LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

March 1996 price £1

Irish peace in jeopardy...

Who's to blame?





Inside...

- Scott inquiry
- Hemsworth assessed
- Scottish news
- International Women's Day
- The Harman affair

Labour Left Briefing

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What did you do for peace, Mo?

I'VE NEVER supported the IRA's bombing campaign in Britain or Ireland but yet again I will be refusing to join the hypocrites' chorus of condemnation. Neither will I pedal one of the left variants of condemnation which are trotted out when a bomb explodes in Britain.

The most ludicrous demand is that Gerry Adams and Martin McGuiness should condemn the bombing. As John Bruton has pointed out this is quite simply a "waste of time" and I would add such a move would severely undermine their usefulness in the peace process.

After the tragic London bombing socialists in Britain should focus on one question - what can we do to help bring about peace in Ireland? We should also fight to get Britain out of Ireland and offer solidarity to socialists in Ireland but the immediate issue is simply one of peace.

John Major gave up on peace in Ireland months ago. Intelligent sections of the establishment wanted a peaceful solution even at the cost of a united Ireland. A united capitalist Ireland is better for business than a war torn six counties or even worse bombs in London. But Major's problem was that he found himself trapped by Unionists prepared to defend his wafer thin Parliamentary majority at a price. He also had to deal with his own right wing for whom the Union is as much an article of faith as opposition to European currency.

Major wrecked the peace process. Eighteen months of peace were frittered away whilst Major insisted on an IRA surrender of arms that Adams would never and could never deliver. Major promised talks but failed to hold them. In the words of Albert Reynolds "Commitments were made in the Downing Street Declaration which were not kept. New preconditions were introduced as delaying tactics. Republican leaders such as Gerry Adams and Martin McGuiness, who courageously led their community into political involvement, should have received more support by true political activity, but did not".

The Times has suggested that since November the Cabinet has been receiving MI5 briefings that the Republican movement's militarists were growing in strength. It is in this context that Major dumped the Mitchell Commission report and embraced the Unionist demand for elections before talks. Major wilfully courted war. He has now traded the blood of ordinary working class people in London and possibly in Belfast and beyond for Unionist support in Parliament. But what did Labour do?

In the eighties Labour had moved towards a position of "unity by consent". The Unionist veto was intact but under McNamara the bipartisanship of Tory and Labour policy was nibbled away at, and Labour looked as if it might join what the Republicans now call the ranks of "persuaders" of the Protestant community. That all came to an end when McNamara was forced out and in came Blair's Mo Mowlam who was prepared to turn bipartisanship into a religion.



If Major was prepared to trade lives for Parliamentary votes Labour was prepared to risk lives rather than be seen as 'soft on terrorism'. To have broken with bipartisanship Mo Mowlam would not have had to call for "Brits out" or even embraced self-determination - she would simply have had to support the actions of the Clinton administration, John Hume or John Bruton (and before him Albert Reynolds) when they implicitly criticised John Major and pushed for more progress.

If Labour had broken with Major and opposed the preconditions to talks, backed the Mitchell commission or supported the Irish call for a Bosnia style conference, that would have been a new factor in the political situation. Put bluntly Adams could have said to his supporters Major has given up on peace but we could do business with a Labour Government. By backing Major at every turn as he pirouetted for the Unionists Mo Mowlam played her role in ensuring the return of the bombs.

That situation must end. We must build the widest possible coalition at the base of the Labour Party which calls for peace, a break with bipartisanship and talks which include Sinn Fein. Even sections of the Tory party such as Peter Temple-Morris MP can say "The IRA delivered an 18-month-long ceasefire and could deliver another one if they thought it could work. We have to react by showing sufficient willingness, having entered the process, to be prepared to move away from the status quo and to contemplate real change in Northern Ireland". Can we expect as much from Mo Mowland before it is too late?

Bryn Griffiths, Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP (personal capacity).

Labour: get serious about peace!

Francie Molloy, elected member of Dungannon Council and National Executive Committee of Sinn Fein, spoke to *LLB*.

LABOUR'S BI-PARTISAN policy on Ireland has killed it as an opposition. Numerous opportunities were missed by the Labour Party leadership to encourage and develop the peace process. Early on, Labour was silent over the necessity to promote talks. The Labour leadership consistently refused to undertake the most token of supportive gestures such as a brief meeting with the President of our party. Again, in the last few weeks Labour should have called for public consideration of the Mitchell report; not support for Major ditching it and adopting the Unionist agenda of exclusive Six County elections.

Instead Mo Mowlam has courted the Unionist Party, attended Unionist meetings and deliberately distanced Labour from its sister party, the nationalist SDLP. The sacking of Kevin McNamara was a clear signal to the Unionists that Labour was ditching the nationalists.

Mo Mowlam was clearly seen as a safe pair of hands to do her leader's bidding. The head count is very simple. The Parliament after the next British General Election will contain many more Irish Unionist MPs than Irish Nationalist MPs.

The Labour Party seems only to be interested in peace if handed it on a plate. No party that is serious about realising the resolution of conflict can afford to sit on its hands, or in this case adopt a partisan approach. The Labour Party does not at present have the will or commitment to Ireland necessary to win a lasting settlement.

The Labour Party's reaction to the Canary Wharf explosion has been a major failure to understand or even analyse. Why? There has been a deliberate decision made not to seek a serious analysis.

My fear of change of government is that it might further delay the peace process. The Labour Party would not engage in dialogue for fear of taking the necessary risks.

As for the wider labour movement in Britain the need is to push for talks, not to support one side or the other. The Unionist parties have backed down before in the face of popular pressure from their supporters. The British Government has ignored and gone over the heads of the Unionists, as with the Anglo-Irish Agreement, when it has deemed it important.

Dublin is saying "Yes we can deliver the Nationalists" but they are wrong. There can not be an internal settlement. An assembly would be the thin edge of the wedge to Stormont and all the systematic discrimination that entailed.

Labour's line: "ask Tony"

Martin King reports: Five days after the bomb, Eric Illsley, MP for Barnsley Central and Labour front bench spokesperson on Northern Ireland, told a public meeting in Manchester that the 'Labour Party policy on Ireland has stood the test of time'.

Locating the responsibility for the present situation with Sinn Fein, 'if they had only surrendered some arms' and sticking tenaciously to a closely typed script, he treated the meeting to edited highlights of Blair's most recent remarks.

The Conservatives were in fact implementing Labour policy of long standing ('formulated in 1981'). It was the Conservatives who had changed their Irish policy, not Labour. The 'change in emphasis' in Labour policy from 'persuaders' to 'facilitators' was not an example of political poverty, it was the mark of political consistency.

"We do have differences with the Tories," he reassured himself, "We disagree with the Tories over ....Irish agriculture and economic issues" (not specified).

An eternity later when questions were invited Eric looked worried - that unscripted moment had come.

Asked if he might 'understand the scepticism his advocacy of consent and democratic principles might provoke', given the recognition by Labour and the rest of the pan-unionist alliance of the original non-consensual division of Ireland in 1921, Eric beamed, and agreed that there was an inconsistency. 'Yes, the Irish elections of 1918 were not consistent with the following division of Ireland - but that was history!'

Mr Illsley, if Labour is so united on its pan-unionist alliance policy, why was Kevin McNamara sacked? A quick shuffle of his script, then Eric smiled: 'You'll have to ask Tony about that'.

Some reality did break through into the proceedings when Eric let slip the New Labour agenda on Ireland. There were the 'electoral consequences' of differing from Major on Ireland. 'The Tories would no doubt exploit any clear blue water between Labour and the Tories,' revealed Eric. 'Look how Major did it with law and order.' 'New' Labour has obviously decided not to court the Irish republican vote.

A rather incredulous listener asked if he really meant what he had just said. 'Well, ah, no'. Smile, a look down at his script for inspiration. 'Ah, no! I did not mean electoral considerations were involved... Northern Ireland costs us billions of pounds a year,' he added.

This was a 'New' Labour front bench spokesperson barely in command of his brief, aware of his own unease. The chances of peace looked very fragile in such hands.

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Northern Ireland: created and maintained by repression

Joan Maynard [Labour Party NEC 1972-86 & former Chair of the Labour Committee on Ireland] places the blame for the peace impasse with the Tories.

I FIRST VISITED Northern Ireland in 1970. It was a shock to see troops with guns at the airport. In Belfast itself they were dodging from doorway to doorway with guns. Tanks were roaring along the roads. I thought this sort of thing only happened in fascist countries. I had a lot to learn, as have many English people about our 800 year history in Ireland.

The British media would have you think only the Irish killed people. In fact, Britain has a bloody history across the globe: but nowhere as bad as in Ireland. The potato famine and what the English landlords did, starving and burning people out of their homes and then burning their homes down so they couldn't go back in and also forbidding anyone to take these poor starving Irish people in. Then came Cromwell.

We, the English, divided Ireland *by force not consent*, against the wishes of the Irish people in 1921, thereby creating the present Northern Ireland state with an inbuilt Unionist majority. You could have as many elections as you like there but because this is a gerrymandered state the Unionists will always win. That is why they are supporting elections now, they know they can't lose. It is much worse than that as we (the British) wrote into the Constitution that this situation cannot be altered except by the consent of that inbuilt majority. It makes my blood boil when I hear the word democracy in connection with Northern Ireland. There is no democracy.

Britain has never been able to maintain the Northern Ireland state without repression (the Emergency Powers Act, the Special Provisions Act, Diplock courts, no right to silence, or the Prevention of Terrorism Act, which has nothing to do with preventing terrorism and everything to do with intimidating Irish people and collecting information. You look to see how many people have been convicted of terrorism under this Act - which incidentally I never voted for when I was Labour MP for Brightside because I considered it was an infringement of civil liberties.



We have many times been condemned by the European Courts for our undemocratic laws in Northern Ireland, some of which have now inevitably arrived over here, for we have just lost the right to silence in the British Courts. Then there was internment without trial, plastic bullets, CS gas. Plastic bullets have been used here and now they are talking of CS gas. You can't deny freedom to others as we have done to the Nationalist population of Northern Ireland and retain it for yourself. Catholics were debarred from jobs and had great difficulty in getting re-housed. All these injustices were carried out by the Unionists sitting in Stormont and we turned a blind eye. Yes, British people are not innocent. We elect governments and what they do they do in our names.

The cease-fire was an enormous relief. At last we had a chance to win lasting peace in Ireland. There were no pre-conditions set by anyone at the time of the cease-fire. But once it took place the Unionists, aided and abetted by the Tories, began to erect hurdles for the Nationalists. Was it a permanent cease-fire? Then decommissioning before talks. Nowhere in the world has any group of people been required to decommission before a settlement. It was like telling the IRA that they had been defeated, which they had not been. Then when the Mitchell Commission ruled that out, Major moved on to elections as the latest stumbling block, reneging on their previous commitment to all party talks by the end of February 1996. They did not consult the Irish government, who like the SDLP were furious. The British Government needed to keep the Unionists sweet in order to maintain a Parliamentary majority. Unfortunately they have been aided and abetted by the New Labour opposition. Somebody, could it be Mr Blair, has changed Labour's policy. We used to be for a united Ireland by consent with the British Government acting as a persuader of the Unionists. We believed that it was possible for both peoples to live happily together in Ireland. So long as we support the Unionists and their veto there will never be peace in Ireland. Why should the Unionists agree to anything but their present dominant position when they know they have the support of the House of Commons?

