defend Clive Lewis

Clive Lewis, the convenor of the Black Students Campaign and NUS vice president, has been sacked by NUS president Jim Murphy for speaking in favour of free education at Queen Mary and Westfield College. QMW student governor Shiraz Rustom explains why.



The NUS walks away from its commitment to free education.

FOLLOWING CALLS from the Labour leadership the National Union of Students recently ended its historic commitment to preserving free education. The student movement, and indeed the whole future of the higher education system, has suffered a crushing blow months before a general election almost guaranteed to rid the country of the Tories.

Queen Mary and Westfield College Students Union has been considering affiliation to the Campaign for Free Education. In order to ensure that students were adequately informed, Douglas Trainer, president-elect of the NUS and confirmed New Solutions supporter, was invited to speak. He agreed to send a representative: Lee Findell, a vice president, Clive Lewis, the convenor of the Black Students Campaign and a co-author of a report on the economic case for free education, was also invited. He was suspended the following day by NUS President Jim Murphy for having taken part in the debate, despite an unchallenged chair's ruling that Mr Lewis was not speaking on behalf of the NUS. Murphy is Labour's PPC for Glasgow Eastwood. He is now also the subject of an Early Day Motion in Parliament admonishing him and Trainer for their undemocratic behaviour. The motion was put down by the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs. I would like to thank them for their support.

In recent years vice-chancellors and principals, the supposed guardians of the higher education system, have threatened fatally to undermine the principle of equality of access with the imposition of top-up fees. In QMW, having ended the potential for abuses within our own union, the union has won the argument for autonomy from the College (our paymasters). However, we were shocked and surprised by the behaviour of the larger unions of which we are members - the University of London Union and the NUS - during the education funding debate at this year's NUS Conference. QMW student policy is to support the principle of free education paid for by general taxation. This is not the view of the ex-president of ULU Ghassan Karian, who attempted to composite our motion into one tabled by the New Solutions group who support graduate tax.

As a result of his subsequent conduct he was banned from QMWSU and found it necessary to resign the presidency on the basis of a no-confidence motion tabled by us when he announced his intention to work for the Labour Party before the completion of his term in office.

QMW is not a particularly political college. I am a member of the Labour Party and the Labour Students, the majority of the executive are not. We have now been labelled as a Trotskyist organisation.

The purpose of student unions is to protect the interests of students. It is not to provide electioneering opportunities for specific political parties, nor is it a Job Club for a few career minded individuals. Maybe the shiny suits in the Labour Party could learn from this.

If we can act in a responsive and accountable manner, truly representing those groups that rely on us, rather than preaching to them, then Labour can not only win the next election but also form a government with a mandate to make a real difference. ❑

Education for everyone

The following statement has been issued in response to the Labour Party's recent embrace of graduate taxation (given with the help of the NUS leadership).

Education is not a privilege. It concerns the advancement of the body of knowledge and experience that is at the heart of society. Everybody benefits. University is not an easy option, the hours are long and the stress levels are extremely high. The size of the current grant/loan is not overly generous and, in London, barely covers the cost of halls of residence fees. Why should it be just for those with the motivation to go through the further and higher education systems to shoulder the entire burden? Such an approach shifts the burden onto the students and their families, many of whom have already been contributing for many years through general taxation. The idea of a loan repayable over 20 years is an ominous undertaking and will definitely discourage members of the working classes from becoming students. To support such a scheme is to display damaging short-termism. Once the grant system is gone it is gone for good. The Student Union Movement exists to further the educational interests of students now and in the future, and not for the benefit of the Labour Party. Nor does it exist to provide a platform from which to launch the parliamentary careers of a small minority.

● Endorsed by the students of: Queen Mary & Westfield College, University of East London, Newcastle University, Huddersfield University, University of Westminster, Glasgow Caledonian University, Sheffield Hallam University, University of Hertfordshire, Tynemouth College, De Montford University, Fyfe College, University of York, Manchester Metropolitan University, University of Sussex, Bradford College, University of Aberdeen, Glenrothes College, NUS Black Students Campaign.

Paying to be kept alive

Linda Clarke, a member of Haringey Disabilities' Consortium, explains why charging for care is just not on.

AS HOSPITALS continue to close, the numbers needing 'care in the community' continue to rise. But the Government has cut local authority funding, forcing them to find cuts and start charging for what was once provided to the elderly or disabled free of charge.

Councils are spending thousands on investigating every aspect of disabled people's lives in order to work out how much to charge them for services. Council workers visit our homes, question us often without anyone else being present, and at the end ask us to sign a form. Although legal advice to disability groups is not to sign, this can result in a warning that the Council will charge for the full amount of care - anything up to £250 a week.

The Department of Health has advised local authorities to take into account the extra costs of being disabled when working out how much individuals can afford to pay. These costs may include needing extra heating, not just because when someone is immobile they find it harder to keep warm, but also because disabled people tend to stay at home more. We get no help with our high energy bills. We may need extra laundry and have to pay for what are simple things to most people, like having our toe and finger nails cut. Holidays can also be very expensive. Local government has not taken these extra expenses into account when implementing their changes for care. It is totally unfair.

We still have to pay our council tax.. Education is the major expense faced by local authorities and I don't have children, but I don't resent helping to pay for it. Like many disabled people, I find it hard to take full advantage of council amenities for which I am helping to pay, like sport, libraries and parks. The things we are being asked to pay for are necessary to keep us alive, or to give us a reasonable standard of comfort and normal life. In my own case, I cannot cook or prepare food for myself, so if carers don't come, I don't eat. Now I am being asked to pay to stay alive. We have already paid once with the Council tax, it is not right that we should be made to pay again.

Campaigns are now starting against charging, and these will grow as more people refuse to pay, but we need support. Unfortunately, people with disabilities are low in people's consciousness. That includes the left, including *LLB*. I enjoy quizzes but the last *LLB* quiz I came to was above a pub and without comrades to carry my chair up I would not have been able to take part. I'm afraid that when I saw the next one was in the same venue, I decided no way would I go again.

Dave Whitton - our Motamole

When Dave Whitton, whose death we reported in last month's *LLB*, got an injustice between his teeth, he could not let it go. As an advocate for the rights of people with disabilities, and as a community activist, he poured himself into many battles. His death was a shock to his friends because it had seemed that the more ill he grew, the more determined and creative he became. Without Dave's tenacity, his refusal to be fobbed off with complacent half truths and his healthy and deep-rooted suspicion of people in high places, the whole Motability scam would never have been uncovered. The *Despatches* programme on Motability, broadcast a month after his death, was a tribute to his relentless campaigning. But the best tribute we can pay him now is to take that campaign forward - and hold the perpetrators to account. Bureaucrats and time-servers found Dave an implacable pain-in-the-bum. The more power to his memory!

Hackney fights library closures

Eddie Barns, Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP reports: Earlier this year, Hackney Council produced a "consultation document" on the future of the library services in the borough. This was sent to the people of Hackney asking which libraries the council should close. Keeping all of the libraries open was not an option, we were told.

The Chair of Education and Leisure, David Phillips, assured us that they were committed to improving library service, yet the Council's plan was to close seven libraries. Labour politics takes on a surreal quality - a cut in service is an improvement.

We have been here before: in 1988, local people were not prepared to accept similar cuts and occupied the libraries scheduled to be closed. They remained there until the Council broke down the doors.

On 24th May, 25 protesters occupied Hackney Central Library. The seven libraries scheduled for closure had already been barred and padlocked. During the occupation petitions were collected and thousands of leaflets distributed; the protesters received an enthusiastic response from the general public and motorists honked their car horns in support.

Hackney Council is locked into a don't-blame-us-it's-the-Government attitude. They offer no solution - just more cuts and rocketing council tax. Meanwhile, they have internal divisions on such vital issues as who should be mayor of the borough.

Libraries are vital not just as a book-lending service but as a community resource: pensioners read the newspapers in them; parents take their children to them; unemployed people use them to search through journals to look for work.

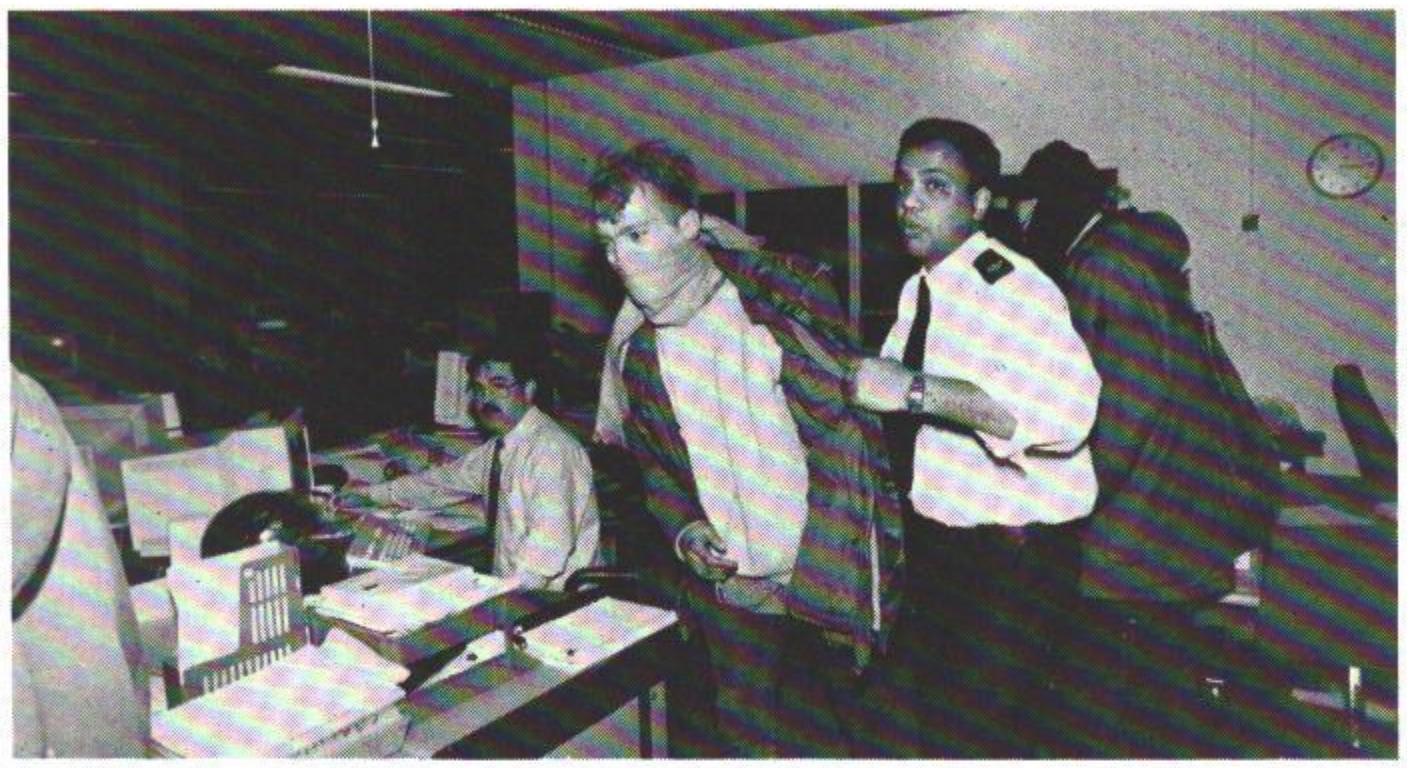
The individuals concerned with the occupation are forming a Save Our Services campaign so that the next time Hackney Council ride roughshod over the wishes of the people they claim to represent we are all better placed to defend what is left of our services.

There is an alternative to cuts: join the campaign and make your voice heard.

- Details from Ms S. Jane - Tel: 0171-249 4703.

JSA injustice

Stan Marsh gives a round up of action against the JSA.



JSA demonstrators occupy the Dept. of Employment HQ. Photo: Paul Mattsson

THE JOB Seeker's Allowance is one of the most important piece of recent Government legislation affecting the lives and living standards of the unemployed in Britain.

The JSA is primarily designed to save money - £70 million in the financial year 1996/7. More than 70,000 claimants will lose all entitlement to benefit in six months, and a further 95,000 are likely to have to apply for means-tested benefits six months earlier than they would otherwise have to.

As a result, 250,000 claimants will be worse off once the JSA is operating.

Employment service advisors will have annual performance targets set to get as many so-called positive outcomes as possible. These advisors will have power of 'direction' over interviewees' actions and even appearance - including everything from clothing to haircut - with the power to withdraw benefits. The potential for abuse resulting from management pressure to get results is great.

JSA union struggle kicks off

A wave of industrial action is growing as members of the Civil and Public Services Association in the Benefits Agency (BA) are involved in trials for the Job Seeker's Allowance. CPSA is looking to broadening the dispute.

Many of the disputes concern health and safety. Staff in BA offices have security screens to protect them from disgruntled claimants. Even with these there were 125 assaults on BA staff in 1994.

BA management is seeking to transfer staff working on the JSA to Employment Service (ES) offices, where screens were removed some years ago. Assaults on staff are much more commonplace in ES - 546 in 1995.

This is despite the most desperate claimants - those being means-tested - being dealt with at BA offices rather than by ES.

BA staff in Leicester and Nottingham struck for a week after management ignored the result of a survey by consultants which recommended the use of screens. The strike has been followed by an overtime ban and a work to rule.

Members in East London also struck for a week after management commissioned a risk assessment which ignored the issue of screens.

However management in Northern Ireland has agreed to spend £1.5 million after considering the same risks to staff as in Britain. CPSA members in Tottenham BA struck for a week in protest at the introduction of the scheme on a trial basis. Brighton members also struck for a week against plans to post them compulsorily to JSA work. Sheffield is balloting for all-out action. Protests have also occurred in Ealing, Middlesborough and Shropshire.

CPSA is planning a ballot for selective action, including a two-day strike, in all 600 BA offices open to the public.

They have four key demands:

- no JSA work should be done without screens;
- no worsening of conditions arising from the transfer of staff to JSA work;
- no compulsory transfers;
- there should be no redundancies resulting from the introduction of the JSA.

Union victory in Sheffield

In two Sheffield Benefits Agency offices CPSA members have defeated management's attempts to transfer staff compulsorily to work on the JSA. A matter of days before an indefinite strike was due to start, management withdrew its proposals.

On July 10th, the National Unemployed Centres' Combine is organising a national conference at Congress House, Great Russell Street, London (off Tottenham Court Road). This will bring together all the voluntary agencies concerned with the effects of the JSA to discuss the impact of the Act on poverty levels and to investigate alternatives.