The breakdown in the peace process must be laid fairly and squarely at the door of our Government. The only solution is a United Ireland. Ireland is one country and there will never be peace until it is re-united. When you deny people every democratic outlet, they turn to force. We must help to find the political solution to this problem of which we are so much a part. ❑

Blair must act on Ireland

THE TRAGIC ENDING of the IRA cease-fire underlines in blood the need for Labour to break free from the bipartisan approach to the stalled peace process. The failure of the Tories to respond positively or creatively to the cease-fire has prevented progress towards a lasting peace with justice for the Irish people. Labour has shamefully followed the lead of a Government unwilling to break the log-jam of the Unionist veto.

Although the IRA is wrong to return to an armed struggle which has not led to British withdrawal and is unlikely to do so, it is the responsibility of the British and Irish Governments to create a political space for peace, justice and self-determination that would enable the republican movement to participate in political progress.

Since Labour will be governing Britain within a year, there is no reason for our Party to wait to kick-start the peace process. Tony Blair and Dick Spring should organise a dialogue with all parties in Ireland in order to

Jon Rogers
East Lewisham CLP

work towards a political settlement. These talks should take place now and should be open to all parties to participate without any preconditions.

The Socialist Campaign Group of MPs hosted a useful discussion between Sinn Fein and Irish Labour Party speakers on Wednesday 14th February. Positive notes were sounded by Tony Benn, who spoke for British withdrawal from the six counties, and Ken Livingstone, who condemned the pointless denunciation of violence from those who had no proposals to bring the war for Irish freedom to a just conclusion.

Unfortunately, many Campaign Group MPs sounded like pale echoes of the Major/Blair consensus.

Mildred Gordon, constituency MP for the area affected by the Docklands bomb, spoke movingly of the need for the republican movement to make allies in the British working class movement. But what is also needed is for the British working class - and in particular its leadership - to make alliances with the republican movement.

If Major won't start peace talks now, Blair should. If Blair won't, then it's up to the Campaign Group to continue to facilitate dialogue as it did on the night of Wednesday 14th February. "Jaw jaw" is better than "war war" - and no Member of Parliament can deny their responsibility to see to it that meaningful negotiations begin as soon as possible.

I condemn the bomb

Tony Dale provides an alternative view, emphasising criticism of the republican movement.

ON 9TH FEBRUARY Mitchel McLaughlin had a TV debate with a Unionist MP, Ken Maginnis. On the same day Gerry Adams was on a radio phone-in. Before the IRA's cease-fire, this dialogue would have been unheard of. That evening the IRA bombed London killing two people, injuring scores of others and seriously damaging the peace process.

The IRA announced a cease-fire in August 1994 because of a realisation that the armed struggle was at a dead end. The way forward, they believed, was through the construction of a pan Nationalist bloc with the SDLP, Dublin government and the Irish-American lobby. On their own terms the resumption of the military campaign makes no sense. Their nationalist allies are now under pressure to distance themselves.

The military campaign ran into a dead end because it came up against the key obstacle that at present a million Northern Ireland Protestants do not want a united Ireland. This opposition will not be eroded by a new military campaign which will only reinforce their opposition to a united Ireland.

But John Major shares responsibility for the collapse of the peace process. The hurdles he put up (arms handover before talks, little movement on prisoners, and proposed elections to a N. Ireland assembly) all helped strengthen the hand of republicans opposed to the cease-fire. Adams and co. could not hold the line and the IRA are back into a futile war.

Whilst Major shares the responsibility, the British government by itself could not deliver all party talks. Sinn Fein's belief that London could deliver the Unionists is deeply flawed. The Tories could definitely have done more to aid all party talks - but they could not guarantee that the Unionists would turn up.

The way forward for the republican movement is to meet the Protestants half way and respect their rights to a separate identity. In the 1970s, when the IRA genuinely believed victory in the immediate future was possible, they advocated a federal settlement. A similar strategy is needed today.

The Isle of Dogs bombing should be condemned by socialists. There is no justification for a renewed military campaign. At the same time there should be a new commitment by all sides to all party talks without pre-conditions. Freezing Sinn Fein out will not bring peace.

It is difficult to see lasting peace without political reconciliation between Protestants and Catholics - and that will be difficult with the present players on the park. Without the emergence of a local labour party based on the trade unions committed to a democratic settlement it is difficult to see how a lasting peace will be achieved.

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Nigerian "unlawfully killed" by police



Helen Shaw of INQUEST reports on the Court victory for the friends & family of Shiji Lapite.

ON 16th December 1994 30-year-old Nigerian asylum seeker Shiji Lapite died shortly after he was involved in a struggle with two plain-clothes police officers. The cause of death was asphyxia from compression of the neck consistent with the application of a neckhold.

At the inquest officers admitted kicking Mr Lapite in the head, biting him and placing him in a neckhold. They denied using excessive force. Pathologists' evidence and post-mortem reports revealed that he had suffered 36 to 45 separate injuries, his larynx and neck were bruised, and a cartilage in his voice-box fractured.

Officers said there was a violent struggle during which Mr Lapite attempted to strangle one of them. A Home Office pathologist said that serious doubt must be thrown on this allegation given the absence of any marks on the officer's neck.

The inquest jury returned a unanimous verdict that Mr Lapite had been unlawfully killed.

The Coroner made recommendations that all police officers should be brought up to date on the hazards and dangers of neckholds, which should be deprecated. This was attempted after the verdict of unlawful killing in the case of Oliver Pryce in 1991; the Police Complaints Authority (1993 Annual Report) and the Association of Chief Police Officers (March 1994) issued new guidelines warning of the dangers of neckholds and stressing that they should only be used in exceptional circumstances and officers would have to justify their decision to use this technique.

In light of the Lapite verdict, the file was sent back to the Crown Prosecution Service for reconsideration of the decision not to prosecute any of the officers involved. Following Lapite's death an extensive police inquiry - 85 witness statements, 57 documents including medical/forensic reports, photographs and tape-recorded interviews - was supervised by the Police Complaints Authority. After considering the results of this inquiry, the Crown Prosecution Service decided there was insufficient evidence to bring charges against any of the police officers concerned. Lawyers representing Lapite's family were denied access to relevant documentation.

This lack of disclosure by the police underlines legitimate concerns about the independence and integrity of the PCA and the unfairness of the current investigatory process. Public interest demands that there is a full and thorough inquiry into deaths in custody to ensure accountability of the police. Given the secrecy and apparent lack of fairness that surrounded this death, Inquest questions whether the system is capable of ensuring that the truth will out.


Helen Shaw. Photo: Chi Chan.

Time for action on housing

Labour needs to set out its own housing strategy, argues Colin Hall, Chair of Housing, Leicester City Council.

FAMILIES FLEEING domestic violence and racial harrassment will be among the victims of the Housing Bill currently before Parliament. It also restricts the assistance currently given to the homeless.

Labour's front-bench has rightly condemned these proposals.But this can't mask Labour's overall weaknesses on this issue, and the need for a full-scale review of our housing policies and practices.

If we are serious about reversing inequality, tackling poverty, promoting better health, cutting dole queues, defending the environment and enhancing the educational opportunities of our children, then we must make resources available for a substantial investment in local and national housing programmes. It is an essential precondition for progress on any of these key goals.

The leaders of local government associations, who on many other issues would be regarded as model Blairites, recently published a report calling for 125,000 homes to be built for rent each year. They also urged that local authorities should be able to finance building and repair programmes through being allowed to borrow against their assets and make full use of their capital receipts.

Other suggestions included the continuation of housing subsidies, which the Tories are trying to phase out, in order to ensure rents remain affordable; reform of the housing benefit system to improve work incentives and help with mortgage costs for homeowners who fall into financial difficulties; and a programme of action to improve conditions in the private rented sector, including reintroduction of rent regulation, improved tenants' rights and greater local authority powers of intervention.

No doubt many of these proposals, which most *LLB* readers would regard as extremely modest, will be absent from the Party's next housing policy document which will be launched by Tony Blair himself at a conference in Westminster on March 5th.

However we need to continue to argue the case for housing at every opportunity. At the moment when tenant groups come to us, as they do on a regular basis, we tell them that the Government will not allow us the resources to meet their need for basic repairs to their homes. But when we win the election and become the Government, that position will become untenable.

We have the biggest opportunity for a generation to set the housing agenda. But do we have the nerve, or even the will, to seize it?



FIGHT TO DEFEND

The campaign against the government's asylum and immigration policies is building up. Sue Jones looks at anti-deportation campaigns and the role of local authorities in implementing racist policies.

LAST YEAR, nearly one hundred people were removed every week from the UK by the immigration authorities and 3,951 people imprisoned. Yet the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (NCADC) reports many victories.

For example, Nigerian pro-democracy activists Akin and Teju Adegboye of Edinburgh, supported by the Scottish Refugee Council, church, community and trade union groups, won their appeal to stay in January after two years of uncertainty and refusals by the Home Office. When the security forces in Nigeria went looking for Akin, they beat his father so badly he died within weeks. The Immigration Special Adjudicator made a significant ruling, finding that Akin had "been living a life of continual deception, and sometimes also of fear, in Nigeria and the UK. In Nigeria he feared that his activities would attract the disapproval of the military government, in the UK his actions were affected by an overwhelming apprehension of being returned to Nigeria". Like many refugees, he had lied to the authorities, but these lies strengthen rather than weaken his claims for asylum: a claim granted after he went on hunger strike in prison.

"We are delighted that we received justice," say Akin and Teju. "Our special gratitude goes to all those who supported the Campaign. This success will give new asylum seekers encouragement that justice can be obtained. I implore the British Government to help them."

Meanwhile, the Asylum and Immigration Bill goes through its committee stage with only brief consideration of sections which introduce immigration control into employment, applying for housing and child benefit, as well as threatening the rights of all immigrants to fair hearings and decent treatment.

One clause makes it a criminal offence to be employed to advise people to claim asylum unless working for a "bona fide" organisation for refugees. Refugee community groups help those denied benefit while appealing against Home Office decisions. Many report cases where the decision dates appear to have been deliberately postponed to after February 5th when the new benefit rules came in.

Church, refugee and black groups, angered by the refusal of the Government to subject its policies to any test of fairness, effectiveness or reason, have set up an independent panel of enquiry. The Glidewell Panel (Sir Iain Glidewell, Ranjit Sondhi, Rabbi Julia Neuberger and the Rt. Revd. Dr David Say) will meet in public to consider evidence on the Bill and associated policies. It hopes to report before Parliament makes its final decisions. To give evidence contact them at 59, Carter Lane, London EC4V 5AQ.

As community and voluntary groups realise that there will now be two to three thousand people a month denied basic benefits, expected to starve or go, concern increases about local authority attitudes to their legal obligations. One group telephoning a London borough social services department asking for help for a schoolboy at risk of starvation was told by the duty social worker "Don't quote our fucking laws to me."

Ann Widdecombe, asked why the Bill removes housing rights when the Housing Bill has a virtually identical provision, stated that local authorities had asked "for an early resolution of the problem that will result from the benefit changes": i.e that people who have lost benefit will be deprived of the right to help once they become homeless. Labour Party members must ask: did your council press for this? Either way, we must ensure that they oppose this clause and clauses 124 and 145 in the Housing Bill openly, loudly and effectively.

Ms Widdecombe also announced that she was pressing for Housing Associations to refuse to house "certain classes of immigrants": clear proof that the Bill has nothing to do with the use of public funds and everything to do with racism. Trades unionists need to discuss now what action they can take to stop this further drift to internal immigration controls. ❑

(Send £1:00 to 22, Berners St, Birmingham, B19 2DR for a copy of NCADC's newsletter).

Model resolution for Labour Party branches

Campaign against the Asylum and Immigration Bill

We deplore:

a) The implementation of the Social Security [Persons from Abroad] Miscellaneous Amendments Regulations 1996, which remove entitlements to basic welfare benefits from many asylum seekers;

b) The Asylum and Immigration Bill, which will further restrict the rights of appeal of asylum seekers; criminalise those assisting refugees and asylum seekers and requires employers to carry out immigration checks.

We believe that a weak and discredited Tory Government is resorting to a policy of deliberate and overt racism in a desperate attempt to secure re-election. The Labour Party must expose and confront this fundamental attack upon civil and human rights.

We therefore resolve;

1. To affiliate to the Campaign Against The Asylum and Immigration Bill, and to write to the National Executive Committee calling for their support for the Campaign;

2. To call upon the PLP to do everything possible to prevent the passage of the Asylum and Immigration Bill (and to urge our local MP/PPC to speak out against the Bill);

3. To call upon Labour Councillors to identify and take all possible steps to defeat these legislative attacks upon asylum seekers;

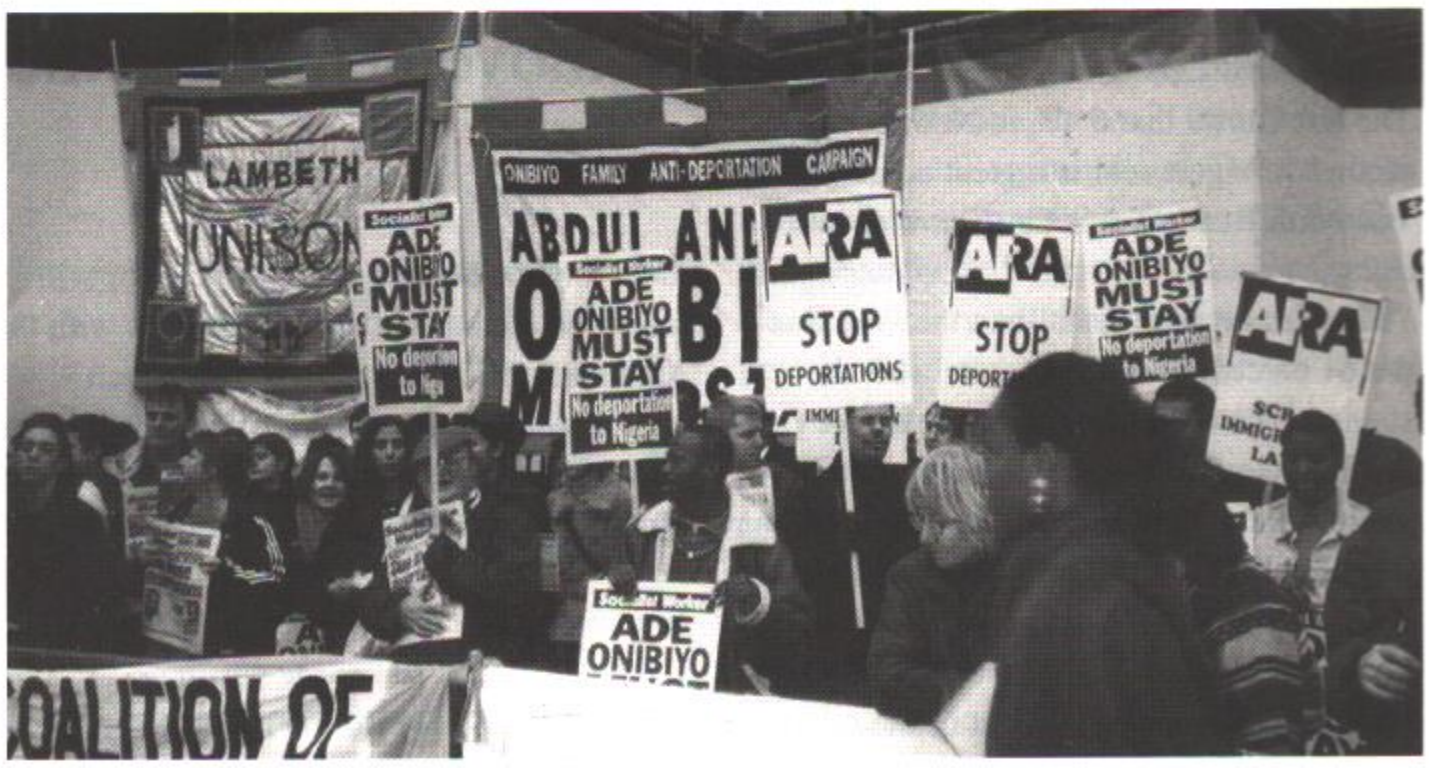
4. To pledge our support for workers who refuse to implement checks on the immigration status of service users, or of applicants for employment.

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ASYLUM RIGHTS!

Asylum: the Tories' false alarm

Frances Webber from the Campaign Against Racism & Fascism slams the Tories' racist Bill.



Unions and campaigners lobby the High Court in support of Ade Onibiyo. Photo: Ed Hall

DESPITE INTENSIVE campaigning by anti-racist, refugee and migrants' rights groups, welfare and housing organisations, charities and churches, and legal challenges, the Government's onslaught on refugees and asylum-seekers remains on course.

The Asylum and Immigration Bill is in its committee stage and new social security regulations came into force on 5th February. Between them, entitlement to all social security benefits is removed from virtually all immigrants and most asylum-seekers.

The social security regulations present a form of induced repatriation by starvation. The Bill goes about the task of getting asylum-seekers rejected and out in a more straightforward way. The 'white list' allows the Home Secretary to designate any country 'safe', rendering any asylum-seeker from that country 'bogus' in the absence of compelling proof to the contrary. The first list included India and Pakistan (the subject of repeated and severe criticism for 'abuses' such as torture, extra-judicial killings and 'disappearances' of opponents), Poland and Romania. This was going through Parliament just as Home Office officials were ordering a prominent Saudi dissident out of Britain for upsetting 'our' Saudi friends by harping on about human rights!

Others to be accorded similar treatment will be those who have suffered past persecution but not recently ('the circumstances which gave rise to the fear no longer exist'); claims made in response to a deportation notice; and 'vexatious' claims. (This last category would presumably include the likes of Mohammed al-Masari.)

'Unfounded' applicants, namely those who came through a country certified 'safe' en route to Britain, have in-country appeal rights removed. The reason? They were too successful: in 40% of cases adjudicators accepted that there was a real risk of 'chain deportation' and ordered ministers to reconsider.

Other provisions make it a criminal offence on a par with assisting illegal entry (punishable with seven years imprisonment) to help asylum-seekers get into the country 'for gain'; equate immigration offences of overstaying and illegal entry with rape and murder for the purposes of police powers of entry and search; and criminalise employers who hire undocumented workers (a measure which, employers claim, will deter them from hiring black workers at all).

The response of the Government to accusations of playing the race card or of violations of international refugee law is to parrot '96% bogus'. Ministers heap ridicule and contempt on anyone who suggests that the acceptance figures have been manufactured. But why has the proportion of asylum-seekers accepted as deserving of protection, either as full refugees or by the grant of 'exceptional leave' (as war refugees or for humanitarian reasons) plunged from 80% to 20% in two years?

The alarmingly low rate of successful appeals (4%) is used by the Government to support the 'bogus' argument. But the figure reveals that the poisonous drip of the 'bogus' propaganda has trickled down to infect adjudicators' decisions.

With the usual tireless and honourable exceptions, Labour opposition in the Commons has been muted. We can expect the Lilley-Howard package to be fully implemented within a few months. Further homelessness, destitution and despair will not be the only results. By whipping up indignation and hatred against asylum-seekers while kicking them out of welfare provision, the Government is providing racists with motive and opportunity for more murderous attacks. ❑

● The threatened deportation of 20-year-old Ade Onibiyo, whose father, Unison member Abdul Onibiyo, has disappeared since his deportation to Nigeria in October, moved a step closer when an application for judicial review was rejected in the High Court in January. Campaigners are now awaiting a hearing in the Court of Appeal. To help the campaign contact them via Lambeth Unison, 6a Acre Lane, Brixton, SW9.

● The Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic Unison has agreed to call a conference to discuss building opposition to the Asylum and Immigration Bill within Unison and among public sector workers. The conference is likely to take place in London in early May.

Time to act

Patrick Sikorski, RMT Council of Executives, argues the case for the Socialist Labour Party.

AFTER TWO and a half weeks existence and without any organisation in the constituency, Brenda Nixon scored 5.4% of the vote in the Hemsworth by election. The *Guardian* reported that Labour had 'crushed' Scargill. The left knows that 5.4% in New Labour's second strongest seat is a great achievement. Walworth Road wishes the *Guardian* were right.

Much more significant than the vote was the 61 percent of the electorate who abstained. There are warning signals here for those relying on Blair's leadership to see them through the General Election. Blair may inspire Alan Howarth or Paddy Ashdown. He does not speak for the mass of traditional Labour voters.

Socialist Labour is born out of the crisis that New Labour is creating throughout the labour movement. Some lefts repeat the old arguments about how socialists should stay with New Labour as it is still partly based on the unions and working class support. These and other abstractions have been received wisdom for decades, but the whole of society senses that something new is going on.

New Labour has reached a decisive point in its ninety year journey back to a re-united Liberal Party. Rooted in the defeats in the 1980s; hooked into the international triumph of the market, New Labour has accelerated the unravelling of its connections with its traditional base. This process does not need a fascist catastrophe in society to succeed inside New Labour. The Party's evolution has always been in one direction only. New Labour leaders have taken the Party over; it is as though the 'Gang of Four' had won.

The next General Election will be about getting rid of the Tories but the fundamental problem is how to prevent New Labour completing its destruction of what remains of independent working class politics.

It is a geographical error when some of the left claim that Blair can only be fought from within New Labour structures. As Liz Davies, Walsall, Birmingham, Govan, etc., show, even criticising Blair inside the Party is hazardous. Can the left fight back from the unions? 50 percent is not even a veto. Union influence in New Labour is going one way. If trade unionists and others go into battle against a Blair Government, as they must, does anyone believe that New Labour will allow an increase in union influence with the Government? When unions were much stronger, did Callaghan? No, Blair will push the weakened unions further out, without the internal backlash Callaghan faced.

> "Socialist Labour comes from the heart of the best experiences of the British labour movement since the war."

> "Does anyone believe that New Labour will allow an increase in union influence?"

The left in New Labour still argues that a fight to the finish with Blair over the Party is ahead. A Blair Government will carry out Tory policies. Millions who will have seen Major defeated will react. The Party will rise up against Blair and all his works. Perhaps Blair (not knowing any history) will join with the Liberals against his own left wing. The left, buoyed up by the unions, will then seize the true Labour mantle .. a convenient fantasy!

A New Labour Government, as well as giving hope because of the Tory's election defeat, can also demoralise and confuse its support, as Hemsworth shows. New Labour's message is that nothing can change and, unfortunately, millions are being conditioned to that idea. Waiting for the big bang with Blair assumes the labour movement can stall until the depleted left in New Labour is provoked enough to sound the charge. Meanwhile the Tories will be regrouping around something much more right wing than Major's programme.