- More details: JOB (Jobs or Benefits), 24 Hardman Street, Liverpool L1 9AX, tel: 0151 709 3995, email Centre@mtucurc.com

Socialist Campaign Group [Supporters' Network] AGM

Preparing for a Labour Government: The Policies Labour Needs

Saturday 9th November; London

Speakers include Tony Benn MP

LLB page 11

Policies to save the NHS

Last month *LLB* asked campaigning organisations what they wanted from a Labour Government. Here we print further contributions. Other ones are very welcome.

John Lister
Information Director, London Health Emergency

SEVENTEEN YEARS OF Tory cuts and market-style "reforms" have brought crisis to the NHS and spread demoralisation through its one million strong workforce.

At the last count, the gap between Government spending and the amount needed to keep pace with inflation, population pressures and new technology had topped £3 billion a year.

To make matters worse, the 1991 reforms set up the ludicrously bureaucratic and costly "purchaser-provider split", fragmenting the NHS into a chaotic patchwork of quangos, with health authorities seeking to balance their books by screwing ever-greater "efficiency" out of increasingly desperate trusts.

The result has been a massive proliferation of top managers and a dangerous decline in the numbers of front-line staff. If the Tories get their way, the first NHS hospitals since 1948 to be built with private capital and run for profit will already be under construction, driving an even thicker wedge of privatisation into the heart of the service.

Already tens of thousands of frail elderly patients are carrying the costs of the "community-care" reforms designed to axe NHS continuing-care beds and force patients into private nursing homes, where they must pay means-tested charges.

To halt and reverse this decline, Labour must take urgent steps to dismantle the market system, scrap the community-care reforms and pump in the necessary cash to prevent further damaging cuts. An immediate injection of at least £2 billion is needed to restore acute hospital services, mental health and care of the elderly.

In place of the network of docile quangos which control the £30 billion NHS budget, Labour must set up elected health authorities. Opted-out trusts and GP Fundholders must be brought back under NHS control.

All private contractors and companies providing support services to the NHS and private nursing-home chains must be nationalised, with staff offered NHS contracts.

All charges for prescriptions, optical and dental checks, which contribute negligible amounts to the NHS budget at great bureaucratic cost while inflicting distress on the low paid, must be scrapped.

From this radical starting point, Labour could win the confidence and commitment of health staff and other public-sector workers and begin to lay the basis for a genuinely accountable, accessible and socialist health service.

Transport 2000's campaigning priorities

These are nine actions that are needed to get Britain's transport system on the right track.

1. Cut traffic: there is too much traffic in towns and cities. Set a target to cut traffic by 10% by 2010.

2. Switch funding: to cut traffic, switch funding from road building and bridge-strengthening to investment in rail, bus priority, and walking and cycling.

3. Improve public transport: reverse the fragmentation of the railways and buses. Invest more to make them reliable and cheaper.

4. Abolish company car perks: the company car system creates incentives for people to drive further and costs the Treasury £1 billion a year. It should be reformed to remove company car perks, to tax free parking at work, and to reward companies which set up green commuter plans.

5. Crack down on heavy lorries: ban the biggest lorries from sensitive areas, crack down on poorly maintained vehicles, and switch freight from road to rail.

6. Promote walking and cycling: three-quarters of all journeys are less than five miles, yet walking and cycling - the best ways to travel for these journeys - are in decline. Invest in high-quality pedestrian and cycle networks to reverse the decline.

7. Stop speeding: motorists who break the law by speeding are potential killers. Yet most of us do it. Enforce the law more rigorously and cut the speed limit to 20 mph in all urban areas and 55 mph elsewhere.

8. Reduce the need to travel: locate life's essentials close to where people live. If shops, schools, pubs etc. are nearby, many longer journeys become unnecessary.

9. Ask us: ordinary people simply don't get asked about transport decisions that affect their lives. Bring in proper consultation about road schemes and look at the full range of alternatives before slamming down the tarmac.

Pensions are our property!

Eddie Phillips, national trade union side secretary for Department for National Savings Staff.

OVER THE PAST three years pension scandals have rocked the industry. Occupational pensions are still best for workers - if they can get one. Democratic control of occupational pension schemes by workers is crucial. Employers see pension schemes as their personal resource to plunder when the company needs capital. In truth, pensions are deferred wages - the workers' property.

Personal pensions are beyond many ordinary people. It's no wonder that up to 5 million people have no pension provision except the state pension scheme. A properly funded state pension is looking increasingly unlikely under a Blair Government. Taking their cue from the Commission on Social Justice, ideas such as the growth of private pension provision and abolition of universal state pension entitlement tail-end the Tories. Not a single original provision has come from their deliberations.

I would like to see the introduction of a state annuity based pension scheme. This is in fact already in development. The National Savings Pension Plan (NSPP) is a method for 'the missing millions' to make a form of provision additional to the state scheme. They could do this direct or at the Post Office. The Department for National Savings had operated annuities in the past and has management costs of 0.5% - 4%, much less than insurance companies. People could save regularly, by direct debit, by lump sums or occasionally as they have the money. An age related ready reckoner would allow them to know how much their contributions will entitle them to on retirement. Such a scheme should appeal to many employees transferred to the private sector and without an occupational scheme but unprepared to be ripped-off by the private finance industries pension plans.

I am not suggesting this is a consistent socialist solution to the present pensions dilemma. That could only come from the state scheme which fully protects all workers and their families from poverty. What an NSPP would do is offer a safety net for a large number of people who need it the most.

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New Labour foreign policy: in the 'business interest'

Hugh Kerr MEP reviews Labour's statement of policy on foreign affairs, defence and international development.

WHEN *Britain in the World* was presented to the National Policy Forum in May the key introductory chapter was missing. No doubt this was judged to be too important to be shown to the forum! The document seems to have little connection to recent events. Will Labour's foreign and defence policy be any different to the Tories? Remember Ernie Bevin, the right-wing Foreign Secretary in the Labour Government of 1945-50 said "Socialist foreign policy is what a Labour Government does in power".

The section on Europe is generally positive, talks about a peoples' Europe, and deals with the question of unemployment as a key objective. However, as we have seen during the past month when the Tories went to "war on Europe" Labour, instead of crucifying them for causing the crisis, coat-tailed them "in the national interest" and now seems to attack their capitulation from a position to their right. Blair and the spin doctors were terrified of being accused by the *Sun* of being "unpatriotic".

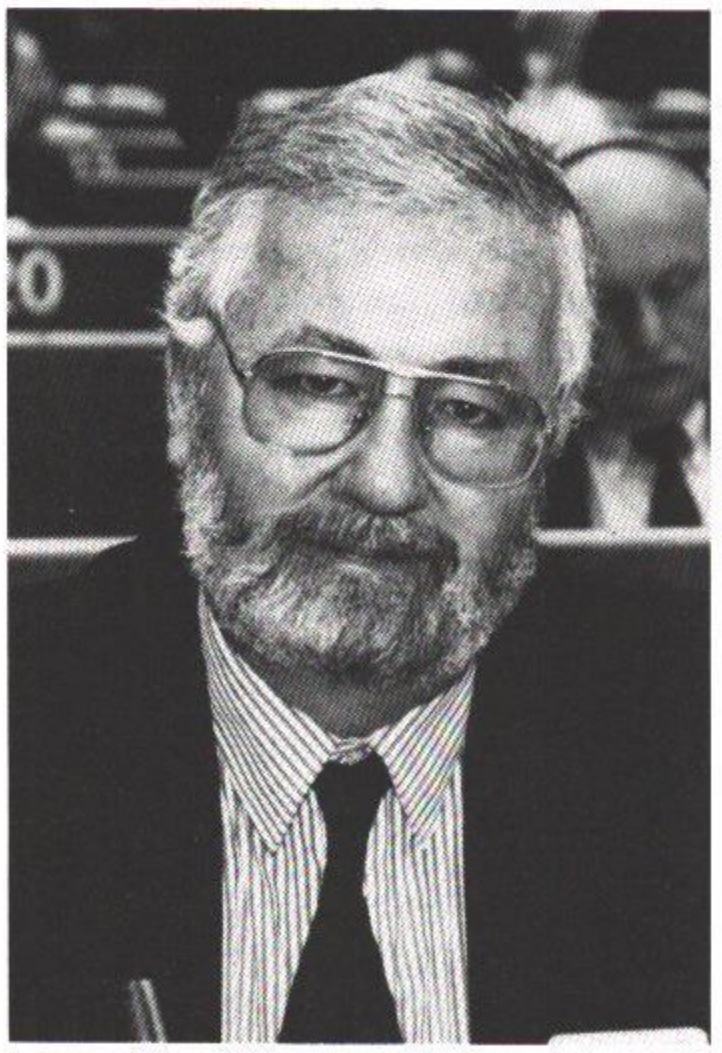
Donald Dewar recently visited the European PLP. He told us we weren't really supporting the Tories. We were engaged in "staged distancing" - ie. by being selective over the measures the Tories had vetoed in Europe, we would distance ourselves from them! As I write, the Tories have vetoed 78 measures and Labour supported 75 of these. Not a lot of distance, and I fear too sophisticated for the electorate!

The document's trade section is driven primarily by the desire for a Labour Government to increase links with business. Robin Cook stated recently that he is proposing to appoint top businessmen as ambassadors for key markets, something even Thatcher failed to do. The assumption that the "national interest" and "business interest" are the same is part of the central philosophy of New Labour. Socialists know that business's main interest at home and abroad is in maximising profit at the expense of workers here and overseas.

The document reaffirms our commitment to NATO (quite what it defends us against I'm not sure) and states firmly that we will keep nuclear weapons - ie. Trident - until "we are satisfied with progress towards our goal of global elimination of nuclear weapons". How long will that take?

There are other sections - on strengthening the UN, aid and human rights, but no timetable is given to restore our aid budget to the UN level of 0.7% of GDP (as and when resources permit is the phrase you will be familiar with). This is a worthy and "safe" document. It won't frighten the tabloids or the middle-class. It certainly doesn't frighten the Foreign Office: one of my colleagues recently met an ambassador and a top Foreign Office official, both of whom said they were looking forward to a Labour Government and a return to "stability" in foreign policy!

When you think that Blair's chief of staff, Phillip Powell, was a top Foreign Office official and number two in the UK embassy in Washington (reputedly dealing with the



CIA), and is also the brother of Jonathan Powell, who was Thatchers' key foreign-policy advisor, it makes you realise that under New Labour foreign policy will be, as they say, "in the national interest"

Liz libel latest

Following the NEC's decision in September 1995 not to endorse Liz Davies as PPC for Leeds North East CLP, the *Financial Times* published a quote from Tom Sawyer that there was some evidence that she had incited activists to violence. Since the 'evidence' that Sawyer purported to rely on was completely untrue, Liz issued writs against the *FT*, and also against the three Islington Councillors who had made these allegations: Tal Michael, Phil Kelly and James Purnell.

On Tuesday 4th June 1996, the *FT* agreed in Court that the NEC had made no such finding against Liz on the issue and that they had not suggested that Liz had ever incited activists to violence. The *FT* has paid Liz damages for any distress caused to her, and her legal costs. The proceedings against the three Islington Councillors continue, but as the *FT* capitulates, the three are looking more and more isolated.

Leeds North East CLP

THE CLP HAS finally been allowed to start its re-selection process. Since the industrial tribunal decision against all women shortlists, the NEC has required CLPs to draw up a statement of candidate qualifications as part of the selection process.

The accompanying guidelines make it clear that the contents of the statement are a matter for the individual CLP. Leeds North East Executive Committee drew up a list of qualifications for their PPC, including the requirement that the candidate must live up to the highest standards of honesty and probity, be committed to socialist principles, be held accountable to the CLP, and commit themselves to living in the constituency.

When the statement was sent out by full-time Party officials, all of these requirements had mysteriously vanished. Are we to assume that commitments to honesty, probity and socialism would disqualify any potential PPC under New Labour?

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Straw's law

Alex Taylor slams the shadow Home Secretary's growing authoritarianism.

IF A SINGLE soundbite was the making of Tony Blair, it was "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime". Echoed in local election addresses and manifestos across the country, and hammered home in speech after policy document, that simple phrase was widely credited with wresting the initiative on "law 'n' order" from the Tories.

But what does being "tough on crime, tough on the causes of crime" mean in practice? Matching strident Tory rhetoric on crime - and proposing macho measures from curfews to community safety orders - is relatively easy. Any self-respecting Labour moderniser worth a front bench job should be capable of crafting a suitably punitive response to the latest crime scare. But the causes of crime are notoriously inscrutable. Worse still, eliminating them is almost certain to cost money. Safer then to forget about the second limb of the soundbite and concentrate on what the punters in the saloon bars of middle England really want: tough talk on crime, and firm action against the ne'er do wells responsible for it. Enter Jack Straw and "new" Labour's growing love affair with the police.

In the late 1980s neither Labour nor the Conservatives were sure what to make of the police. To the Tories, they were both a bloated, inefficient, public sector bureaucracy and the thin blue line between right-thinking people and "the enemy within". To "old" Labour, they were at once an unaccountable coercive force at the beck and call of an authoritarian government ("Maggie Thatcher's boot boys") and an, albeit inadequate, last line of defence for women against male violence and black people against racist attacks.

But in the 1990s, with Kenneth Clarke, the scourge of public sector vested interests, off to the Treasury, and Jack Straw pounding the Home Affairs beat for Labour, things seem much simpler. A new cross-party consensus on law, order and the police is being built. Occasional spats between the front benches on the detail of criminal justice policy and the speed of change mask a growing convergence of opinion on everything from police powers to youth justice, and terrorism to the future of the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS). Speaking to the Police Federation in conference at Scarborough in May, Jack Straw promised to "strive for the greatest cross-party consensus that we can achieve" and boasted about Labour's support for recent Government bills on knives, the security service, terrorism, and the disclosure of evidence. Later in the same speech he castigated the "limp-wristed" (our Jack knows how to work an audience) criminal justice system for failing to deal with young offenders and contrasted the high reputation enjoyed by the police with low, and falling, levels of public confidence in the courts, defence lawyers and the CPS. If only liberal judges, unscrupulous lawyers and pernickety prosecutors would let the police get on with their job, he suggested, Britain would be a safer place.

To put matters right, he offered a series of unnecessary and untested measures - support for improvements in "co-ordination" between the police and the CPS, a "fast track" to get persistent young offenders off the streets, and greater flexibility in using injunctions to restrain anti-social behaviour. Just the kind of stuff to play well over a gin and tonic down the Rose and Crown.

As for policy on the police themselves, Labour's document, *Safer Communities, Safer Britain*, is forlorn. Passed at Conference last year, it meekly calls for the democratisation of the new police authorities created by the 1994 Police and Magistrates' Courts Act, but omits to say how this would be done. A new police authority for London is proposed, but again no details are given. In any case, these are scarcely revolutionary demands.

Many chief constables would be happy to work with a more powerful police authority as a counterweight to burgeoning Home Office control, while in London - with the GLC long gone - senior officers view the



prospect of a degree of local accountability with equanimity. *Safer Communities, Safer Britain* also champions the cause of "policing for the community". This, we are told, consists of a "new approach to policing" based on a "close relationship between the police and the communities they serve". In fact the only thing new about this is the spin. For most people, community policing is pathead policing - friendly bobbies ruffling children's hair and talking earnestly to pensioners about local problems.

But Straw is on record as supporting a very different kind of kick-ass community policing. Advocated by the American New Right criminologist (and adviser to Ronald Reagan), James Q Wilson, this involves the police taking strict enforcement action against a range of so-called "incivilities" - begging, washing car windows at traffic lights, being out in the streets in possession of a football under the age of 40 - which may or may not amount to any criminal offence. It is supposed - on highly dubious evidence -to have swept crime from the streets of Republican-controlled New York. But a six week experiment in this form of "zero-tolerance" policing in London's Notting Hill ended with the officer in charge of the operation ruling it out as an option in British conditions. He feared that it would swiftly lead to the police becoming "an elite" with "no tolerance" of the public (*The Observer*, 9th June 1996).

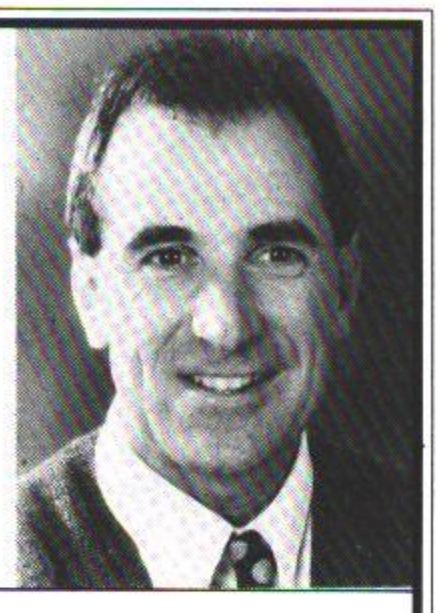
Labour's policies on criminal justice and the police - as in so many other areas - are long on reactionary rhetoric. But beneath the bluster there is scant evidence of the imagination needed to develop practical alternatives to Michael Howard's brand of authoritarian populism. When *The Guardian* condemns his musings on curfews for under 10s as "a right-wing, law-and-order lurch too far", we should all start worrying. Now would you trust Jack Straw with your civil liberties?

Labour Reform Group

A NEW Party pressure group, Labour Reform has been launched to campaign for some level of democracy within the Party while embracing most of New Labour's policy changes. Its members have supported most of Blair's project but are concerned at the lack of consultation. They have finally realised that, however much Party members believe internal 'reforms' have gone far enough, the modernisers are planning to push on relentlessly.

Their launch prompted a hysterical reaction from a key Blair supporter, Labour Co-ordinating Committee chair Paul Richards. On Newsnight, he condemned them as 'splitters'. It is a sad comment on today's Labour Party when the leader's supporters are denounced as splitters, just for seeking a modicum of internal democracy.

Honey, I criminalised the kids



by Alan Simpson MP

IN A WEEK which saw the start of the Dunblane Inquiry into the massacre of innocent children, it seemed somewhat perverse for Labour to come up with the idea that the fight against crime ought to begin with a curfew on the under-10s. "Honey I Criminalised the Kids" simply doesn't strike me as the most vote catching theme which would sweep any party into office at the next election.

The idea has two major weaknesses - it wouldn't work and it doesn't make sense. Apart from that it was a cracker. We certainly out manoeuvred Michael Howard. Mr Howard is probably the most reactionary, autocratic and out of touch Home Secretary in my lifetime. But even he hadn't lurched into this one. Smart move eh?

Lets explore some of the practicalities. It is perfectly reasonable for people to have a fear of crime on the streets; particularly crimes of violence. This could be from a stolen car, in a gang, with a knife or other offensive weapon. For me, I suppose the greatest fear is of the gun; for the gun changes everything.

Faced with a barrage of calls about burglaries, car thefts, robberies and assaults, the last thing that the police want is to be sent off in a game of chase the kids around corners.

And how would you know if the magic age of 10 had been reached or not? A library card would be no good. Not everyone has one...and you could always lie about your age. So its ID cards for primary schools, perhaps with a fingerprint which would be more consistent than a child's signature at that age.

Hang on a minute. I missed something. All the accounts I have seen and read, about serious crimes in society, focus on much older groups and individuals. It isn't the under-10s I fear. Surely they are amongst the greatest victims of our current fear of crime, rather than its greatest perpetrators.

Oh sure, I can think of one or two who are regular nuisances. But the way to tackle this is for more precise measures, focused on individual children and their family circumstances. Beginning from an idea that we should simply place all kids in purdah turns children themselves from victims to villains. It skirts perilously close to the criminalisation of childhood itself.

Of course it wouldn't work. Neighbourhood crime would continue. Further groups must be curfewed. I've seen women fighting on the streets, and pensioners who have been loud, drunk, and abusive on the way home from the pub. Better curfew them too.

It doesn't matter that the groups being curfewed are overwhelmingly victims of public crime; are overwhelmingly law abiding and innocent. This shouldn't stand in the way of a party in pursuit of a rough, tough, populist image on tackling crime.

Of course this is absurd. It isn't where we should be starting from at all. We need policies which reclaim the streets; making them safe for people of both sexes, all ages and all races. And many of the starting points would be incredibly popular.

We could begin with guns. There is now virtually no case for the private ownership of guns. Make a regulatory exception for pest control if need be, but the rest of us would breathe easier without access to them (or their replicas). Then improve street lighting and public transport, in the ways which other European cities have already transformed their urban environment for the people who live there.

And what about reinvesting in positive provision for children (outside the confines or limitations of their own home). Even in populist terms, the last thing that society needs today is the installation of a Labour Home Secretary masquerading as Cruella de Ville in drag, and unleashing the 'child-catchers' in pursuit of an evening cull.

If anything needs to be sent to bed early, its probably this idea. Better to sleep it out of our system and start from somewhere else in the morning.



Trade union

CWU: postal workers jubilant at 2-1 vote for action

Des Kirkland (Thames Central CWU branch officer) reports: The first annual conference of the Communication Workers Union (CWU) clearly demonstrated the differing backgrounds of the workers in the new union. The scene was set some months earlier at the Rules' Revision Conference held less than a year after the amalgamation of the Union of Communication Workers (UCW) representing postal workers, and the National Communications Union (NCU) with engineering and clerical workers in British Telecom, Mercury, cable companies, GiroBank, (now part of the Alliance and Leicester Bank) and a number of other companies within the telecommunications field. Clear lines emerged, not on political groupings, but based on functionality.

Numerically the most powerful block is the postal workers who quickly forged alliances with the engineering section within BT. But the clerical section retains a veto (from a previous merger) to balance their numerical weakness. The functional conferences met simultaneously at the start of the week and the general conference took up the last two days. The tone and level of debate was lacklustre until the current pay claim was debated. Lively debate took place at the postal conference on the Post Office's continued lack of payments to the pension scheme and the intransigence of the trustees against increasing benefits to pensioners. Fireworks erupted in the general conference on the last day when the finances of the union were debated. We continue to run the union wastefully, with two HQs etc..

But the highlight of the week was when joint General Secretary Alan Johnson announced the results of the ballot for action against the 'Employee Agenda'. The 2-1 majority for industrial action caused jubilation amongst the delegates and calls for the executive to harden their stance against Royal Mail. Johnson's bland response was that the result will assist the union's efforts to bring the Post Office back to the negotiating table.

MSF: left win positions - by a whisker

Leonora Lloyd, vice-president, London Region MSF, reports: MSF's conference showed important, but close run, gains for the left. Gary Fabian - last year's vice president - won the presidency by 70 votes over Blairite MP and whip Bob Ainsworth. Sharon Allen became vice president - by just one vote.

Motions condemning the leadership for the way in which it has handled the union's financial crisis were defeated. The Labour Party Conference report was rejected (by three votes) specifically because the delegation merely abstained on Liz Davies' candidature.

During Conference, news came through of the bombing in Manchester and it transpired that an office where MSF members were working had been badly damaged and a number injured, including one who had to have nearly 300 stitches to her face. Conference unanimously condemned terrorist attacks and supported the role taken by our Irish members in the peace process and against sectarian working practices.

Contentious issues discussed included drug testing at work - conference opposed it, but supported a debate in the labour movement on drugs policy. On the minimum wage, the TUC figure was accepted.

Delegates voted to maintain Labour Party links with at least 50% TU vote at conference, opposed changes in the current way MPs are sponsored and opposed state funding of union elections. They also called for the next Labour Government to repeal all anti-trade union laws and replace them with statutory union rights.

A major issue now facing MSF members is the election for general secretary. The two left groups - Unity Left and the Campaign for a Democratic Union - have agreed on a candidate to oppose Roger Lyons, and CDU has produced a platform which the candidate, Jo Bowers, has accepted.

PTC: unholy left alliance beaten

David Pope reports: The inaugural conference of the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC) provided considerable food for thought for the left. There were hopes of left gains in the NEC elections, but the Blairites swept home and fought off an attempt to revoke a rule allowing the NEC to conduct membership referenda.

The formation of the new union - caused by the merger of the National Union of Civil and Public Servants and the Inland Revenue Staff Federation - prompted an electoral pact between the two left factions, Broad Left and Unity. The Blairites denounced this as an unholy alliance of Trotskyites and Stalinists and took the majority of NEC seats.

The responsibility for negotiating pay and conditions of service has been delegated to departments and executive agencies. Such national issues were only discussed in general terms resulting in a conference agenda dominated by rule amendments and internal union affairs. While the left lost some of the votes, including affiliation to the Labour Party, Conference asserted its opposition to the Private Finance Initiative and condemned the recent barring of Irish and Commonwealth citizens from certain Civil Service posts as racist. Delegates agreed to affiliate to the Zero Tolerance campaign and expressed support for Kick Racism out of Football.

Conference ended on a high note when standing orders were suspended to hear Doreen McNally from Women of the Waterfront. In a no-holds-barred effort she demanded a one-day national strike in support of the Liverpool dockers - to the visible discomfort of Blairites on the NEC!

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conference reports

FBU: cuts, strikes and the Labour Party

Mick Shaw, London Regional FBU chair reports: The Fire Brigades Union's Annual Conference was held in Bridlington in May. The previous twelve months had seen the union balloting for industrial action in a number of areas over cuts and attacks on conditions of service.

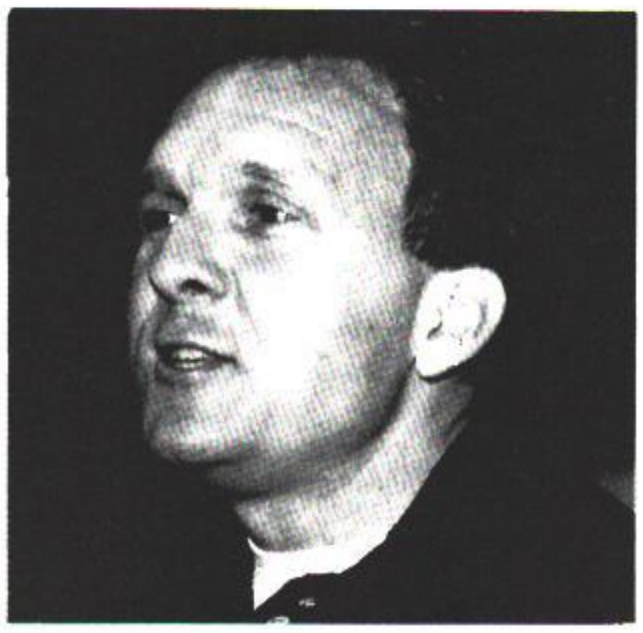
On Merseyside, the series of nine and twenty-four hour strikes that had started in August over twenty job losses and the loss of three days' annual leave was ended in April, after talks at ACAS. The settlement that was agreed means that only one day's leave will be lost in the forthcoming year, while talks chaired by ACAS take place to try to resolve the issues of staffing levels. The Fire Authority also agreed to recruit ninety firefighters during the current financial year.

A ballot for strike action was also started in Surrey over plans to downgrade a full-time fire station at Haslemere to part-time. The ballot was called off after the county council withdrew the proposal.

A strike ballot in Essex over £1.3 million worth of cuts produced a 69% vote for action. A series of nine-hour strikes was called off after the county council came up with an additional £600,000.

A strike ballot in Derbyshire over £1.3 million worth of cuts produced another vote for action, with 75% voting in favour of a series of nine-hour strikes. The first strike took place on 10th June, with further action on 15th June. Labour-controlled Derbyshire County Council attempted to get a last-minute court injunction against the FBU, using the Tory Government's anti-union laws. However, the judge threw the case out and ordered the Council to pay the union's costs. Perhaps if the Council spent less money on court cases and army strikebreakers, they would be able to settle the dispute.

It was the behaviour of Labour councillors in Derbyshire, Merseyside and elsewhere, as well as the policies and conduct of the national Party, that produced a number of resolutions that were highly critical of the Labour Party.



Mick Shaw

Conference passed a motion from Merseyside condemning the Party for suspending the selection procedures for local election candidates in the Derby ward of Bootle CLP, where the chair of the Merseyside Fire Authority is a sitting councillor. The same motion also condemned the statements of George Howarth, Labour Shadow Home Office Minister and Merseyside MP, who criticised the union during the series of strikes for not re-balloting its members on an unacceptable offer that was made by the Fire Authority.

Despite a strong speech in opposition from General Secretary Ken Cameron, Conference also passed a motion from Greater Manchester which instructed the executive council to prepare a statement for the 1997 Conference on the union's relationship with the Labour Party, "with the objective of providing a more discriminating and effective use of the union's Political Fund, including the funding of politicians and political parties who are supportive of socialist principles".

Labour Party General Secretary Tom Sawyer received a lukewarm reception when he addressed the Conference. The only enthusiastic applause was for FBU President Ronnie Scott, who told comrade Sawyer to report back to the Party the union's concerns about Labour councillors on many authorities, "who have been willing tools in implementing cuts."

The frustration felt in the FBU at the conduct of Labour-run fire authorities may well be a foretaste of the reaction in many trade unions to a Blair-led New Labour Government.

Sick attacks in Birmingham

OVER 5,000 WORKERS employed by Labour-run Birmingham City Council took strike action on 13th June in their fight to stop compulsory redundancies and the implementation of a draconian sickness policy. UNISON members from three branches shut neighbourhood offices, housing centres, nursery schools, social services offices and libraries and 2,000 strikers attended a lively rally in the city centre.