New Labour's left must base itself on facts. First, the history of the Labour Party is reaching a denouement under unfavourable national and international conditions. The working class organisations are losing their remaining grip on a mass party. New Labour is committed to that end. It may well come to an internal scrap, but the left inside the Party is already disenfranchised and is getting weaker. In any case, its cause will be aided by the growth of a strong socialist party.

The wider labour movement is unenthusiastic for Blair, but lacks an alternative political perspective. Under today's conditions its absence will have an impact on the capacity of workers and others to struggle. A 'big bang' inside a New Labour Government is not very likely, and if it did occur, would the enfeebled left be in a position, to provide the organisation, policies and programme which had been previously absent in the movement?

However difficult, we are in a period where laying the foundations of a new mass working class party is the key, whether you are inside or outside New Labour. Socialist Labour comes from the heart of the best experiences of the British labour movement since the war. It can unite all the most positive gains from the labour movement tradition and wider; on internationalism, women, black people, oppressed minorities, on the environment, on democracy, on the class struggle against this terrible system. We have to start again, perhaps not at the beginning, but we do have to start again.

> "The fundamental problem is how to prevent New Labour completing its destruction of what remains of independent working class politics."

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No workers' leadership sighted at Hemsworth

There was only one real loser of the Hemsworth by-election, argues Steve Smith from the *LLB* EB. Not the Socialist Labour Party (SLP) but ordinary people looking for real leadership.

SO HOW SHOULD we judge the 1,193 votes gained by Scargill's SLP in Hemsworth? Do you say that it's only 323 votes away from the Lib-Dems ... or just 541 votes more than Screaming Lord Sutch? No doubt the SLP will cling to the comfort blanket of a saved deposit from a hastily organised campaign. But the real winner was the 60 per cent apathy vote: the losers were ordinary people looking for an effective workers' leadership possessing a clear strategy for addressing the problems of a failing system.

Most delighted with the SLP vote will be Tony Blair. It's too low to offer any electoral threat to Labour, but still not disastrous enough to dissuade some confused socialists from a fling with the SLP. Impatience with the historic task of winning socialist arguments within the labour movement remains the SLP's greatest recruiting sergeant.

Much has been said about Scargill's decision but less about the other leadership voices within the SLP who have long opposed socialists organising in the Labour Party - and have conveniently discovered new arguments about 'Blairism' and class independence to justify themselves.

What are these new arguments for breaking with Labour? Firstly, the economic collapse of the post-war welfarist consensus which gave the Labour Party its political mission in life, and secondly the profound changes in the Labour Party instituted by Blair and the modernisers.

The first argument about the loss of Labour's 'role' is sound enough - but the contradictions this will throw up for Labour Party members and trade union affiliates are surely best exploited by socialists from within the Party.

The second argument about Blair's 'triumph' betrays a misinterpretation of recent Labour Party history and a misreading of the present balance of power within the labour movement between the modernisers and the pro-welfarist trade union bureaucrats. In reality, John Smith's great crusade against the block vote in 1993 collapsed into old fashioned horse-trading within the bureaucracy over governmental programme, much to the horror of the modernisers. Ken Livingstone has correctly pointed to the same process occurring at the last Labour Party Conference, where Blair was forced to



concede a deal over the size of the trade union vote in order to avoid humiliation over the minimum wage.

The SLP also fail to account for the fact that the 120,000 new members joining the Party has led to an increase in the left NEC vote, not a decline. This is hardly surprising, because despite the witch hunt, the space for socialist agitation inside the Labour Party remains vast and largely untapped, as shown by the continuing growth of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters' Network and its local groups.

The SLP is fond of ridiculing the 'big bang schema' about a left revival under a Labour Government. While crystal ball fantasies are useless, real judgement has to be made about whether workers will fight if their hard-won welfare rights are withdrawn. It is a general trend of working class history that when workers fight back, they will turn first to their traditional organisations. This has been repeatedly confirmed this century in Britain, most recently by Bennism. A Labour General Election victory will give impetus to this process. Furthermore, the SLP launch is seen as premature in the eyes of some of its supporters. One of the RMT EC who has joined up told the *Guardian*: "...unless a Labour Government delivers on rail renationalisation, we are bound to reconsider our historic affiliation."

Implicit in the SLP's withdrawal from the Labour Party is a deep pessimism that the existing labour movement will not fight over issues such as the welfare state. It is a lucky thing for French workers that such defeatism was not so rife recently.

As such schemas go, big left splits emerging from the Labour Party very soon is a fair exercise in wish fulfilment. And the fantasy apparently culminates in the promised land of a 'refounded' labour movement truly fit to carry out the historic battles.

The leadership of Militant Labour has been forced to admit that there remain 'lingering feelings' among its membership that its turn away from the Labour Party was wrong - after all, what now remains of their by-election adventures? Those influenced by the SLP message should take heed - it may look cosy but it's a very cold and lonely life away from the actually existing workers' movement. Conditions could not have been better for a left challenge to Labour. The contest took place in the aftermath of the Harriet Harman fiasco and in a mining constituency in which the NUM candidate had been debarred from selection by Labour's NEC. Despite these favourable circumstances, the SLP vote compares unfavourably even to the low standard set by Militant Labour in Walton.

Govan: white male shades it

Margaret Curran writes: The Parliamentary selection battle in Govan between current MP Mike Watson and local councillor Mohammed Sarwar faced left activists with a dilemma. Many of us supported the right to challenge a sitting MP; we recognise that the black community is not properly represented in Parliament and that Govan has one of the largest black communities in Scotland. However Sarwar, a wealthy businessman, is well to the right of Watson; he supported the changes to Clause IV, which the local party opposed.

Those of us active in the Scottish Labour Women's Caucus had argued the case for women-only shortlists against vociferous opposition; yet the prospect of an all-male shortlist in Govan was apparently not controversial.

We concluded that we had to field a woman candidate. I hesitated about standing; this was a brutal campaign and I knew I could face humiliation in terms of my vote. But I went to the hustings and talked about politics, only to discover that this was irrelevant. The decision was not made on merit or ability but on the effectiveness of competing machines.

We knew the vote would be close. In fact Mike Watson won by one vote after my second preferences were counted. Mohammed Sarwar is now calling for a re-run.

We need a more diverse and representative Parliamentary group; the lobbying, networking and horse-trading that goes on disadvantage women in particular.

Scottish Labour Party Conference

Campaign For Socialism Fringe diary

Whose Party Is It Anyway?
Thursday 7th March, 7.30pm
Dennis Canavan MP, Mark Seddon (Editor, *Tribune*), Maria Fyfe MP.

The Economy - A Socialist Approach
Friday 8th March, 7.30pm
Tony Benn MP, Friedrich Wolf MEP (Greens),
Harriet Lamb (World Development Movement, in a personal capacity)

Campaigning for Socialism
Saturday 9th March, 7.30pm
George Galloway MP, Cllr Jane Mitchell (Chair, Labour CND), Cathy Jamieson,
Alan Simpson MP, Soren Wibe MEP (Socialist),
Katy Clark (PPC Dumfries & Galloway).
All meetings at Edinburgh City Chambers

Labour Left Briefing

Scottish Labour Party Conference Fringe Meeting

9th March, Saturday Lunchtime

The future of the Labour Party... Why we stay and fight

Speakers: Liz Davies, Jim Mearns (Campaign for Socialism), speaker from *LLB* editorial board.

Auld Clachan Bar, Fountainbridge, Edinburgh

Towards a Scottish Socialist Alliance

Allan Green, Scottish Socialist Movement, maps out his strategy for the left in Scotland.

THREE HUNDRED AND fifty people attended a Socialist Forum meeting in Glasgow on 10th February. Activists from a range of left groups and campaigns voted overwhelmingly to support the creation of a Scottish Socialist Alliance. The SSA would be based on Scottish autonomy and would aim to unite socialists under a common banner. The next step is a founding conference for the Scottish Socialist Alliance on Saturday 20th April in Glasgow.

The next general election could quickly be followed by the creation of a Scottish Parliament elected by PR. In Scotland Labour is 'the establishment' - the Scottish electorate have overwhelmingly rejected the Tories time after time.

This is the political backdrop. We are not 'splitters' from the Scargill talks. The SSA is the result of years of patient discussion, joint campaigning and emerging unity among significant sections of the Labour left, left nationalists, Communists, Scottish Militant Labour, environmentalists, trade unionists, anti-motorway protesters and animal rights activists. We had hoped these Scottish developments could have been part of the new initiative proposed by Arthur Scargill.

I am aware that *LLB* is not yet willing to leave the Labour Party. I genuinely admire your perseverance and the fact you are fighting for socialism. I know some feel the "real battle" has yet to take place in the Labour Party. But this is a question of judgement and tactics. After the years in the Party, I believe there is no prospect of a left revival within New Labour.

The SSA approach is already established successfully in much of Europe - United Left (Spain), the Left Wing Alliance (Finland), the Green Left (Netherlands) and the RCP (Italy).

The overwhelming desire to get rid of the Tories, together with the first past the post electoral system, will work to Labour's advantage in the General Election.

The SSA wants to avoid splitting the anti-Tory vote in marginal Tory seats - this is easily accommodated in Scotland where there are only 10 Tory MPs. There may also be socialist candidates in Labour and the SNP that the left want to support.

By standing in a few selected seats now the SSA has a longer period to consolidate support among trade unionists and other activists and to build a public profile before elections to a Scottish Parliament. Judging by recent support for Scottish Militant, under first past the post some electoral success is likely.

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Target Labour Government!