The decision to hold a ballot for up to five one day strikes against threatened compulsory redundancies and a sickness policy that enables a worker to be sacked after eight periods of sickness in two and a half years was made at a mass meeting attended by over 2,000 council workers with an almost unanimous vote.

It took UNISON nationally seven weeks to issue ballot papers and it was done using inaccurate records and only six working days over the Whitsun bank holiday were allowed for the return of the papers. Up to a thousand members not involved in the dispute were issued with papers. This resulted in a 30% turnout in the ballot and UNISON's National Emergency Committee, without discussion with the three branches, only approved one day of strike action.

The one day of action was a great success, but not sufficient to shift the employer. Compulsory redundancies are still a real threat and the sickness policy is to be implemented on 1st July. UNISON nationally must reverse its decision and allow the branches to take the strike action that members have voted for.

UNISON: waiting for Labour

Jon Rogers
London Region Deputy Convenor

UNISON Conference took place from 17th to 20th June in Bournemouth. The Conference reflected the low level of industrial struggle and the hopes and expectations which are being placed in a Labour Government.

Delegates narrowly rejected a call from the Greater London Region for non-compliance with the Asylum Bill. Branches representing the larger cities generally supported this call. The policy which was passed made concessions to the left - leaving the door open to support members who refuse to comply with requirements to police racist internal immigration controls. Following Conference's decision, managers in Liberal/New Labour Lambeth issued threats of dismissal to housing workers refusing to check the immigration status of applicants for housing. The Annual Delegate Meeting of the Local Government Service Group responded to this with unanimous support for the Lambeth workers and a pledge from the Chair of the Service Group, Jean Geldart, that UNISON would be issuing advice to its members on how to frustrate the intentions of the Asylum Bill.

The profile of the debate on the Asylum Bill was in part a negative consequence of the lack of debate around industrial action. An attempt by the Birmingham branch to raise issues around its current dispute over job cuts was blocked by the Standing Orders Committee. During Conference, UNISON's Industrial Action Committee refused - on the casting vote of the Chair - to back further action in Birmingham. Members now have little choice but to take unofficial action.

The long running Hillingdon hospital strike was backed unanimously when Conference adopted an emergency motion supported by the strikers, which endorsed their demand for reinstatement, reflected in the recent overwhelming rejection of a cash offer from the employers in a ballot of the strikers. Thanks to an effective intervention by the left, organised by the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON (CFDU), the National Executive backed the strikers and their emergency motion. Rodney Bickerstaffe made a stirring call for delegates to attend the national demonstration in support of the strike which will take place in Hillingdon on Saturday 13th July.

The renewed battle against Pall Mall, employer of the Hillingdon hospital cleaners, and their parent company, the Godfrey Davis group kicked off with a protest at Bournemouth pier, where Pall Mall have a contract to clean a bar.

There was little other debate on industrial action, and victories for the left at Conference were restricted to debates on policy demands to make of an incoming Labour Government. UNISON's support for a minimum wage and for the restoration of public services was reaffirmed, and a mood of hostility to Tony Blair mingled with the desperate desire for a Labour Government which permeated the Conference. An *LLB* fringe meeting heard London Region Convenor, Geoff Martin, and Jennifer Davies, from the influential Newcastle branch, explain the steps which UNISON will need to take to press its demands on Labour.

A rising tide of concern at the domination of the union by full-time officials almost brought victory for a call from the London Region for the election of regional secretaries, currently appointed by and accountable to the General Secretary rather than the rank and file. This call, backed by 48% in a card vote, will almost certainly be reiterated next year and the worried looks on the faces of regional secretaries during Conference suggest that even the UNISON hierarchy recognise that the demand for union democracy will have to be met.

The most serious threat to union democracy and the left - the continuing witch hunt against shop stewards in the Liverpool branch - has also inspired increasing opposition from UNISON members, demonstrated when Conference delivered a symbolic slap in the face to the NEC by referring back the Annual Report on constitutional matters because of the exclusion of a report from the NEC's Discipline Panel. A fringe meeting backed by the CFDU, the Liverpool branch and the London Region launched a renewed national campaign in solidarity with the Liverpool stewards. A lobby of the disciplinary hearings in September will take the fight against the witch hunt forward.

On a positive note, the CFDU demonstrated its persistence as an open broad left organisation centrally involved in many of the key issues within the union. The establishment of UNISON Labour Left by London Region Convenor, Geoff Martin, was also a step forward for the left, offering the opportunity to reach a layer of Labour Party oriented activists which the CFDU has so far failed to reach.

Although many of those involved in UNISON Labour Left have demonstrated a sectarian hostility to the CFDU, inspired by opposition to Militant Labour, the possibility that both organisations can work together on many questions is clearly demonstrated by co-ordinated work by the two organisations to organise a lobby of the TUC in support of UNISON policy for a minimum wage. If - and it is unfortunately a very big "IF" - activists involved in the CFDU and UNISON Labour Left can avoid the temptation to attack one another, UNISON's left could be in a good position to lead the struggles which will have to be waged under a Blair Government. ❑

Support Hillingdon Hospital strikers

- *No slave labour!*
- *Pall Mall out!*

NATIONAL DEMONSTRATION

Saturday 13th July
11am, Hillingdon Hospital

March to rally at Hillingdon Civic Centre.

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Dock solid!

SACKED LIVERPOOL dockers, now in the ninth month of their dispute, are standing firm for complete reinstatement. A mass meeting of more than 400 voted to reject a new offer by Mersey Docks & Harbour Company.

Under the proposed deal all 329 previous employees of MD&HC would be re-employed (not reinstated) on a fixed term four week contract. They would be required to indicate whether they wished to continue working for the company or accept severance pay of £25,000.

For those wishing to work,there would be 60 jobs immediately, fewer than in a recent verbal offer. The company reserved the right to decide the "suitability" of anyone applying for re-employment.

The company faxed a copy of the offer to John Bowers, President of the International Longshoremens' Union on the US east coast. They are worried by the international solidarity action against ACL, their biggest customer. Swedish dockers recently held up one of their ships for twelve hours. A complete boycott of ACL vessels is now on the cards. The international boycott of Liverpool vessels is costing the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and the giant shipping companies millions. Liverpool tug boat crews have recently become more involved. They have observed the dockers' picket line for two twelve hour periods.

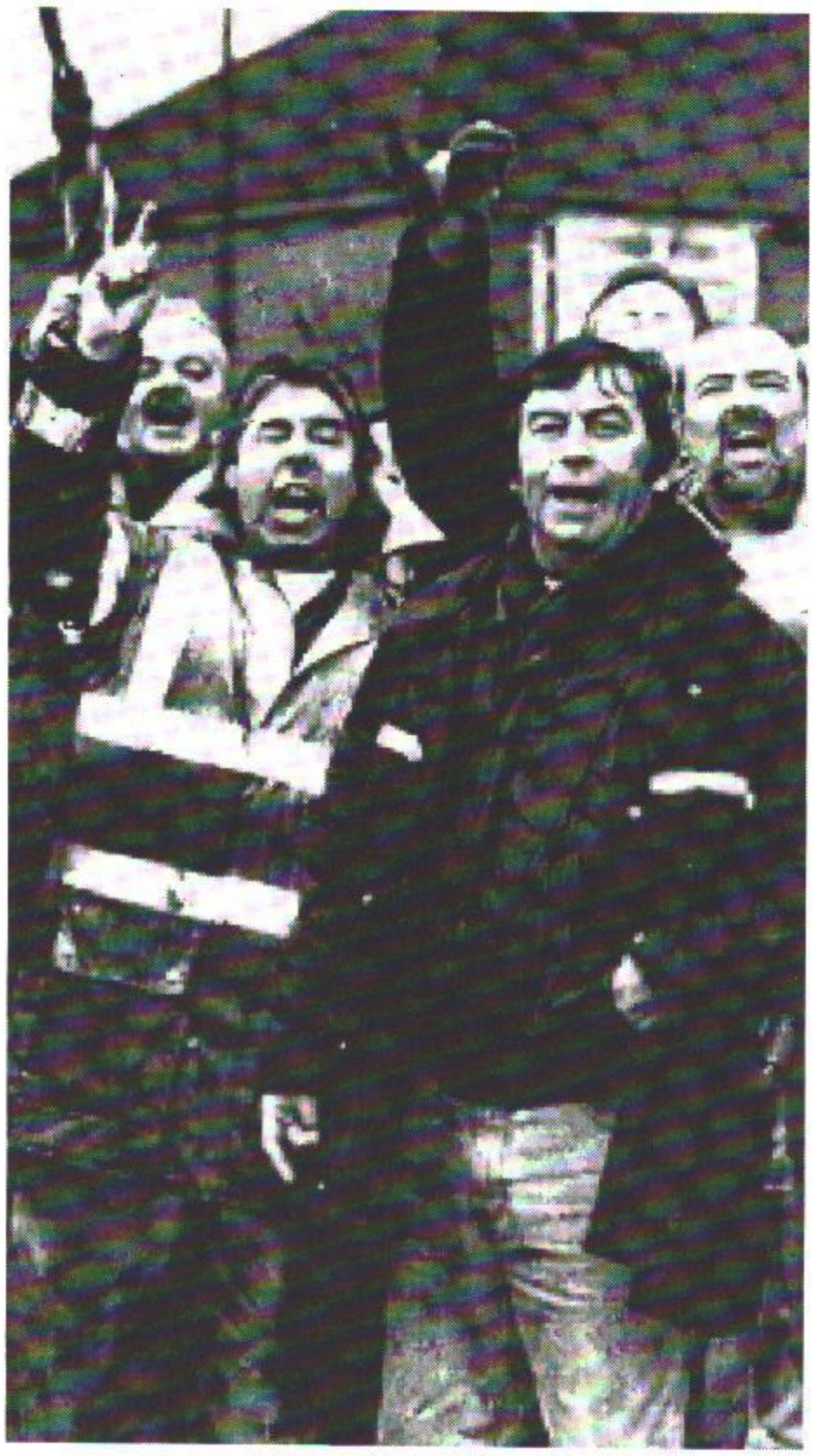
On the first occasion, a Canmar cargo ship tried to make its way through without tugs. It drifted towards the sandbanks and had to down anchor when an SOS call failed to get tug boat crews from another company to cross the picket line. This blocked access to the port, meaning that an oil tanker bound for the power station also had to drop anchor. A Canmar container vessel was also hit by the second action of the tug crews.

Since the outset of the dispute, the dockers have spoken to well over 4,000 meetings, and delegations have met with dockers all over the world. The Dockworkers International Conference in February was attended by dockers and their supporters from around the world. There have been 15 marches and rallies in support organised by the union and local community.

With the trade union conference season in full swing, dockers are being invited to speak on conference platforms and fringe meetings. They are selling the *Dockers Charter* newspaper and discussing with delegates. Thousands of pounds have been donated to their hardship fund from all the major unions - topped by the massive £35,000 from the Communications Workers.

Despite the anti-union laws and the failure of the TUC to call for supporting action, other workers are moving into struggle around similar issues - postal and tube workers will be well represented at the national march and rally in Liverpool on 29th June.

- Phone 0171-627-8666 for dockers' solidarity information.



Dockers' solidarity has shaken bosses. Photo: Dave Sinclair / Chris Bailey.

Women of the Waterfront

Speaking at an MSF fringe meeting organised by the Campaign for a Democratic Union, Irene Campbell may have claimed to be "just a housewife", but she gave a devastating and moving analysis of the dispute and its effects on families and the whole community.

Like the miners' wives, these women are discovering new ways of organising and new strengths and talents. The dispute started because "fathers would not cross their sons' picket lines" and continued because these workers would not go back to casualisation.

Despite claims by the employers that the dispute is not damaging them, Mersey Docks and Harbour Company shares are dropping by 12p a day.

Unlike factories, docks cannot be moved. Neither can the determination of these women and their families.

Driving testers get shirty

David Pope reports: Industrial action is looming in the Driving Standards Agency, the arm of the Department of Transport which administers and conducts driving tests. Members of the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union voted 60-40 on a 67 percent turnout for a strike in support of their pay claim. More than 75 percent voted for additional action short of a strike.

The action will start with a one-day strike throughout the DSA on 26th June. Thousands of driving tests will have to be cancelled and rebooked.

The strike will be followed by an overtime ban, a work to rule, a refusal to work in higher grades, non-co-operation with sickness monitoring and a ban on detached duty working (conducting driving tests away from the home station, which is crucial for keeping the waiting lists down).

Liverpool UNISON witch-hunt

THE DISPUTE WHICH sparked the disciplinary action currently being taken against Liverpool stewards was unofficial strike action by black workers and white colleagues in Fairfield Day Centre against openly racist behaviour to staff and service users. For years, black workers at the Centre had to endure racism. Numerous complaints were made to management but none addressed. Black workers and a number of white colleagues walked out. Management were forced to investigate the complaints of racism. Following that investigation two managers were disciplined for 'inadequate management'.

Many local branch members were unhappy about how the branch secretary, Judy Cotter, handled blasck workers's complaints. The four Social Services stewards who supported the black workers faced disciplinary charges from their own union. Many black workers turned up to make complaints at an investigation held over 3 years ago. UNISON has done nothing about these allegations. Today there are no black workers at Fairfield Day Centre. They have all have left. They wanted to issue a statement in the national *Black Action* paper for Annual Conference - but national officials tried to ban it together with another article questioning the costs incurred in the witch-hunt. But a statement was eventually issued at Conference. The stewards still facing disciplinary action have not been allowed to raise the question of racism in their defence.

It is vital that branches ask questions about what is going on. To date at least £250,000 of UNISON money has been spent pursuing this case. A Conference motion on this issue was ruled "subjudice" even though there are no legal proceedings taking place at the moment.

Sheffield Council

Sheffield City Council has backed off from threatening compulsory redundancies and pay cuts in the Department of Design and Building Services following two successful strike ballots run by UNISON. However across the Council all APT&C staff have been written to in an attempt to replace virtually all the current collective agreements covering reorganisation and redeployment.

Leading with the left



Geoff Martin, UNISON London Region Convenor, takes a lefty look at life.

- When a Labour frontbencher announces, without the slightest hint of irony, that the Party should introduce a 9pm curfew for kids under ten as a solution to the problems of youth crime you know that it's time to start looking in the cupboards and under the bed for Jeremy Beadle. But that's the vision of a caring society under Jack Straw and the rest of the seventies student lefties who now see it as their job to outdo the Tories for barmy right-wing ideas. Never mind the fact that kids are more likely to hang around street corners if they've got sod all else to do - round the little buggers up! If open fires hadn't gone out of fashion around the time that Jack and his cronies were busy occupying the university refectory I reckon he'd be planning to stuff nine year olds up the chimney as a cure for truancy.

- So now that Tony Blair has said that it's OK to smack your kids if they've been naughty does that mean it's alright for us to give Mandleson and Straw a bit of a slap when they've been out of order?

- I was talking recently to a mate of mine who knows someone who'd been given a guided tour of the Party's new Millbank centre. As he was being shown around the much-touted "Instant Rebuttal Unit" some bright young Blairite let it slip that not only can the computers spew out the details of Tory MP's speeches and articles but they also contain information on trade unionists as well. In fact, the name of my old mate Rodney Bickerstaffe was mentioned. I will now be writing to Tom Sawyer to find out if I've been included on the rebuttal unit computer. If I haven't, I'll sue.

- Those photos of the England players being strapped into a dentist's chair in the Jump Bar in Hong Kong and having tequila poured down their throats looked like fun. I reckon that you could book yourself onto the Cathay Pacific, fly out to Hong Kong, do the business in the chair and still have change out of what it would cost you for a routine dental check-up in this country.

- What with this being the last *LLB* for a couple of months I hope you all have a good long, hot summer. Oh yeah. I will be turning out for the Pistols in the park and probably up at the Phoenix festival as well if I can find someone to borrow an easily erectable tent from. No jibes about sad old gits trying to recapture their youth, thank you very much.

- Editor's note: Geoffrey has recently been barred from the Plough for taking action against the pub's TV when Cantona scored in the cup final. A defence campaign has been launched. Model resolutions are available from the *LLB* office, where donations should be sent, made out to Geoff Martin (Fighting Fund).

Russian reaction reorganises

An election in which one contender represents finance capital and the other more managerial interests, is hardly something to get excited over. Hillel Ticktin of the Centre for Socialist Theory and Movements, and editor of *Critique*, argues that the Russian elections in June were a side-issue to the main matter - the continuing war between the Russian elite and the working class.



YELTSIN'S Our Home is Russia party received only 10% in the December 1995 elections. Yet in the first round Presidential vote he got 35%, trailed by Zyuganov with only 3% less. Yeltsin now looks the most likely winner. Lebed, with 15%, is thought to be anti-Zyuganov.

Lebed's nationalist base might more naturally vote Zyuganov, but it is not that simple. His vote was a compound of a nationalist switch from Zhirinovsky and a protest vote.

Commentators have noted that the straight 'national-patriotic' vote went to Lebed and that Zyuganov had another constituency.

The point, however, is that Yeltsin has made so many moves towards the Zyuganov line and base that the difference between them is no longer clear. From a worker's point of view, neither has anything to offer.

Yeltsin realised that in order to get re-elected he needed to appeal to ordinary people as well as the discontented section of the elite. Standards of living have collapsed and unemployment is a real threat, so this was not an easy task - especially as the opposition made the failure of the reforms a major campaign issue.

Yeltsin therefore took a series of measures, dismissing major reform ministers like Chubais, who was crucial to privatisation, and adopted a more protective - and nationalistic - attitude to indigenous industry. This secured the support, or neutralisation, of those in the elite who were losing out to foreign competition and lack of government support.

Zyuganov is essentially the representative of the section of the elite which lost out over the last five years. This includes factory managers, apparatchiks of different kinds and sections of the intelligentsia.

Yeltsin effectively undercut Zyuganov by striking a bargain with his constituency. Yeltsin stumped up and down the country promising increased pensions (and there were increases), payment of wages on time, and reduced unemployment.

Given that in 1992 he said that he needed only six months to improve the situation, and it then deteriorated far more rapidly than in any other period in peacetime Russian history, these were supremely cynical measures.

It is difficult to believe that ordinary workers could have been taken in. Indeed, as 40% of the largely mining population of the Kuzbas voted for Zyuganov, they clearly were not. The importance of this vote lies in the fact that it was largely the miners that secured Yeltsin's original elevation to power. As more than a quarter did not vote at all, we are left with around 25% of voters backing Yeltsin.

As a substantial section of the elite and others dependent on the market sector had to give support, it means that the majority of workers did not vote Yeltsin. Nonetheless he obtained a large minority of the vote in the major industrial areas of Moscow, St Petersburg and the Sverdlovsk region - the original working class areas of the October Revolution.

Yeltsin's monopoly of the media played a key role. The clear statement that Yeltsin stood against the revival of the purges and the forms of atomisation that had existed until very recently, were crucial - more so than the repeated appeal to vote Yeltsin, which, given the history of the biased Stalinist press, may have been counterproductive.

Workers were totally opposed to the old Stalinist bosses, as well as to the political-economic exploitation and oppression of the old system. Many would have decided that Yeltsin, however bad, was better than Stalinism.

That Yeltsin might well increase the level of atomisation and already growing power of the KGB further appeared less threatening. Zyuganov would not have returned Russia to Stalinism, but he is a Russian nationalist, anti-Semite and marketeer. He was not a real alternative.

Surprisingly perhaps, opinion polls show most Russians are not driven by nationalism. Zyuganov did appear however to threaten a revival of Stalinism. Hence Yeltsin's anti-communist drive was successful.

A Yeltsin victory promises to maintain the existing policy of concessions to the managerial elite, allowing them to join with their financial/criminal cousins in extracting and exporting the surplus product. With investment down to 27% of the 1990 level, production halved, and with a rising number of strikes, the elite has few alternatives.

Zyuganov's relative failure will hasten the intelligentsia's rethinking outside and inside his party. It is not clear that he will fare any better in five years time. The intelligentsia led the movement for the reform but has been hit hardest by its implementation. It remains confused, but individuals are moving to an authentic left.

The regime uses differential pay and conditions to divide the workers, as is clear with the massive votes for Yeltsin in Moscow, St Petersburg and the oil rich area of Tyumen. The old atomisation continues, even if it is more limited. A workers' party remains necessary and inevitable. ❑

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Israel after Peres

The victory of Likud's Binyamin Netanyahu in Israel's prime ministerial election poses a threat to the Oslo peace process and Yasser Arafat's autonomous authority, argues Bob Deed, Executive Committee of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign.

IN THE PAST there has been substantial continuity between Likud and Labour governments. Likud, for example, shouts loudest about West Bank settlements, but it was a Labour government which oversaw the first settlements and recently undertook a substantial programme of road and house building for settlers.

In this election, the Labour and Likud election platforms bore remarkable similarities - almost word for word - on Jerusalem, settlement and borders. However, the Likud manifesto included pledges which could derail the Oslo process.

In spite of Likud's acceptance of the Oslo accords, it promises to intensify settlement, intervene militarily in the autonomous areas, close PLO offices in East Jerusalem, and rule out any Palestinian state. These policies will strip the Palestine National Authority (PNA) of its remaining credibility.

The PNA has in the past accepted humiliating compromises in return for the appearance of sovereignty: a stamp, a flag and a president. Likud will not even concede these symbols. It is hard to see the PNA being allowed by the Palestinian people to make further concessions. Arafat's close aide Nabil Sha'ath recently warned the Israelis of another uprising. Although this was partly bluster and partly an attempt to encourage Israelis to vote for Peres rather than Netanyahu, it does reflect nervousness in the leadership of the PNA.

The issue of settlements is likely to destabilise Israel-PNA relations. Netanyahu will no doubt be more single-minded than the "peace coalition" in colonising Arab lands.

But it is unlikely that he will immediately introduce the massive settlement programme demanded by some of his supporters, such as the "Yesha Council" of settlers which has proposed tripling the numbers of settlers.

Early this year Hamas appeared split. The "moderates" wanted to trade their guns for a role in the PNA with the influence and patronage it offers, while the "extremists" rejected any ceasefire with Israel for either tactical or ideological reasons. These disputes may soon be history. Under Netanyahu, significant support for Islamic politics and terrorist actions among the refugees will continue. If Hamas and Islamic Jihad carry out further attacks in Israel, Netanyahu is likely to respond with at least "hot pursuit" incursions into the PNA-ruled areas. Arafat and each of his 30,000 armed "police" would have to decide whether to resist.

With Netanyahu unwilling to withdraw from the Golan Heights and South Lebanon, negotiations between Israel and Syria will remain stalled. With Hizbullah in Lebanon killing more Israeli soldiers since "Operation Grapes of Wrath" than in the previous four months, Netanyahu may renew attacks on Lebanon. The demonisation of Syria and the recent Israel-Turkey military pact bode ill for the region.

Netanyahu's election raises numerous unknowns. His party reflects different shades of opinion and accounts for a small minority of 120 Knesset members. He will have to satisfy the raised expectations of the settlers and the religious parties without upsetting the US with heightened instability in the region. The only certainty is that the new government will be no friend of the Palestinian people.

- Contact PSC at BM PSA, London WC1N 3XX

One significant aspect of this election is the turning away of Israel's Arabs from Peres and Labour in the wake of the Grapes of Wrath attack on Lebanon. The Communist-led Democratic Front for Peace and Equality gained five seats. Coupled with the four seats for the United Arab List this represents the highest ever number of seats for the essential Arab parties.

The other surprise of the election is that the number of seats for the mainstream Zionist parties - Labour-Meretz/Likud-Tsomet - has declined from 96 to 75 just as the number of seats for the religious ultra-orthodox parties increased from 16 to 23. This is part of a longer term trend which has seen the ultra-orthodox parties growing to command nearly 20% of seats.

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Nigerian unions fight for democracy

The international credibility of the Nigerian regime is at an all time low following the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa. The country's trade unions remain the most powerful opposition, with over four million members. One of its leaders spoke to Sean Coyne. He has asked to remain anonymous for fear of Government reprisal.

Q: After the regime took over the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) nearly two years ago who led the resistance?
A: The oil workers are the foreign exchange producers of our country. When they strike they pose a real threat. Oil receipts are the regime's lifeblood.

Comrade Frank Kokori, the leader of the main union (NUPENG), has now been in prison for almost two years and was recently joined by the leader of the senior staffs' association in the oil industry.

But morale is high. Comrade Frank is missed of course, though there is another layer of leadership who are trying to maintain the union.

Q: Many people are surprised at the size of the Nigerian trade union movement. How has it been possible for the regime to survive for so long?
A: The past leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress collaborated with the Babangida regime. Some leaders were bought off. Control of the oil receipts provides the regime with billions of Naira. A few hundred thousand here and there to a few individuals is nothing.

Large amounts of money were handed over for trade union-inspired projects. The price we paid was to keep quiet, to pretend to the outside world that things were moving towards democracy.

Many thousands of activists came to see the union leadership as almost part of the regime. The other factor to remember is that the regime can be merciless. No one wants to be imprisoned. But there is much to be hopeful about. The affiliated industrial unions of the NLC have continued to function without being manipulated.

The unions have told the Government that they will no longer tolerate interference after attempts to force a series of mergers. This marks a new determination to establish an independent trade union movement.

Q: What has been the regime's reaction to this new boldness?
A: They have tried to buy some leaders, and when this failed, to smear people. Then they resorted to the law.

Decree Four specifies that full time officers of industrial unions cannot stand for election for positions in the NLC. It's preposterous.

Q: What is behind such extraordinary measures?
A: The old leadership of the NLC has been discredited. The new leadership is represented by dynamic people like Comrade Adams Oshiohmole, of the Textile Workers Union. He is honest, immensely popular, and has built one of the most formidable and democratic unions on the continent.

Decree Four should really be called 'The Stop Adams Decree'. It has been designed to prevent him from being elected the new President of the NLC.

Q: What are the priorities of the new leadership of the NLC, assuming that it is able to be freely elected?
A: The first task must be to make sure that the NLC does not have to go begging to the regime. We have to rely on our own resources.



Nigerian worker: labour in chains

Secondly, we have to rebuild grass roots confidence by ensuring accountability and transparency.

Thirdly, we have to clarify our priority campaigns with clear demands.

Fourthly, we have to make alliances with all those who are fighting for human rights and democracy.

Q: You have not mentioned the position of women in the trade union movement.
A: This is a serious omission. The women's wings of each union and of the NLC local structures have been crucial in keeping the flame of trade unionism alive.

However, there is a lot of education needed, especially of the men, to help them to understand the need for real equality, and to encourage women to stand for leadership positions. Women workers have carried a double burden. It is time this was recognised.

Q: What is likely to happen to the struggle for democracy in Nigeria?
A: The Abacha regime has said that it wants to return to barracks. We have heard this many times before.

It cannot satisfy the conditions of the World Bank and the IMF. The US and others can no longer rely on the military to deliver their debt repayments and profits.

But the opposition is very divided. For decades, participation in parties and politics has been denied to the majority of our people. This is why the trade union movement is so important. It has shown that it is possible to unite Nigerians and to campaign for change.

As the regime gets pressed against the wall, it will thrash out in order to stay in power, hence the mindless assassination of Kudirat Abiola (the wife of Moshood Abiola) and the brutal suppression of the students in Ibadan.

It is going to be a long hard struggle. Those who have sold arms to the regime and helped them to plunder our oil reserves will not be forgotten by us.

That is a promise. ❑

US Labor Party formed

Jane Slaughter
Founder member,
US Labor Party

Over 1,500 union members gathered in Cleveland on June 6-9th to found a labour party. A groundswell of interest in the last two months turned what convention organisers had expected to be an event of 500-700 delegates to one of twice that size. There were hot controversies and inspiring bursts of unity as the five-year old Labor Party Advocates took its first step toward transforming itself into the Labor Party. It was the first time a labour party had been placed on the agenda of the labour movement since the late 1940's. Bob Wages, president of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers (OCAW), told the delegates "We've got to organise to take our country back. This isn't rocket science - this is understanding simply that there are more of us than there are of them."

The OCAW - which was LPA's biggest backer - brought the most delegates, followed by the United Electrical Workers. Other sizeable groups were the California Nurses Association, and the Farm Labor Organising Committee. In the last month, both the American Federation of Government Employees and the United Mine Workers have given support.

Delegates voted to stay out of electoral politics - to neither endorse nor run candidates. Instead, the Labor Party's "new organising approach to politics" is designed to force candidates to respond to its concerns. A selling point to hesitant union leaders has been that they can be pro-labor party and still support Democratic politicians. This is only possible if the Labor Party does not field competing candidates of its own. Initially, proposals put forward by convention committees would have postponed any participation in elections till after "hundreds of thousands" of workers had been recruited. Many speakers were unhappy with putting elections off until an indefinite time.

A debate on structure reflected the tension between the leadership and the organisation's chapters. The 36 chapters represented at the convention have recruited most of the party's activists. The leadership, however, feels that the key to growth is the affiliation of local and national unions.