Kenny Bell and Jennifer Davies
Newcastle Unison

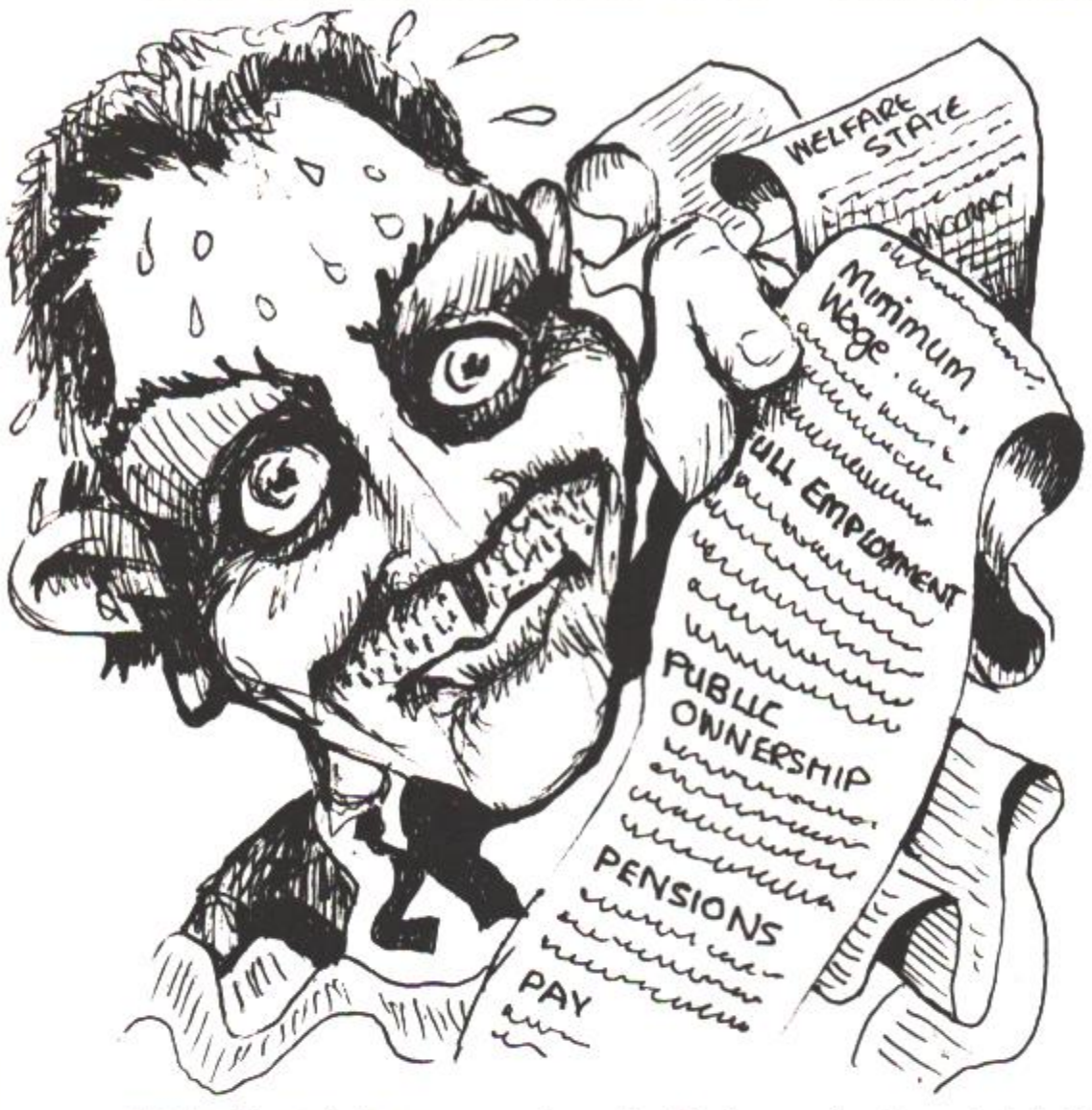
PEOPLE WILL expect results from an incoming Labour Government. We must prepare now to ensure the inevitable disillusionment strengthens the left and not the Tories.

The next round of union and Labour Party conferences should be the last before we get a Labour Government. It is vital that the left puts a set of concrete demands to these conferences to form an agenda for a Labour Government. If the left fails it will be all the harder for the labour movement to hold a future Labour Government to account.

All the indications are that a Blair Government will want to carry on where the Tories will have left off, running down the welfare state, cutting public investment and increasing the role of the private sector. This will be totally at odds with public expectations. The majority of people will expect improvements in terms of the health service, education, unemployment and low pay. A great responsibility rests with the left to ensure that discontent with a Labour Government does not result in apathy or Tory support but in action that can secure some concrete gains.

If the Labour and trade union left organise around the following basic demands it will be possible to win broad support :

- A minimum wage of at least half male median earnings.
- Full employment - with an immediate aim of one million jobs to be created in the first two years of a Labour Government.
- A strategy for reducing hours without reducing pay.
- Bringing back into public ownership all services privatised in the last 17 years - with an immediate halt to CCT, contracting out and market testing.
- Pensions at 60 and at a level to ensure a decent standard of living.
- A right to longer periods in education and training.
- No pay restraint policy. It is long overdue for the fall in real terms of public sector pay to be redressed.
- A comprehensive and properly funded welfare state. In particular the crisis in schools and hospitals needs immediate action.



We can also develop a list of specific, practical measures which can be implemented in the first 100 days of a Labour Government at little cost and without the need for primary legislation. In relation to local government we consider the following necessary:

- Restoring local government spending to 95/96 levels including the rate support grant element;
- Approval for increased capital spending with particular emphasis on areas of greatest need;
- Increasing basic and supplementary credit approvals for social services;
- All residents of council run residential homes to have the same access to benefits as those in homes run by the private sector;
- Withdrawal of requirements to expose services to CCT;
- Withdrawal of the stipulation that 85 per cent STG monies to fund community care must be spent with the private sector.

Activists in other parts of the public sector will be able to identify similar measures relevant to their sectors.

How can it all be paid for? If the following measures were adopted £206bn could be raised annually plus a further £40bn over three years from 1998/99:

- Reducing tax relief for share option schemes, private health insurance, personal equity plans and profit related pay (£1.35bn) and the further phased reduction of mortgage interest tax relief, consistent with the ending of subsidies to council housing, (£700m).
- Immediate release of existing local authority receipts from the sale of council houses (£6bn).
- Increase of Corporation Tax by 2p, restoring the 25p rate for small companies and restoring the planned 0.2% cut in employers' national insurance contributions (£2.5bn).
- Introduction of a new 50% tax rate for annual incomes over £50,000 and a return to 25p basic rate of income tax, restoring the 1p tax cut in 1996 but maintaining the lower rate at 20p (£3.6bn).
- Abolition of many quangos and competitive tendering regimes (£500m).
- A one-off windfall tax on the privatised utilities could net £500m.

The Government's public spending plans for 1996/7 and the subsequent two years are based on standstill budgets except social security, health and defence where spending is projected to increase. The defence budget is planned to increase from £21.4bn to £22.6bn over three years; a review of priorities could result in a reduction of £5bn annually.

It should be possible to win a large section of the Labour movement to key demands along the lines of those above. Then if we succeed in getting a Labour Government we will have a base line to start fighting from. ❑

A fast track to socialism

Bob Spooner, author of *State Education - What's Left*, considers Labour's education policies.

BETWEEN 1948 and 1983, we made some progress in our schools towards equality of opportunity. We saw education as a means of closing the social gap. But the 1988 Act pursued inequality of opportunity and sought to make state education mirror social divisions.

The Tories have succeeded beyond their wildest dreams. Given a declining birthrate, they have been able to boost social selection. Local management obliges schools to be competitive; the league tables and SATs are social indicators, and secondary schools are increasingly examination factories. An overburdened national curriculum reduces personal education, encourages learning by rote and prefers knowledge to understanding. It emphasises academic ability at the expense of practical skills and creativity.

Selection by examination spends more money on academically able children; social selection, by interview or postcode, spends more on well-off children; some so-called comprehensive schools practise both within their own system. Equality of opportunity requires mixed-ability teaching up to year ten and a free choice of timetable afterwards. By 1988 most comprehensive schools had a mixed-ability policy. It is being undermined by tier systems in 14+ SATs and GCSE courses. Right-wingers want pupils graded, as if they were eggs: a new educational fad called differentiation does just this. The Blair/Blunkett fast-track proposals come from the same right-wing stable. They reek of valuing academic qualifications more than all-round education. But the fast-track is a bad idea if you believe that social and emotional development is as important as academic success.

To fast-track you have to select: right-wingers would like to use SATs as hurdles and hold back pupils who don't clear them. We could end up with pupils of 16 repeating year seven, and pupils of eleven working with 16 year olds. Before Tony Blair gets hooked on this vision, he should realise that experienced people *even on the right* reject it; most people value school and think that it is not sensible to hurtle through it like a bat out of hell, any more than one should hurtle through life with the grave (or Downing Street) as one's sole objective. But whether it's a good thing or not, fast-tracking a few precocious children is scarcely an education policy. Just because David Blunkett trotted through a school where two pupils had been fast-tracked, must it be foisted on the nation? David's guru, the demon Barber, is doing his best to saddle us with statutory homework, 5+ SATs, community service, payment by results and parents subpoenaed to attend school consultations.

Left-wingers might tolerate this folly, but we all know that it is there to blur the fact that Blair intends to leave Tory policies in place. Selection by examination may be eliminated; but if social selection remains, we will still be a long way from a comprehensive system. And what about selection by cheque book? Now that the Tories are intent on self-destruction, the time is ripe to deal with difficult issues: get a mandate to bring public schools into the public sector and make all schools secular. This is the fast track Blair should be talking about: the fast track to socialism. ❑

Set budgets to needs

John Kimberly of Sheffield Class Size Campaign Committee reports in a personal capacity: When faced with the need to oppose deep cuts in the budget allocated to a school, its governors are presented with a major dilemma; how to argue for what they really need.

Like many others connected with FACE, Sheffield Class Size Campaign is looking at "needs-based budgets". What constitutes the needs of pupils in schools?

Drawing on various local and national sources, in Sheffield we are considering the following:

- Class size - 30 maximum.
- Reception class size maximum 20 per teacher.
- Craft or science groups 25 maximum.
- Single age classes ideally.
- If mixed age class becomes the only feasible alternative, then there should be a drastic reduction to well below 30.
- Special needs budget to be allocated to special needs staffing.
- Staff non-contact time as appropriate.
- Management time as appropriate.
- At least minimum heating standards maintained.
- At least minimum or above sanitary standards maintained.
- Minimum supplies and services.

Expenditure per child to be £50 (1995 prices)

These ideas are being offered to governors meetings over the next month or so to give them a base to work from. Perhaps we are asking too much and will frighten governors off.

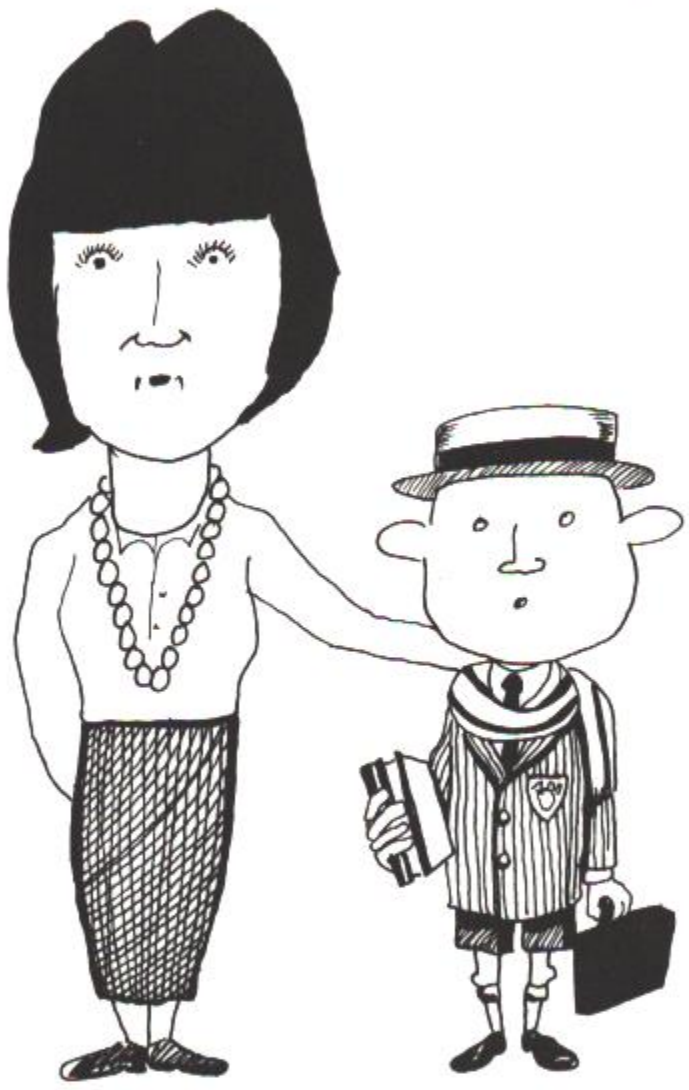
Perhaps we are asking for too little. Are we letting the LEA and Tory Government off the hook? The Class Size Campaign is still discussing this and there are different views. We do know that a large handful of Sheffield schools refused to set a restricted budget last year, and the LEA found some extra money.