The convention passed no action plan that would unite members in different unions and cities, nor did it discuss how to give the group some national visibility, giving rise to questions about what the party will actually do. Given the disparity in conceptions of the party, this lack was perhaps inevitable.

DELEGATES' VIEWS

- I stood up publicly against the Labor Party for its refusal to recognize the danger in ambiguous language regarding the right to choose when and if a woman wants a family...I don't want to patronize anyone by saying that I expected more...I am not satisfied with concessions or compromise language. I stand for much more than that. I am only one of many standing at the bottom demanding a voice in a workers' party. - ***Leslie Rockenbach***.

- The environmental section is not only weak but, unfortunately, has language which should have been taken out. Incidentally, the civil rights language in the programme was strengthened only because the sisters and brothers from Black Workers for Justice kept the committee up until 1 a.m. arguing with them. - ***Tom Condit***.

- The military policy is left basically untouched with the following wording, "insure adequate national defence". An amendment to reduce the military budget by 50% was defeated. The health care section includes "access to a full range of family planning and reproductive services for men and women". The following amendment was proposed: "The Labor Party supports safe, legal abortion and believes it is a woman's private decision." This was defeated 629 - 1723...Personally, I think the adopted language is sufficiently ambiguous as to allow the Labor Party leaders to talk out of two sides of their mouths. - ***Paul Zarembka***.

- Since the Labor Party Advocates had not produced a discussion bulletin prior to the convention, there were no copies of resolutions or platform proposals available to all the delegates.

Despite these difficulties, the convention was a major and historic step forward. The majority of unionists left the convention with the strong view that a new time had come for American working people. The political vacuum that now exists throughout the US could bring millions into the Labor Party if the party begins to reach out to all working people and those in struggle against privatisation, for national healthcare and for jobs.

It was also agreed that there would be a national convention again in two years and the party would again look at the question of running candidates as well as other issues.
Steve Zeltzer, Golden Gate Chapter

French public sector protests

France's largest telecommunications workers union has rejected a Government privatisation proposal that would shed 15% of the workforce - 22,000 jobs over the next ten years. One official said the union would try to recapture the mood of December 1995, when the country was disrupted by a wave of public sector strikes. Other civil service unions are also threatening strike action after Prime Minister Alain Juppe vowed to remove "fat" from their ranks. Union leaders responded by calling national demonstrations and stepping up demands for a shorter working week, higher pay and stronger economic growth.The labour unrest in France echoes what is happening in Germany. Postal and transport workers are staging strikes to back their demand for a 4.5% wage increase for Germany's 3.2 million public service workers. Juppe and Chancellor Helmut Kohl are both attempting to bring their debt, deficits and inflation rates in line with criteria set for countries wishing to join a single European currency in 1999.

Bosnian miners strike

Since the return of their delegation to Bosnia, Bosnian miners have been forced to take strike action. For four years no wages were paid, but from January 1st 1996 the authorities promised wages of about £160 a month, which has not been paid. Food prices in Bosnia are much the same as in Britain.

The miners are also appealing for money to buy safety equipment for half of their members - about 20,000 - who are at present not working for lack of safety equipment. The Bosnian miners played a central role in defending their multi-cultural communities and their union represents miners from all ethnic backgrounds. They have a proud history of struggle.

- If you are able to help please send all donations payable to: The Tuzla Miners Aid Fund, c/o The Miners Hall, PO Box 6, Red Hill, Durham.

LLB page 24

Burma resists

Mike Phipps writes: A year ago the military junta ruling Burma released leading democracy campaigner Aung San Suu Kyi from six years of house arrest. With the latest crackdown on democracy rallies, this move seems like a cynical attempt to improve the country's image to entice investment and tourism.

The regime's 'Visit Myanmar Year 1996' begins officially in October. In preparation, forced labour has been used to build infrastructural projects and thousands of people have been forcibly relocated to make way for 'unspoilt' tourist developments.

The current military regime dates from September 1988 following a brief flowering of democracy. 10,000 were killed in the subsequent crackdown and although elections were held in 1990 with the National League for Democracy winning 82% of seats, the military refused to hand over power. Dozens of opposition MPs were jailed.

Burma is one of the worst human rights abusers in the world. Shackled prisoners build roads. A recent TV documentary by John Pilger highlighted the exploitation of young children in building projects.

In forced relocation, 200,000 'squatters' were moved out of Rangoon. In 1990 the entire population of the tourist destination Pagan were evicted to a site of unsheltered, baked earth 7 kilometre away. Each family was paid $2.50 compensation.

The regime hopes to earn billions of dollars from tourism - the world's fastest growing industry. The existence of Aung San Suu Kyi's opposition is acutely embarrassing to it.

● For more information contact the Burma Action Group, Collins Studios, Collins Yard, London N1 2XU.

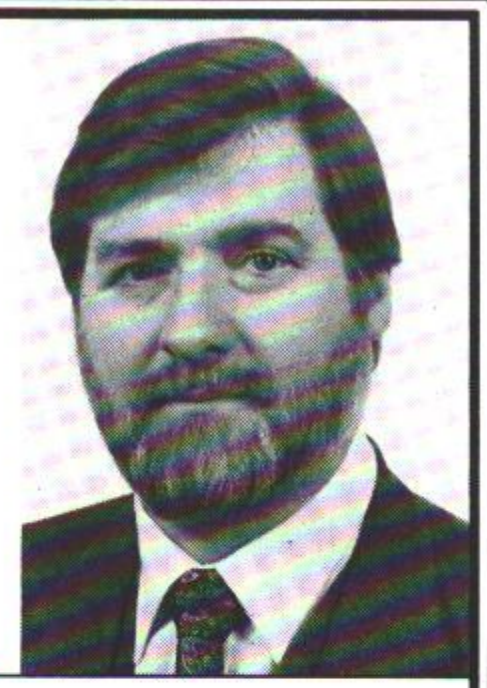
Slavery In Brazil

A survey by the Pastoral Land Commission in Sao Paulo uncovered 25,000 Brazilians working in conditions of slavery or semi-slavery last year. Forty per cent of them are children between the ages of 7 and 16.

Official Ministry of Labour data back up the findings. Fifty-six firms were charged last year for different sorts of human exploitation. A typical finding was the discovery of hundreds of men, women and children, especially Indians, working 15-hour shifts in return for a meal, under the supervision of hired gunmen. Rising unemployment has contributed to the problem. Jose de Souza Martins, a sociologist at Sao Paulo University, who has been researching the issue for 18 years, estimates that there are up to 95,000 slaves in the country.

● For more information, contact Brazil Network, PO Box 1325, London SW9.

Where's the beef?



by Michael Hindley MEP

WHAT HAVE JAMAICA, China, Algeria, Bulgaria and the USA got in common? They had all already banned British beef before the BSE scare and the subsequent European Union (EU) ban on exports.

Moreover, none of those countries have been subjected to the tirade of xenophobic abuse unleashed on our EU partners by our trashy newspapers when they took the prudent step on banning sales of British beef in their own countries, after the UK Government's cack-handed original announcement that there was a possible link between BSE and its related human form Kreuzfeld Jakob's Disease. The most characterising features of the crisis have been the manner with which the Tories have sought to divert the debate away from food safety into a raucous and sterile debate on (yet again) Britain's actual membership of the EU.

Labour, according to the official line from its putative Ministry of Truth, is engaged in a "staged distancing" from the Tory tactics of blocking EU business. With the Hun at the gate, and demanding, rather irrationally it must be admitted, that banning British beef is the only way to restore Germans' faith in their own beef, it is no time, according to the non-elected spin-doctors, for loose talk at the cross-roads. Only later when others have been brave enough to raise questions about the Tories' counter-productive wrecking measures should New Labour lift its carefully coiffured head above the parapet.

How dreadfully weak and unprincipled. To listen to the press you would be forgiven for thinking that the only thing we exported was beef. The other week the Government blocked an EU trade agreement with Mexico - improvement in the trade regulations between 300 million Europeans and a crucial Central American country were stymied - there's scope there for Labour to stand up for the true interests of Britain's exporters.

My Spanish colleagues on the trade committee were politely ironic about the need to take appropriate measures to show disapproval of EU policy in the appropriate forums but other colleagues on other committees do note a thinning of patience, not least with the Labour Party's failure to distance itself - in a more decisive, less "staged" manner.

So back to beef. We need to go onto the attack against the mad cap drive towards profit before safety in food production. It was the Thatcherite deregulations in the 1980s that caused this crisis.

It is quite accidental that it is the beef scare that has hit the headlines. Our chickens have until recently been turned into the carnivores nature certainly did not intend.

It is the mentality of cutting corners to get the food onto the plate as quickly as possible that needs to be addressed.

A while ago a glowing representative of the American Soybean Association told me that stuffing protein into animals was essential to get the food onto the plate in the quickest most profitable way. His association even sponsored research into "chicken mortality" to achieve that end. Now, is it "Old Labour" to believe that such ludicrous examples of getting your priorities wrong in a world where millions die of uncomplicated diseases which have simple and cheap cures are wonderful campaigning material? Incredibly the watchword from the Blair camp is not to have too much water between New Labour and the Tories on Europe - their reluctance to speak out against Major's ghastly xenophobia is because they fear to be labelled unpatriotic by the trashy press the Blairites have been so keen to butter up to.

"Savages", "Green Guerillas" and Central American ecology

Mike Phipps reviews Savages *by Joe Kane, Published by Macmillan, price £16.99, and* Green Guerrillas, *edited by Helen Collinson, published by Latin American Bureau, price £10.99.*

OVER THE last 30 years American oil exploration in the Ecuadorian Amazon has proceeded without regulation. Every day millions of gallons of toxic pollutants are dumped into a watershed of 50,000 square miles of rain-forest. The estimated cost of the cleanup is $5bn. Texaco, whose pipeline has spilled almost twice as much oil as the Exxon Valdez spilled off the coast of Alaska, has so far offered a pitiful $12m.

At stake is the astonishing bio-diversity of the rainforest, where in an area the size of two football pitches 473 species of tree may be found - more than are native to the whole of western Europe. The effect of pollution on the rivers, flora, and fauna — the means of life for the 150,000 indigenous people of the region - has been devastating: birth defects, cancers, a 98% malnutrition rate. "An entire way of life is being destroyed," says one of the interviewees in Joe Kane's ironically entitled book. "So you tell me: who are the savages?"

Kane's often funny, deeply moving book is a record of his contact with the Huaorani people, one of the most remote peoples of the forest. But this is not an idealised account of a passive society quietly awaiting their destruction. It is about their tenacious spirit of resistance which helped them harness the benefits of a western-style education designed to tame them and use it to articulate an awareness of their own rights. This indomitable spirit led to a campaign with local and international environmental organisations which enabled the Huaorani to press their demands to the President of Ecuador and even in Washington DC.

Not that Kane gives a one-sided optimistic account: there's plenty of 'environmental imperialism' here, with US-based groups taking a 'we know best' line and negotiating over the heads of indigenous people. Sadly there are also cases of indigenous leaders being literally bought off by oil companies.

Under international pressure, western oil giants now claim to be clearing up their mess. But Kane's penetration of one such operation exposes the reality of massive oil spills cleared up by hand. Disease-ridden farmers, whose land has been ruined by contamination, work for a dollar a day scooping toxic waste into leaking plastic sacks which are buried in shallow pits. These frequently overflow after heavy rain.

This is a remarkable book, full of humanity. It is ideally complemented by *Green Guerrillas, a reader in Latin American and Caribbean environmental conflicts and initiatives* edited by occasional *LLB* contributor Helen Collinson. If *Savages* focuses on the impact of environmental devastation on one indigenous people, *Green Guerrillas* paints a bigger picture. This year Brazil opened up over half of all its indigenous land in Amazonia to outside interests.

One of the most powerful case studies of exploitation here is of the Colombian flower industry employing 72,000 workers. The price of a bunch of carnations in a London florist is a day's pay to these mainly women workers. Thanks to the use of pesticides, many of which are banned in Europe, the US and even Colombia itself, they regularly suffer from fainting spells, dizziness, skin and respiratory complaints, premature births and neurological problems, including Parkinson's Disease. One woman's young baby who nearly died and was revived in hospital, was found to have been poisoned by her mother's contaminated breast-milk.

But there are stories here of resistance too - massive mobilisations against 'experimental" power stations in Puerto Rico, the development of a reafforestation programme in Haiti which loses 40 million tons of topsoil a year in erosion. Here too is the remarkable story of the Brazilian city of Curitiba, which has defied Third World expectations to bring a cheap transport system, clean water and sanitation and spacious parks to its 1.6. million inhabitants.

Green Guerrillas updates us on the oil companies' devastation of the Ecuadorian Amazon too. Texaco now face a $1.5 billion court action in New York. The Ecuadorian Government, fearing this could be a disincentive to oil companies to invest, presented a diplomatic protest to the US Government and asked the case to be heard in Ecuador instead, where the courts might be more accommodating. This produced a storm of media protest in Ecuador and charges that the Government had sided with a foreign corporation against its own citizens.

Meanwhile last month Hector Villamil, President of one of Ecuador's indigenous people's organisations and who spoke in London at the launch of this book, was elected to the country's parliament. Things are clearly on the move.

Cabaret for Nicaragua

8pm - midnight (Doors open 7.30)
Friday July 19th 1996
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1
(Holborn tube); Disabled access

Food available

Kevin Day, Harry Hill, Phil Jupitus, Veronica McKenzie, Julie McNamara, Fay Presto and Mark Steel.

Part of proceeds to Nicaragua's Radio Zinica
Admission in advance £7, £4(concs); at the door £8/£5
Tickets from 0171-272-9619.

'Fit to Govern?' is fit for nothing

Liz Davies reviews Fit To Govern? *by Leo McKinstry, Bantam Press, £12.99.*

This book is hailed as an insider's view of Blair's Labour Party. McKinstry was a Party activist in Islington for ten years. We were members of the same ward. He spent four years as a councillor, including two as chair of Personnel and worked as a researcher for MPs Harriet Harman and Doug Henderson.

Leo left the Party in a fit of pique nine months after losing his Council seat in 1994. He had been one of Islington's and New Labour's rising stars - anxious to grind down Council staff's terms and conditions, always ready to defend every twist and turn of the Labour Party leadership and even to do their dirty work for them. When he lost his seat, he had been on the verge of becoming Deputy Leader and was tipped as a future Leader. But not long afterwards he wrote in the *Spectator* that Labour local authorities were obsessed with "political correctness, bureaucracy, intervention and abuse of public money". He dramatically tore up his Labour Party membership card and left his job in the House of Commons.