It is also certain that to put forward a needs-based budget helps remind us of what we want education to be about, and not just what other people think we can afford.

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Harman: hypocrite or just plain wrong?

Mike Eslea, a former St Olave's pupil, from Leeds North East CLP explains the real argument.



OF COURSE it is infuriating that a Labour front-bencher should so obviously undermine the principles of comprehensive education. But her real crime is that she should have selected such an elitist school at all.

St Olave's represents all that is narrow-minded and wrong about traditional, right-wing education. When I was a student at St Olave's bullying by pupils and teachers was rife. Ninety-nine per cent of the pupils were white: the only two black kids I ever saw suffered from extreme racism.

A very narrow curriculum meant that Latin was compulsory; the Oxbridge-bound sat at the front while the rest of us drew pictures of gladiators. Subjects like psychology, sociology and politics were never taught. Anglican zealotry meant that the small number of Catholic and Jewish boys were barred from assemblies. Absurdly strict uniform regulations ensured routine suspensions for trivial offences.

Those of us with parents who could not afford whites were effectively barred from playing cricket. Football was actively discouraged, even outside school, since gentlemen play only rugby union.

The school was obsessed with preserving its grammar-school status under the then Labour Government; we were constantly told that we were "the creme de la creme". This is the kind of snobbery that Harman has chosen in the "best interests" of her son. I think this shows that she is guilty of far more than mere hypocrisy.

Orpington Labour opinion ignored

Ron Huzzard, Orpington CLP and Labour spokesperson on Bromley Education Committee 1968-90, writes: During the 1970s Bromley implemented a reorganisation plan for all its secondary schools. Most of its grammar schools became popular comprehensives. Since 1979 Tory right-wingers have changed the plan and retained two exclusive schools - St Olave's and a girls' grammar school - with 11+ selection.

In Bromley the Labour Parties have called for this comprehensive schools plan to be completed. Orpington CLP backs the policy set out in the Party's document *Diversity and Excellence* - "admission procedures must be fair with no return to selection through the 11-plus". Clearly St Olave's is a school at variance with Labour's intentions.

How is it possible for a prominent Labour front-bencher to deliberately choose such a school? The feeling of local Labour Party opinion has been disregarded.

Orpington CLP recently reaffirmed its view on ending selection. It called for Harriet Harman to retire to the back benches saying "unless there is consistency between what we advocate and what we practise, Labour's campaigning on education issues will be unconvincing". Harriet Harman seems to be sending a clear message. She prefers the secondary schools policy of Tory Bromley to those of the Labour-controlled boroughs in South London covering the area she represents at Westminster.

How will a new Labour Government end selection in schools like St Olave's? David Blunkett talks of parents' ballots at particular grammar schools. That is not good enough. Why not a Labour education bill giving LEAs and grammar schools a set time to end selection and open up admission to local children across the full ability range?

Facing the future

ONE YEAR OLD, Fight Against Cuts in Education (FACE) held its conference in Coventry on 10th February.

Those who met at the conference had gathered a broad range of experiences. Many had organised meetings, lobbies, 'phone-ins, vigils, petitioning and demonstrations involving thousands of parents, governors, teachers and school students.

FACE has seen a remarkable growth in 1995, spurred by the anger and power of parents and governors, with no political group playing a leading role. Above all, FACE is a campaigning organisation.

The conference held a sharp discussion about whether we should adopt broader policies embracing comprehensive ideals and opposing selection, as well as pledging to oppose the cuts and insist on a maximum class size of 30. Although the meeting began to move in that direction, anxiety over moving too far, too fast, made us pause for the time being.

The next six months or so will be crucial. FACE plans a national demonstration in Kenneth Clarke's constituency of Nottingham on Saturday 20th April. Local actions involving parents, governors, teachers and students are being organised.

For more information write to FACE c/o St Giles School, Hayes Lane, Exhall, Coventry, CV7 9NS. Tel: 01203 311 013

Democracy - Kaufman style

Helen Gallagher (Manchester Gorton CLP) reports on what happened when an Asian had the temerity to challenge Gerald Kaufman.

MANCHESTER GORTON constituency has seen much publicity recently following allegations of racism. Ahmed Shezhad, a Brent councillor, challenged Gerald Kaufman for the seat. He received few nominations and the NEC pronounced that there would be no ballot, declaring Gerald Kaufman the candidate. In some wards, Asian people who claimed membership were denied a vote in selection meetings. These votes may have been decisive, but it is hard to judge.

Membership of the constituency was frozen for months. People still have to jump through hoops to join. Aspiring members are checked against the electoral roll and must attend an interview with the EC prior to admittance. Hardly an encouragement to mass membership. Ward meetings have been dominated by membership checks and procedural issues at the expense of political discussion and campaigning activity. It is now routine for members to carry around photocopies of cheques and application forms to prove their status.

Unfortunately, some members chose to seek redress in the courts. There have been a succession of costly court cases which have achieved little except to banish democratic discussion in the Party on the grounds of sub-judice. The facts have never been fully discussed in the Labour Party where the debate properly belongs.

There have been some positive developments in Gorton. The number of Asian councillors, ward officers and GC delegates has increased, reflecting both Party membership and the local community. But during all the wrangling, Council seats have been lost to the Liberals and for a while, Labour Party political activity was low.

Whether the issue has been racially motivated is debatable. Some outrageous racist remarks have been aired at GC meetings. But perhaps the main motivation of the majority of the GC is their staunch loyalty to Gerald Kaufman and resistance to any change. When a local white member dared to stand against Gerald Kaufman in the last selection round he was treated very shabbily, and a shortlist of one declared.

There has been a large growth in Asian membership of the Party, in Gorton and elsewhere. If some have joined to vote more Asian candidates into office, is that such a crime? There are worse reasons to join the Labour Party. The membership increase should be welcomed and used to transform local parties into active campaigning bodies encompassing a wide range of views. ❑

The Party in power

THE JANUARY NEC adopted (by 20 votes to 1) a report from a group of NEC members who attended seminars at Cranfield School of Management. Entitled *The Party in Power - a Project for Reform* this self-congratulatory document examines how the Party should "continue its programme of renewal and reform to make it more effective and therefore more electable" and "prepare for a potential Labour Government including learning from previous experiences and strengthening relationships between the parliamentary leadership, the NEC and the party members as a whole".

There is no mention of the S word, and the report does not give any consideration to the policies that might make Labour "more electable". It emphasises that structural change on its own is not enough and that a "cultural change" is needed, "ie ways of working, relating and behaving together". Sounds innocuous, but we doubt whether this includes working together with the left.

This is underlined by a section envisaging the need to tackle "problem local parties" who have not yet embraced "the regeneration principles". Elsewhere the report considers improving "democratic structures such as the Policy Forum ... and the development of a listening and responsive culture". The importance of Annual Conference is recognised; it will get a report of this work!

Women-only shortlists scuppered

Dorothy Macedo reports: The decision of the Labour Party National Executive not to appeal against the industrial tribunal ruling outlawing women-only shortlists has been greeted with dismay by many Labour women.

The Greater London Labour Party Women's Committee has called on the Party to appeal.

The reason given by the NEC for not launching an appeal, that it would cause an unacceptable delay in selecting candidates when a general election may be imminent, sounds reasonable until you hear about the plan to save some of the seats "for a rainy day".

In fact, the lack of urgency about organising selections has been causing comment for some time even before the tribunal ruling. Could it be, cynics argued, that a few vacant seats when an election is called would come in handy for Walworth Road, allowing them to impose their pals who have failed to win selection contests. And what about that nice Alan Howarth...?

Tony Blair's coolness toward the women-only shortlists policy is no secret. Despite talk of looking at other ways of promoting women, the situation now is that the Party has no mechanism for achieving the quota agreed by Annual Conference, and no political will to do anything about it.

Foul play in Birmingham

A year after the Labour leadership suspended four Constituency Labour Parties, there is still no evidence of wrongdoing, writes a member of Ladywood CLP.

THE RECENT news that Tony Blair has ordered a review of how a 'better relationship' can be forged between a future Labour Government and the Party's 360,000 membership will be met with a high degree of cynicism in Birmingham. Four inner city Constituency Parties, Sparkbrook, Small Heath, Perry Barr and Ladywood, due to be merged into three after the boundary changes, have been suspended since 27th February 1995. All have a high number of Afro-Caribbean and Asian members.

The saga follows a familiar pattern - trumped up charges, glaring lack of evidence and complete contempt for the views of rank-and-file Party members.

The pretext for the suspensions was the allegation made in the House of Commons by Jeff Rooker, MP for Perry Barr, that Labour Party members wishing to stand as candidates at selection meetings were corruptly obtaining House Renovation Grants from Birmingham City Council in return for votes. Three enquiries - by the Local Government Ombudsman, the District Auditor and the City Council - found no evidence of this.

The NEC finally got round to sending an enquiry team to interview Party members for just one day at the end of July. Letters to Peter Coleman, Director of Organisation and Development, from a number of members and officers, telling him they thought that the allegations were groundless, were ignored. On 27th September the NEC shifted the grounds of the suspension to that of alleged 'membership abuse' claiming that some 250 members (6%) were not on the Electoral Roll. Yet letters and telephone calls from constituency and branch officers to Walworth Road seeking details of who these members were (so they could be visited) all met with a complete brick wall.

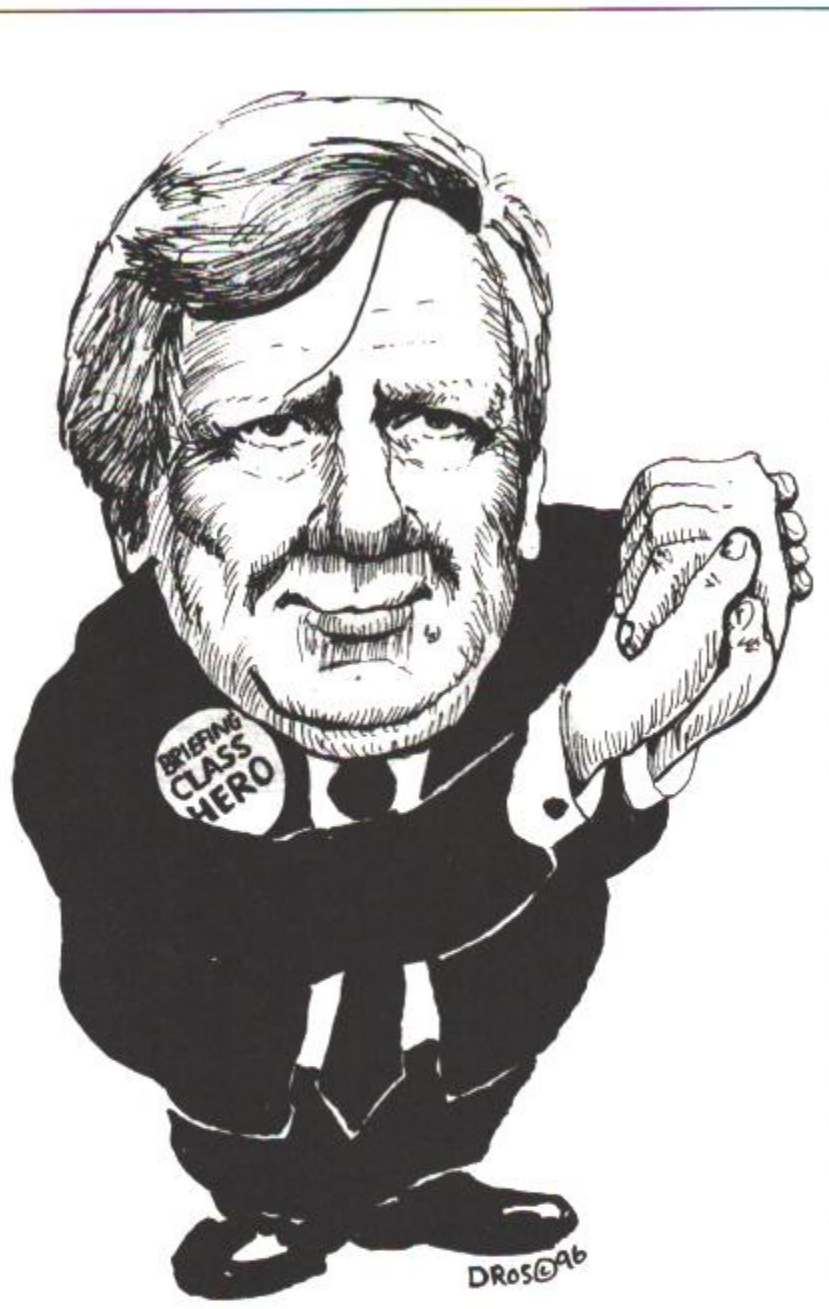
By this time members were becoming extremely angry. The final straw came when Walworth Road decided to reinstate three of the wards with by far the lowest black membership. Nine members complained to the Commission for Racial Equality, asking for a formal investigation into the suspensions under the Race Relations Act 1976. The November NEC's response to this was to extend the suspensions until May and to add fresh allegations to the charge sheet! Among the most incredible of these are: that too many members are paying the unemployed membership rate (hasn't anyone explained that inner city areas have high unemployment rates?), that too many are paying their membership by postal order (because they don't have access to bank accounts), that there are too few women members involved, that the agendas of meetings are dominated by local government matters, and that AGMs have turn-outs that are too large!