His criticisms of the demands of Party activists tell us more about himself than the Party. He describes canvassing on Christmas Eve and having the door slammed in his face, going without sleep for days during election campaigns and an obsessive addiction to meetings. Some of us tried to persuade him at the time to 'get a life'. Leo lionises Stephen Twigg, Deputy Leader of Islington Council, ("a brilliant young man . . . charismatic, handsome and a superb public speaker"). Twigg returned the compliment when reviewing the book for the *Ham & High*, calling Leo "witty, irreverent and charming". And *LLB* get a mention too. It's good to hear that Blairites often wear the accolade of Class Traitor of the Month with pride.

The only interest in *Fit to Govern?* is its insight into Leo's psyche (and possibly the psyche of other ambitious Blairites who find themselves spurned by the electorate). Leo has no new insights into the Labour Party. His book is merely Tory propaganda spiced up with personal anecdotes.

Sex, drugs and HIV



Telly and Girl #2 (sic)

David Pope reviews the film *Kids*: *Kids* is bleak, unsettling and ultimately depressing. It depicts New York teenagers who have no interests in life beyond drink, drugs and sex. Their activities are funded by shoplifting, drug peddling and borrowing from their parents. Of course there is nothing unusual about young people obsessed with enjoying themselves but the film's depiction of totally hedonistic, selfish and thoughtless lifestyles is dispiriting.

The film's central character, Telly, seduces a series of naive virgins and abandons them. Blissfully ignorant of his condition, he infects at least one with HIV. Women are presented as victims. One of them, Jenny, learns she is positive and has been infected by her only sexual partner Telly. Jenny searches for Telly to warn him. She finds him at it at a party. In despair she collapses into a drug-induced stupor. Telly's drunken friend Casper takes advantage. An act of revenge on her part or rape?

It is hard to recommend *Kids*: unrelenting sordid subject matter, obnoxious characters. The film shows a callous society without hope or aspiration. Perhaps its real merit lies in its unconscious criticism of capitalism and for that reason, you should probably see it.

Memoir of a revolutionary

Mike Phipps reviews Carlos, Now the Dawn's No Found Illusion, *by Tomas Borge, published by Katabasis, £6.95.*

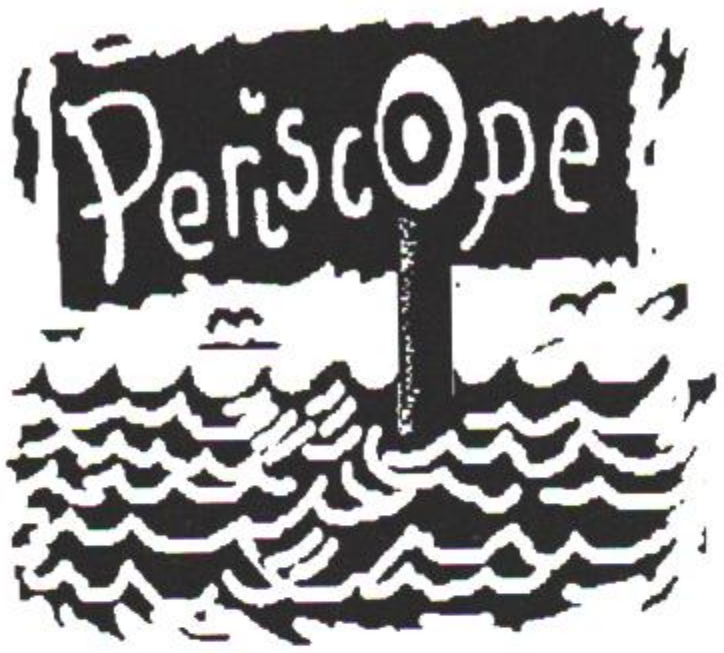
Carlos, Now the Dawn's No Found Illusion is a memoir of Carlos Fonseca, founder of the Nicaraguan Sandinistas in 1961. Available for the first time in English, it was written in prison by Tomas Borge in 1977, two years before the Nicaraguan Revolution, following his comrade's death.

As Borge relates: "The governor of Tipitapa prison came gleefully to our small cell to give us the news: Carlos Fonseca was dead. We were silent for a few moments and then replied: 'No, Colonel, you are mistaken. Carlos Fonseca is one of the dead who never die'. The Colonel said to us: 'Really you people are incredible.'"

Tomas Borge grew up with Fonseca and shared many of his formative experiences - disillusionment with traditional communism and the inspiration of the Cuban Revolution. There are many personal insights into the co-founder of the Sandinista guerrillas, who by all accounts was an extraordinary man who led by example and was modest, generous and self-sacrificing.

But the memoir also contains incisive political observations on the importance of the Nicaraguan peasantry and the guerrillas' strong roots among them. This allowed the Sandinistas not only to survive their military defeats, but to emerge politically strengthened, and to win where other Latin American movements failed.

After the revolution, Borge became Nicaraguan Minister of the Interior. His "revenge" on his jailers and tortures was to visit them and forgive them. This book helps explain how important the idea of reconciliation and redemption was to the philosophy of the Sandinistas - and the man who inspired them. ❑



Here comes that pain again

So former Eurythmic **Dave Stewart** blames his wealth for the fact that his life has been dominated by feelings of ill health. Stewart may have been suffering from somatisation: a tendency to convert one's depression or anxiety into physical ailments. Money in fact has little to do with it. A World Health Organisation world-wide survey found the highest incidence of somatisation on a housing estate in South Manchester. Poverty is a potent cause of mental ill health, but wealth it seems enables you to pay for private consultants and lecture audiences on your symptoms.

Crap jobs for the comrades

Good to see Labour **Bedford Borough Council** leading the way with job security. The new post of Research Assistant to the Labour Group (salary about £13,000) is being advertised as "initially for one year (but will be subject to review) with possible extension up to a maximum of two years". Wow. And in case you get carried away in the post, it's "on a fixed term, non-renewable contract". So no employment protection for you, comrade.

Nepotism?

Stephen Twigg, former NUS President, Deputy Leader of Islington Council, PPC in Enfield Southgate, and leading Blair babe who, of course, had absolutely nothing to do with the smear campaign against Liz Davies, has been short-listed for the position of General Secretary of the Fabians, salary approximately £30,000. The interview panel consists of three leading Fabians, the great and the good, including one Margaret Hodge MP, not only Stephen's close political associate but his former employer.

Lackeys careers club

The **Labour Co-ordinating Committee** (LCC) has provided another lickspittle to pop up the capitalist system: former LCC chair and Prescott aid **Mike Craven** has been elected to the Council of the Institute of Directors.

Progresswatch

Our occasional investigation into the world of Mandelson-sidekick **Derek Draper**'s new journal *Progress*, has revealed a worrying development. Members of the *LLB* EB were among those Party members sent a free copy of the voice of New Labourism, along with an invitation to subscribe and buy Mandy's new book. With mailings now reaching tens of thousands of copies, questions are being asked about how the organisation is being funded and whether the mail-outs breach the Data Protection Act.

How Draper got hold of so many Party members' addresses is, oddly enough, not on the agenda of the next meeting of the National Constitutional Committee. Anyone who is concerned that their addresses are being supplied to outside bodies illegally might consider writing to the Data Protection Registrar, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

Break the LINC

UNISON members may wish to challenge the fact that their money - presumably from the political fund - is being spent on **LINC**, the Labour group advocating an alliance with the **Lib Dems**.

Lambeth still twinning

Next time you have to rush back from work to a meeting, spare a thought for the **Lambeth Lib Dem councillor** who has to return from his job in Latvia to attend council meetings. The council agendas must be rivetting if they can justify a 3000 mile round-trip.

"Safe in our hands"

A finance manager from Kent and Sussex Weald Health Trust was suspended in February pending police investigation into alleged fraud, reports the latest edition of *Health Emergency*, the campaigning paper for the NHS. The fraud allegedly took place at **Tunbridge Wells Conservative Club**, of which he is treasurer.

Euro fraud

Whilst the biggest beef in the EU at the moment is you know what, **major fraud scandals** have been revealed but have not hit the headlines. 4,750 cases of fraud believed to be the tip of the iceberg - were discovered last year, amounting to £1.15 billion ecu (around £.9m). On top of the longstanding ficticious **olive trees of Italy** come cigarettes smuggling and beef export fraud. European Commission President, Klaus Hansch admitted that it had been "less than successful" in combatting the fraud, and that only 10% of sums identified as having been gained fraudulently were recovered.

The budgetary control committee established an anti-fraud unit in 1988 which is presumably not working on a productivity basis. 50 new bureaucrats were assigned to the unit in 1995, making a staff total of no less than 130. Measures to stop fraud among civil servants were blocked by the British Government in May as part of their non co-operation policy over beef.

Outfoxing the law

Hunt saboteur **Simon Wild** has won an out-of-court settlement of £500 from Sussex police for wrongful arrest - after saying "oink" to a police officer. This brings the total awards Mr Wild has gained from the police to £5,000 from five cases in the last six years. He commented, "The money means I can afford to keep going to demos and hunts and I have bought a video camera to record the police so that we have hard evidence against them. The police cannot arrest you without good reason. When I try to put them right, they just arrest me because they think I am a cocky bastard."

Stalinist balance sheet

Eric Hobsbawm is giving the comrades the benefit of his wisdom at a conference "On the positive achievements of the Communist Party of Great Britain". It starts at 10.00am. We understand that it will finish at five past.

ANNOUNCING

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25–28 JULY 1996

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science

Life without faith?

Our science correspondent Chris Knight (senior lecturer in anthropology, University of East London) examines the alternatives to God.

IS GOD dead? According to the latest MORI opinion poll, confidence in him has sunk to an all-time low. Only 43 per cent of the British electorate now think he exists at all. If this is so, then what are the alternatives?

Western society's foremost militant atheist is Richard Dawkins, author of *The Selfish Gene*. Dawkins argues that belief in God is a cultural replicator - a gene-like "selfish" set of instructions on the model of a computer virus. Just as hard disks are designed to soak up and copy whatever is fed into them, so human brains for some reason have evolved to be grotesquely gullible.

The instruction, "God is love - copy me" is therefore only a bit of "junk DNA", present in our heads simply because we're open to such cognitive exploitation. Dawkins is a computer programmer with a mission. He can give us all an efficient, anti-God, do-it-yourself viral detection and elimination kit. Then across the planet, humans will trust only in science.

Dawkins' version of science is compelling - and chilling. Planet Earth is the result of a series of cosmological and evolutionary accidents. Life has neither purpose nor meaning. Human history is of no more significance than the creeping of green slime across damp rock. To ask what is the "meaning" of suffering is itself meaningless - like asking about the colour of gravity or the taste of Black Holes.

Of course, scientists as individuals may not deny life's meaning; but their professional ethics prompt them to keep "meaning" and "science" apart. Bourgeois "science" polarises the world into subjective versus objective aspects, focusing on what is "out there" to the exclusion of all else. We scientists, to the extent that we comply with this ethos, are "scientific" about everything - with the one vital exception of ourselves.

Dawkins' atheism is an inspiration. He is correct to argue that "God" is a self-perpetuating lie. But his own version of Darwinism is unable to explain why humans have evolved to be so "gullible". We humans are designed for faith, our brains and emotions are so constructed as to seek faith in something larger than ourselves. But Dawkins should distinguish between falsehoods of different kinds. Some lies are breaches of faith - mere tricks whereby individuals or groups succeed in exploiting one another. But others are communally empowering - they are faith itself.

My own work on human origins suggests that collective deception is the essence of language, art, ritual, drama, mythology and all



religion. It is what makes us human. Monkeys and apes may deceive, but their deceptions are uninspiring because they are so selfish. Only humans deceive collectively, rejoicing in the elaboration of their own communally empowering fantasies. We became human when coalitions of kin - mothers with their offspring, brothers and other relatives - began painting their bodies and staging rituals to arouse hunters to summon up their energies for the chase. Female dancers identified themselves with the wild beasts, constructing hunters as metaphorical "suitors" courting "bison-women", "antelope-maidens" and other wondrous beings. These were rituals of communal trickery, seductively harnessing the energies of the human male. But like any contemporary carnival, it was all a hilarious, liberating fiction with which men were only too happy to collude. It served their genetic interests not to resist, but to play along. Human gullibility served us well.

I would agree with Dawkins that today's New Age religions are pure fantasy. The Earth, contrary to their claims, is *not* Our Mother. There is *no* Spirit or Goddess presiding over us. I am *not* Brother to the Elephants, Whales or Dolphins. We are *not* all One with the Cosmos.

But as Loyal Rue has written in a marvellous recent book, *By the Grace of Guile*, there are goals worth serving beyond "truth". The truth is that we are hurtling towards ecological and political catastrophe. Sit back and analyse, and we can have no hope. But to paraphrase Marx, our task is not just to analyse the world but to change it. The adaptive challenge of our age is to avert the coming catastrophe. For this, the whole of humanity requires a new "myth" - a narrative enchanting enough to rival the world's dying religions, capturing our hearts and souls.

In loosening the grip of the great religious fundamentalisms, the scientific nihilists have done their work. So let us now thank them respectfully and send them on their way. The rest of us have a story to tell. This story is that of modern science - plus meaning. It is the tale of this universe, this galaxy, this planet and this species of ours. It is The Greatest Myth on Earth. But unlike Dawkins' "science", it presumes to tell us not only how things are - but also *which things matter*. To Dawkins, therefore, it may seem another "lie". Well, perhaps. Our faith in one another - in our past and in our future - is not "science". It is not nature's own story, not told by the earth, not "objectively" true. In Rue's own memorable words: "It is just a tale told by humans, full of contingency and distortion, signifying hope. But it is a noble lie, one that washes down with a minimum of deception and offers up a maximum of adaptive change, and if it is well and artfully told, it will re-enchant the earth and save us from the truth."

● Note: The quotation is from Loyal Rue, *By the Grace of Guile* (Oxford University Press 1994).

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
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While in no way wishing to monopolise the letters page of *LLB*, I feel I have to make what will hopefully be one last contribution to the mini-debate between myself and Tony Dale on the issue of socialist advance in Britain.

Our two letters, side by side, offered two distinct alternatives. Tony's, which presents a position similar to that of most socialists on the Labour left, suggests that one day the left will win the Labour Party over to socialism OR it will split, with the socialist element constituting a mass party with substantial trade union support. Mine, which presents a minority view on the British left, is that the only possible hope for socialist strategy in Britain is for a new socialist party to be formed. I have already outlined the main constituent characteristics of this party, formed from the 'bottom-up' and equipped with an ideology that is not class-based. This party will start very small and will not have substantial, if any, trade-union support. Obviously, trade unions are not, by their very nature and function, socialist in ideology - they exist to defend wage-labourers and one of the main aims of socialism is to emancipate human beings from the trap of wage-labour.