Most members believe the suspensions are to ensure that no Parliamentary selections can take place, that the three sitting MPs (Clare Short, Jeff Rooker and Roger Godsiff) are imposed and that no Afro-Caribbean or Asian candidates get a look-in. Even Roy Hattersley, who is retiring at the next election, has stated publicly that it would be 'catastrophic' if an Asian is not elected to replace him.

Thus far the four Constituencies have conducted a no-holds-barred campaign for re-instatement - including a successful picket of Clare Short's surgery and a highly effective campaign in the local media.

The NEC has already carried out similar manoeuvres in order to block Asian candidates in Govan/Glasgow, Gorton/Manchester and Poplar and Bow in London. Two clear messages need to go to the NEC. Firstly the campaign for reinstatement in Birmingham will be waged as rigorously and publicly as ever. Secondly the credibility of Labour as a party committed to multi-racial equality is now seriously on the line.

The Campaign for re-instatement in Birmingham can be contacted via the Campaign Against Labour Party Suspensions, c/o Ken Livingstone MP, House of Commons, London SW1A 0AA.



"My constituency should never have been suspended. The allegations Jeff Rooker made in the House of Commons were disproved by every official body who looked into them. My constituency was suspended because of those allegations.

'Issues of membership' became the issue afterwards. The way to solve this problem is to draft some extra people in and knock on two hundred doors in a weekend and clear up all the discrepancies and start the Party again the next day...

If you say you don't discriminate against Scotsmen but 'we won't have anybody here called McTavish' you have problems with Scotsmen... that's what's happened in Sparkbrook. I hope that this matter can be completed in time for a proper selection conference. The Party should get this inquiry completed so the rank and file membership of my constituency can select its member. It may select Roger Godsiff but I think it is more likely to select an Asian... People will believe that there is direct prejudice unless a proper selection is held. It would be an enormous embarrassment unless this happened."

Roy Hattersley

International Women's

Leonora Lloyd writes: The inspiration for International Women's Day came from the USA. The first 'Women's Day' was organised by American women socialists on February 28th 1907 to demand political rights for working women. In 1910, the German socialist Clara Zetkin proposed to the second International Conference of Socialist Working Women that it become an annual event. The first, on March 19th 1911, was held on the anniversary of an 1848 Prussian workers' uprising. In 1913, the date was changed to March 8th to commemorate an important strike by women textile workers in New York in the 1880s.

On February 23rd 1917 (March 8th under the old Russian calendar) women in Petrograd insisted on celebrating IWD independently of the wishes of the leadership of the workers' movement of the time. It was the spark that led to the February Revolution and later the October Revolution.

In the early 1970s in this country, IWD was again widely celebrated with marches and rallies as the women's movement grew and flourished. Now IWD has followed the same process as the women's movement in general. It has been taken over by the bureaucracy. Even some Conservative councils put on events. In areas with Labour councils, IWD has become International Women's Week or even Month.

The positive aspect of this is the recognition of the issues that the 1970's women's movement campaigned around, such as child care, abortion, equal rights and opportunities, but the negative aspect is that the independent, fairly united women's movement has all but disappeared, split into a thousand fragments each pursuing its own agenda. The history of the last twenty years is one of two steps forward, one step back. In Britain, the progress of women in the Labour Party is a prime example of this.

The most important aspect of our day, the one that is often forgotten, is that it is an international day. Internationally, women are becoming poorer and even more oppressed with the rise of religious fundamentalism, the search for ever cheaper labour, huge increases in child prostitution, civil wars and so on. The best way for all of us to celebrate IWD is to renew our determination to work towards a socialist world.

Review

Maria Iacovou reviews
Feminism, Objectivity and Economics
by Julie A Nelson
[Published by Routledge, £13.99 /£40 hardback].

JULIE NELSON is an academic economist. She draws on feminist theories from many disciplines to produce the first full-length single-authored feminist critique of contemporary economics.

At the start the book points out that in our culture the qualities which are seen as "male" (detachment, rigour, "hard" science, individualism) are given higher status than the "female" qualities (attachment, intuition, "soft" or applied research, collectivism). Nelson argues that all qualities have positive and negative sides (it's good to be detached but bad to be isolated; it's good to use your intuition but not at the expense of reason), but in our culture we recognise only the good side of "male" traits and the bad side of "female" traits.

She argues that a scientific culture which recognised the good aspects of "female" qualities would be far richer, addressing more important problems and using more appropriate research techniques. In doing so, she moves the emphasis away from the nature vs. nurture debate (ie on whether there is any inherent difference between the sexes) and rejects two feminist approaches from opposite poles, one of which denies that there is any difference between the sexes, and the other which seeks a "woman-centred" science which raises the status of female qualities at the expense of the male.

The evolution of economic practice is entertainingly traced, giving a picture of an economics profession desperate to prove its manhood after a split with the more "feminine" social sciences, and the ensuing shift of interest by economists away from real-life social problems and towards the realms of mathematical models and theoretical rigour. In particular, Nelson is worried by the current obsession of economists to be seen as objective.

She argues that objectivity has come to mean detachment from one's feelings and a lack of concern about practical issues, and that this is not objectivity at all - true objectivity comes from recognising that one is operating within a set of cultural parameters, not by denying culture altogether.

The book then becomes more technical: three areas of microeconomic research are examined, and in each case we are shown how male-centred research has led economists away from asking the most interesting questions and away from using the most appropriate research methodology. Some pointers are given about moving towards richer, more humanistic research, but this is not a book offering quick fixes.

Irish women and nationalism

The British Association for Irish Studies is holding a series of lectures on the theme "Ireland Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" at the Muriel Stott Conference Centre, Manchester. Sponsored by AIB Bank.
The speaker on Wednesday March 6th is Dr Margaret Ward, whose topic will be Irish Women and Nationalism. The meeting starts at 7.30pm and will be chaired by Dr Sheila Rowbotham.
Tickets £4 (£2 concessions).
Details from Mervyn Busteed 0161-275 3623 or 0161-928 8861.

Women on the left

Meeting

Friday 8th March, 7-30pm,
Lothian Regional Council Chambers,
Parliament Square, Edinburgh.
Sylvia Pye (Women Against Pit Closures)
Doreen Cameron (President, NATFHE)
Councillor Liz Davies
Shakti Women's Aid
[creche, childcare wheelchair access, loop system and signer]

Day: 8th March

CSA: An attack on mothers

Michael Kalmanovitz from the Campaign Against The Child Support Act (CACSA) examines the Child Support Agency.

"OUR PRIME objective is not to help mothers with children," declared Anne Chant, head of the Child Support Agency, when the Social Security Select Committee's second report on the Agency was recently published. Chant boasted that over £479m of taxpayers' money had been saved from benefits: that is, from mothers forced off Income Support; from benefit deducted from mothers who refuse to authorise; and deducted as maintenance from absent fathers. Only £187m of this "saving" was distributed in maintenance last year.

From these figures alone it is clear that the poorest mothers and fathers have been impoverished by at least £292m. Not only is maintenance immediately deducted from the income of the 95% of single parents receiving means-tested benefits but mothers who want money from wealthy ex-partners are seeing their cases indefinitely deferred.

Chant didn't explain where the 115,000 mothers who 'disappeared' off Income Support have gone and how they and their children are surviving. Instead of investigating, the Select Committee implied that these mothers were committing fraud.

CACSA's experience is that mothers who fear harassment, custody battles and violence from ex-partners are being forced off Income Support by the Agency telling them that they must 'authorise' maintenance in order to get or keep their benefit, while telling fathers that the mother has asked the Agency to intervene. Tragically 37 deaths - including those of nine mothers and children - are attributed to the Agency.

The Select Committee didn't challenge the Government's doubling of maintenance payable from fathers on benefit while halving the maintenance of the wealthiest men. From April, £4.80 a week will be deducted from fathers on benefit - 41% of the men who pay - up from £2.35. A further 20% earn so little that they, their new partners and children are reduced to subsistence level. Frank Field MP, chair of the Select Committee, recently stated that he is very worried about the movement against the CSA. Central to the success of the non-co-operation movement is the popular self-help handbook, *The Child Support Act: Your Rights and How to Defend Them*, by Legal Action for Women (LAW) which has helped thousands of families defend themselves against the Agency.

Grassroots activists see the Act and its Agency as an attack on: mothers' right to choose whether or not they claim maintenance from their ex-partners; mothers' entitlement to Income Support, and everyone's right to benefit. Labour's front bench has so far refused to commit itself to scrapping the Act. Will New Labour continue to deny mothers' right to choose and stop the further impoverishment of the poorest families?"



Contact Labour Against the CSA at 56 Highfield Drive, Ashton under Lyne, Tameside OL5 0DW. LAW's handbook (£3 claimants, £12 funded organisations, £6 others) is available from CACSA: PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU tel: 0171-837 7509.

Peace at Home

Leonora Lloyd reports on the Labour Party's document on domestic and sexual violence against women.

VIOLENCE SHATTERS lives. Despite recent media hype about aggressive women, violence is overwhelmingly a male problem. When it is directed against women and children, the results are particularly pernicious. *Peace at Home* is an excellent summary of the violent landscape in which too many women and children live.

As well as looking at the situation in this country, it examines the problem and the solutions attempted around the world. It looks at the links with childhood experiences of violence, suggesting that one way to tackle future problems is to deal with playground bullying. Schemes working with violent men and sexual offenders are examined alongside the need for more refuges and other help for their victims.