I suspect that Tony's argument would be that the left within the trade unions also has to fight for socialism, but this is a circular argument: the logic of trade unionism is a parallel to the logic of Labourism - the context and limit of the former is wage-labour as the context and limit of the latter is capitalism.

If I was a betting man and my life was going to be considerably extended, I would bet Tony and any of his comrades on the Labour left that their strategy will not lead even one step in the right direction as regards socialist advance in Britain. In contrast, one day, the type of party that I am writing about will come into existence and then socialists can be clear about their ideology, strategy, aims and practical political activity and will have a context within which they can work.

I would like to conclude with one last thought: there is no ideological continuum between socialism and social democracy, but there is a clear ideological continuum between social democracy and conservatism. That is why the Labour left will never be successful.

Paul Allender,
Willesden.

As a former CLPD member now for many years resident in mini-Thatcherite New Zealand, I'm delighted to see that Vladimir Derer is still in there pitching.

Peter Duffy,
Massey University,
New Zealand.

Chris Williams appears to have missed the point in saying "to oppose the EU just because it is capitalist doesn't make sense" ("In place of Maastricht", *LLB*, May 1996).

The contention of those of us who advocate withdrawal from or fundamental reform of the EU is that the EU presents an affront to the sovereignty of national parliaments and therefore politically disenfranchises the people of the nations of Europe. Instead, power is transferred to a commission, unelected by the people of Europe, and, unless we can stop it, to a central bank. Under such a bank, the power to set interest rates, devalue the currency and, no doubt, impose any fiscal measure affecting the money supply would pass to unelected bankers, bound by the monetarist goal of "price stability" enshrined in the Maastricht Treaty. Robbed of the tools of managing the economy, it would be impossible for any national government within the EU to operate a remotely socialist manifesto. The EU is to Britain what Thatcher's Government was to the GLC. Furthermore, the existence of the EU has led to the centralisation of power within Britain.

The analogy with South Yorkshire leaving the UK is a false one; the good citizens of Sheffield get to vote in general elections. We may not like the Tories, but we can vote against them and get rid of them. The same does not go for the European Commission: we can't vote for them and can't get rid of them.

May I remind comrades of the existence of the Labour Euro Safeguards Campaign, a membership organisation with supporters ranging from Tony Benn to Austin Mitchell, which is currently campaigning against a single currency.

Simon Hewitt,
Vice-Chair,
Brunel Labour Students

Your piece in the June issue of *LLB* on the internal machinations at the *New Statesman* under Ian Hargreaves hardly takes us any further forward. A current exchange between John Lloyd, a previous editor and now assistant editor, and Anthony Barnett in *Prospect* provides more that is of interest. Barnett alleges and Lloyd concurs that Lloyd was passed over as editor of the *Staggers* in the 1980s because he was not thought to be a reliable enough Labour man. Lloyd also confesses that Kinnock told him to pull his socks up and sort out the *Statesman*.

In other words, the top of the Labour Party does care about who has control of the *Statesman*. That explains why Steve Platt, who was prepared to give a hearing to the Liberals on the one hand and the far left on the other, had to go in favour of someone safer. Whether Ian Hargreaves, who is not a Labour Party member or a socialist in any recognisable sense, is that man we shall have to see. A good litmus test will be how long Hargreaves can go on writing his *Sunday Telegraph* column while editing the *Statesman* as well. An even better one will be what the magazine does once Blair is elected and starts to bash those who elected him.

In the meantime, I suspect we will just have to get used to the fact that while some magazines do provide really useful knowledge about the capitalist system and those who oppose it, the *Statesman* will not be one of them. Which, actually, is precisely how it has been for most of its long history.

Keith Flett,
London

LLB page 30

Congratulations to heroes of the South African struggle, John Laredo and David Evans who have exposed John Lloyd in your paper (*LLB* May).

John Harris lost his life and John Lloyd should never be able to assume public office and to my mind should be kicked out of the Labour Party.

Norma Kitson,
Harare,
Zimbabwe.

In your "manifesto for real life" item (*LLB*, June 96), you correctly print the Green Socialist Network's statement that the top priorities of a Labour Government should be to extend social ownership (not just public ownership, but also encouragement of co-ops and self-management) and to take immediate action against all sorts of pollution (whether food additives, atmospheric, oil or nuclear).

However, your lead-in may inadvertently give the wrong impression. In fact, many GSN members are also Labour Party members, so we are not necessarily "outside the ranks". Indeed, Democratic Left, to which we are attached in a network (though not all our members are DL members) now has nearly half of its national executive in membership of the Labour Party. This is possible because neither the DL nor the GSN is a political party. I would also like to correct your attribution of our statement to the Red-Green network, which is a completely different organisation. The word "socialist" (referring to eventual social ownership of the economy) is very dear to us. In DL it is what distinguishes the GSN from the "radical democrat" majority. Further information about our work can be obtained from Green Socialist Network, 6 Cynthia Street, London N1 9JF.

Finally, I would like to express our support for the calls, by other contributors to your interesting debate, for a restoration of the welfare state. If we had been asked for three priorities instead of two, that would certainly have been included.

Graham Taylor,
Wembley.

Amnesty International and Brazil Network are among the organisations demanding an investigation into the massacre of 24 landless people in the Brazilian state of Para in April. The Massacre in Eldorado dos Carajas followed a protest by the Movement of Rural Landless People in which the main motorway was blocked off. The protest had already reached a peaceful conclusion when busloads of armed police arrived, encircled the 1500 rural workers and opened fire with automatic weapons.

A three-year old girl was among the 24 killed and 50 wounded. Many of the dead were 'finished off' at close range after being wounded. Some showed signs of torture. Since the 1970s the state of Para has been the scene of much conflict between landowners leaseholders. Thousands of political activists, union members and rural workers have faced death threats, beatings and murder. Over 6,000 people attended the funerals of this latest and worst atrosity.

Brazil Network are organising a one-day conference on Social movements and the struggle for land in Brazil on Saturday June 29th at the University of London Union, Malet Street. For further information, contact Brazil Network PO Box 1325, London SW9 oRA, telephone and fax 0181 674 4301.

Mike Phipps,
Brent.

Your debate on socialists remaining in the Labour Party starts from the wrong premise. We should join the party which empowers us, individually, most effectively. For some this will be Labour, for others Militant Labour, Nationalist parties or the Greens. Many forswear electoral politics and put their efforts into the SWP, various revolutionary sects or into unions, campaigns and pressure groups.

If political parties want activists, they are going to have to nurture, listen to and value us. Labour has stopped doing that.

After twelve years' activism in the Labour Party, I no longer feel valued. I've gone somewhere I do feel valued, the Green Party. Now, my politics are mirrored by that of my Party's conference. The culture shift is enormous between Labour and the Greens. I can't call people 'comrade' and only one or two know the words to the 'Internationale' - but perhaps that's not so different from New Labour!

To change society there will be differences about tactics, means, agency, between us. However we must encourage activism in disillusioned comrades. And we must co-operate across organisational boundaries. Like the bulk of *LLB* subscribers, I look forward to the possibility of a change of government and will be attacking that government from the left.

I invite your paper and subscribers to help keep liaison across organisations alive, by supporting the Green Left conference on 9th November at Conway Hall. Tickets and further details from John Morrissey, 01203 - 325890. The formation of a joint network of organisations is a distinct possibility. If you fancy an antidote to sectarianism, do come! Alternatively, the 'Green Left' marquee at the Big Green Gathering in Warminster, 24th-28th July will provide some serious politics at a light hearted festival. Details from David Boardman, 0161 627 4862.

Mark Hill,
Red Green Network/York Green Party PPC.

Staff and tenants from over 30 Housing Associations (HAs) have formed a Campaign for Accountability to Tenants and Staff (CATS), led by Circle 33 Housing Trust tenants and the TGWU.

Circle 33 is a major HA with over 10,000 homes around London. New Labour board members include the husbands of MPs Tessa Jowell and Mo Mowlem and Margaret Hodge, chair of the Board, who approved a reorganisation which shed 75% of staff. Chief Executive, Donald Hoodless was also once Labour Leader of Islington Council. Circle 33 have used the fact that 66% of tenants are on HB to hike rents - penalising the other tenants. Tenants were banned from writing articles of protest in their own newsletter. Elected tenants committees were closed down. Hodge dismissed the protesting tenants as "nobodies".

Contact CATS via Leonie Snell, TGWU-ACTS Housing Branch, c/o 308 Grays Inn Road, London WC1X 8DS.

Pat Edlin, Press Officer for CATS.

A.O.B.

"Mr Howard was reported to be in favour of clothing community service offenders in distinctive "mark of shame" uniforms so that they feel and are conspicuous. Soon, no doubt, Mr Straw will be telling us that Labour want them to wear uniforms covered in stripes and arrows and to work in chain gangs. Or why not go the whole hog, and call in the Rio de Janeiro police to dispose of the youngsters?" - ***The Guardian.***

"I can tell you the T & G's attitude towards pay policies - we've been there, seen it, done it and it does not work. We are not having it." - **Bill Morris.**

"They didn't deserve a penny in the first place, and certainly don't deserve any increase in the amount already offered." - **Tory MP Terry Dicks on the Birmingham 6.**

Let the best nation win?

Mike Marqusee expresses some concerns about Mr Blair's Euro-96 fever.



IN AN *Observer* article previewing the Euro 96 football championship, Tony Blair gave England supporters a taste of what he's dished out to Labour Party members. "We should not be aiming for second place," the leader admonished his fellow fans. The article told us little about football, but a great deal about Blair.

As a school boy on holiday in France, he had shared "the thrill of victory, the adrenaline, the feeling of pride and hero worship" that accompanied England's World Cup win of 1966. He seems to have been hungering for a return to national greatness ever since, and he is unequivocal about where greatness is to be found in football, as well as in life. "For true supporters victory is all … In sport as in politics, a well-fought campaign for second place means nothing."

But the reality of sport is that somebody has to finish second, somebody has to lose. Is Blair arguing that for other countries, victory is or should be less important? And if victory is of such utmost importance for all the competing nations, how can the tournament be other than a dog-eat-dog war of all against all? Strange sentiments for a man ostensibly committed to European co-operation.

As we have seen in his opportunism over the beef crisis, Blair's Europeanism is tempered by nationalism. And he sees Euro 96 as a "test of our national character … Like the team itself, English supporters will be on trial during the championship." In a competitive global economy, "England" must put its best foot forward. Never mind mass unemployment and a crumbling welfare state and the increase in violent racial assaults - what matters is that "England" is not disgraced in the eyes of the world by an outbreak of hooliganism.

"Nations express themselves through their football," avers Blair. "Over the next three weeks we will see the flair of the Latin countries, Germany's efficiency, the pace and staying power of the British sides." Pity this wasn't the world Cup. The Labour leader could have invoked the "carefree" Nigerians and "hard-working" Koreans. The crude national stereotyping reveals not only that Blair doesn't watch football with much eye for detail, but also that, for all the talk of facing up to the challenges of the global economy, his view of nations and the world they share is constructed of cardboard cut-outs.

Blair's aides insist that, contrary to press reports, the leader does indeed write the articles that appear under his name. Is this good news or bad?

Football racists attack brothers

Newham Monitoring Project reports.

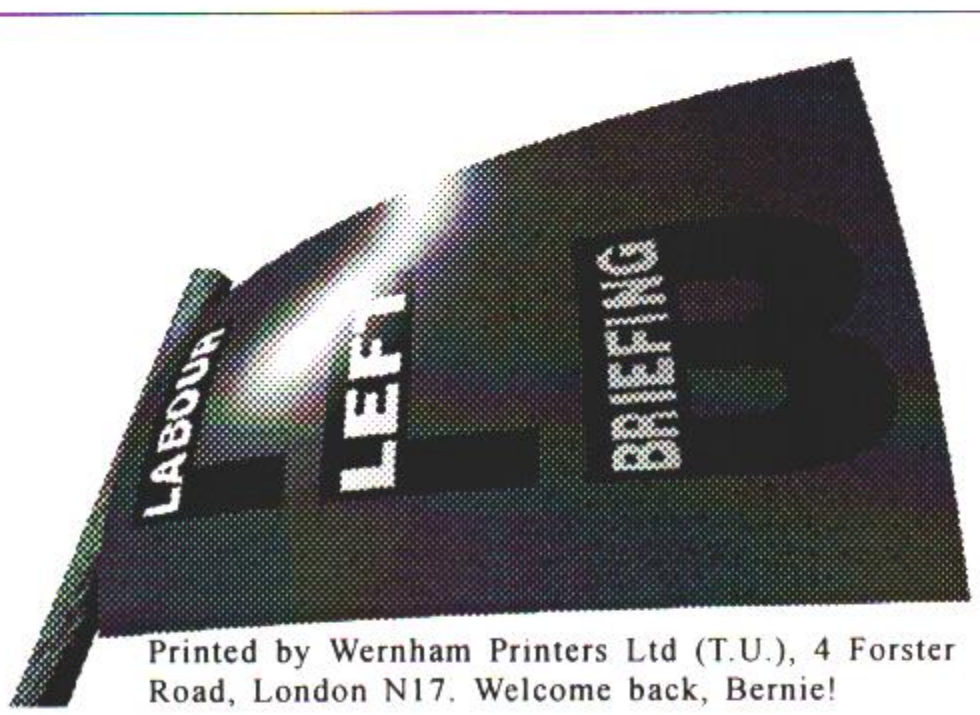
AT 7.30 PM on 9th June 1996, two brothers were brutally attacked in east London.

Dilwa and Jakim Motin were attacked outside their home after being chased by a group of 15 youths from a pub on Old Bethnal Green Road. The men had spent all afternoon getting drunk and patriotic, watching the England v Switzerland football match. As the two brothers passed the pub, the men shouted abuse. In fear of attack the brothers ran home only to find that the group of men were in pursuit. The brothers were pulled to the ground and attacked with broken bottles and pool cues. During the attack Dilwa's wife and a young African-Caribbean boy were also beaten.

Hakim and Dilwa were rushed to hospital where they were operated on immediately. That night the same group of racists went to the hospital and attempted to attack the brothers. They were only prevented from doing so by hospital security.

After a meeting of local residents, many of whom told of harassment from patrons of the same pub, a local community group was set up to deal with the racist problems of the estate and to put pressure on the police and local council to take action against these attacks.

A spokesperson for the family and the campaign said, "The estate for years has been a breeding ground for racists. The community here will no longer tolerate these racist attacks. The campaign will fight for justice for the Motin brothers and the right to live free from intimidation and attack."



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