Although nothing explicit is said about the spending implications, the document makes clear the financial cost of doing nothing. In Canada the cost of a three-year jail term for one sexual offender is estimated at $200,000. Even the World Bank has examined violence against women in the context of health costs and lost productivity. Clearly, anything that reduces male violence will be extremely cost-effective.

The document is weak in three main areas: the need to examine the way young men are raised; the effect of media images of violent men; and the increasing levels of state and interstate violence. Even politicians these days are violent: shouting, aggressive language, meaningless sound bites and insults have all but replaced reasoned argument. I do not expect a document on domestic violence to solve social and economic problems, but I do expect it to acknowledge them. Unfortunately, the implications for the rest of Labour's policies are too profound for this to happen.

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Docks: bribe decisively rejected

Leonora Lloyd reports: Locked out Liverpool dockers have voted by 271 to 50 against accepting £25,000 redundancy money from the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. They are clear their struggle is not over money but jobs. A second set of postal ballots of workers made redundant by other port employers show similar results: 56 to 6 against in one case, 10 to nil in another.

The importance of this struggle cannot be overemphasised. It is about trade union rights, the right to work, particularly for young people, and the life of a community.

The way the campaign is being fought is important. The nature of their work means that dockers have to be internationalists to succeed in any actions. The dockers have sent delegations all over the world, obtaining support from dockers in places such as Japan, the States, New Zealand, Holland, Greece and Israel. As we go to press, an international conference of port workers, organised by the locked-out workers, is taking place in Liverpool, with delegates from 40 countries expected to take part. Throughout, the Internet has been used to send messages of support and solidarity from around the world.

The dockers' partners, taking a leaf out of the miners' experience, have set up Women of the Waterfront and are regulars on the picket lines. Like the dockers, they are learning new ways of organising and are speaking out in public. Although the lock-out as a whole has had little national press publicity, the Women were interviewed on Radio 4's Women's Hour on the same day that it was announced that the shares of Mersey Docks and Harbour Company have taken a dive.



Photo: David Pope.

Eddie Loyden MP and Liverpool dockers' shop stewards.

Eddie Loyden, one of Liverpool's MPs, is giving his full support to the strike (unlike Frank Field, quoted by a member of Women of the Waterfront as saying that he would like to see the dockers hung). He told *LLB* that national support is as important as the international support. Dockers' Charter groups are being set up all over the country and Eddie wants to see massive support for the demonstration in Liverpool on March 23rd.

Because the action started as unofficial - when dockers refused to cross a picket line of young workers who had been made redundant - their union, the TGWU, will not back the men officially, although it was due to negotiations initiated by the union that the rejected offer was made.

Sullivan - no-show for showdown

Jon Rogers, East Lewisham CLP, reports on the murky privatisation schemes of Councillor Dave Sullivan, Lewisham Council Chair of Personnel.

DAVID SULLIVAN IS a company director of Serviceteam. This outfit is the private company in dispute with the GMB over the sacking of four shop stewards in Wandsworth. Sullivan suffered a humiliating setback on 1st February when the General Committee of East Lewisham CLP voted for full backing of the sacked workers and called on Sullivan to ensure their reinstatement. Former Council Leader Sullivan failed to attend the GC meeting at which the letter of condemnation sent him by Wandsworth Labour Group was scheduled to be read. On 10th February Wandsworth Labour leader Tony Belton spoke alongside GMB National Secretary Mick Graham and Labour Party NEC member Mary Turner at a fringe meeting of the Labour Local Government Conference in support of the sacked workers.

Serviceteam is run by former managers of Lewisham's DLO Directeam; the company inherited the Wandsworth dispute along with the 125 local government contracts it took over from AAH Environmental Services last October.

As Marketing Director of Serviceteam, Sullivan has been wandering the country trying to sell the company. Local authorities may have been initially encouraged to think well of a company that was linked with a leading Labour councillor from "flagship" Lewisham. However, the Wandsworth dispute has given the lie to Serviceteam's claims to be a friend of the unions. As sacked steward Mick James tells it: "I worked on the Wandsworth Dust for 16 years, joined the union and was elected steward in July 1995. I represented the members' grievances to Serviceteam management. For these crimes I was sacked along with my colleagues."

As well as the pressing need to support the sacked stewards, the Wandsworth dispute raises two wider issues for the Labour movement. First, trade unionists and Labour Party members need to be on the alert for more union busting from the cowboy employers of Serviceteam. Second, political colleagues of Councillor Sullivan in the local party and the Labour Co-ordinating Committee need to be held accountable for the conduct of this senior Labour representative, especially in the forthcoming Labour group elections.

Send donations and messages of support for the sacked workers to Battersea and Wandsworth Trades Council, 177a Lavender Hill, Battersea, London, SW11 5TE. For further details of the dispute, contact Martin Smith of the Trades Council on 0171 228 5638.

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JJ: total victory



The Industrial Tribunal (IT) sitting in the case of the JJ Fast Food workers has ruled that boss Mustafa Kamil must reinstate all the workers sacked by him last October for joining a union. Liz Knight reports on the victory.

AN Industrial Tribunal has ruled that JJ Fast Foods *must* recognise the union and take all the workers back by 26th March. All will receive compensation based on 17 weeks net pay. That makes a total pay-out of £123,913. Union recognition means that the workers must now receive better basic pay, written contracts, sick pay, holiday pay and better conditions. Everything that the workers fought for during the fifteen weeks of the dispute has been won.

The decision follows a previous interim compensation order. It signifies a magnificent victory for trade unionism, for the JJ workers themselves and for all other workers.

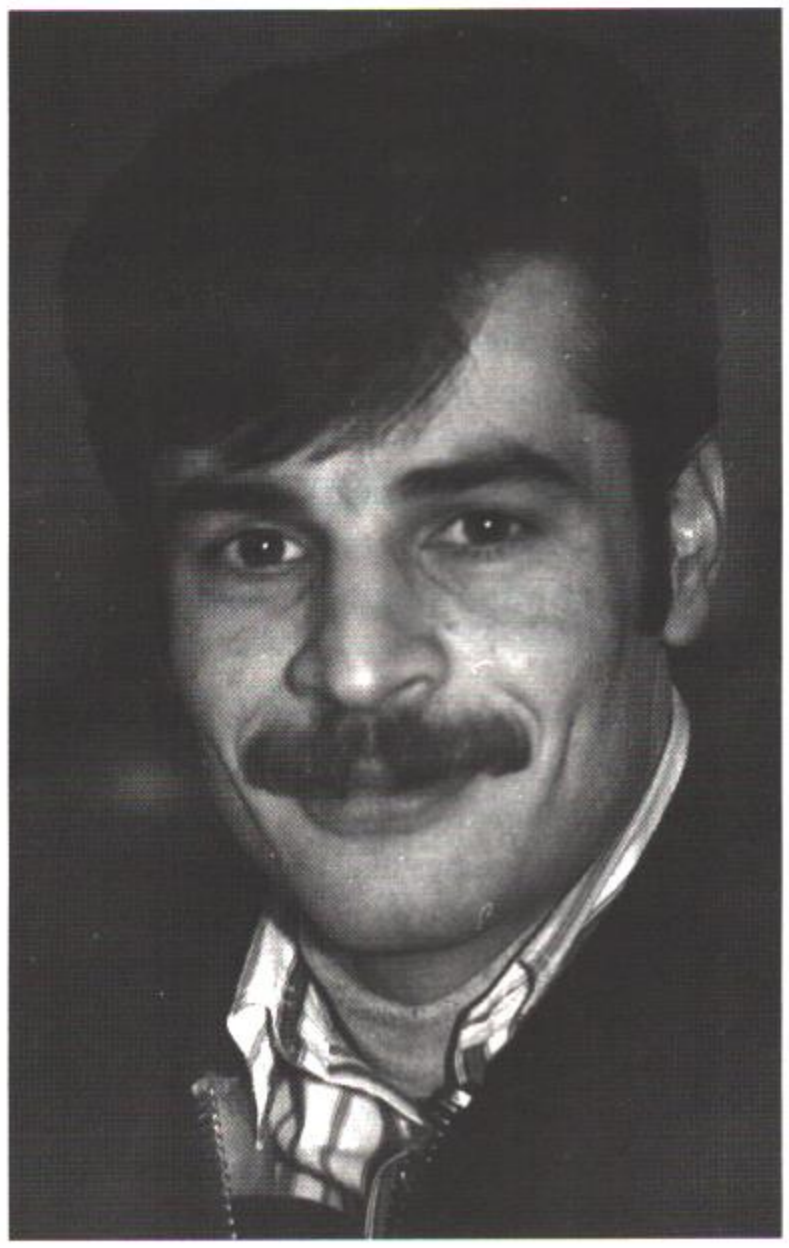
Employers have used mass unemployment, anti-trade union legislation and immigration laws as a licence to super-exploit their workers. This victory is a warning to employers everywhere that workers can fight back and can win.

A hugely successful boycott campaign, winning the support of workers elsewhere and organised by the workers themselves and the Support Group, brought Kamil's business to crisis point and forced him to seek a settlement.

Through trade union action, Harrow and Southwark councils were forced to end their contracts with JJ Foods, as did many smaller outlets, shops and burger bars. The JJ Fast Food workers' campaign had resonance across London. The decision of the IT in favour of the workers was a result of this campaign.

What started with 45 mainly Kurdish and Turkish workers being sacked and then beaten up on the picket line by the boss's thugs, has ended due to the workers' own determined and courageous activity and the solidarity of other workers in a famous victory.

The workers, through the union and the Support Group, will continue campaigning. A drive for unionisation of workers in North London sweatshops and burger bars is being initiated. This is linked to defence of workers' rights, whatever their ethnic origin, and to opposition to the Asylum Bill, anti-immigration and anti-union laws.



JJ striker Atila: "United workers can't be beaten". Photo: Colin Hayward.

On Saturday 2nd March, a victory rally will take place at Tottenham Green Leisure Centre, to which all supporters of the JJ workers are invited.

● For more information on the rally, contact: TGWU, Woodberry, 218 Green Lanes, N4 2HB, tel: 0181 800 4281. For more information on the campaign, contact the Unwaged Centre, 72 West Green Road, London N15 5NS, tel: 0181 802 9804.

"I'd rather close this place down than let the union in" - Mustafa Kamil (boss of JJFast Food).
"We've made him eat his words" - Hussein (JJ striker).

Hillingdon workers battle on

Geoff Martin reports: Despite snow, rain, wind and sub-zero temperatures Unison members at Hillingdon Hospital in west London are continuing their four month long strike against £35 a week pay cuts imposed by cowboy contractors Pall Mall.

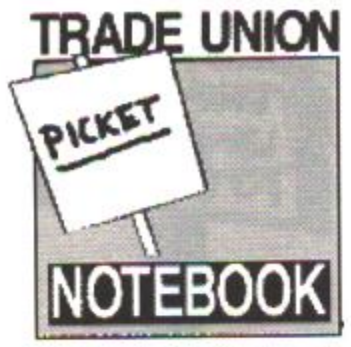
The strikers, mainly Asian women, are determined to battle on. Their fightback has brought back into sharp focus the wage cutting and union busting which goes hand in hand with the whole competitive tendering drive in the public service.

The company involved in the dispute, Pall Mall, sacked the staff after they refused to sign new contracts which would have meant pay cuts of about £1 per hour.

The dispute deserves the support of all trade unionists and of everyone who believes in quality services. It's vital that more delegations get along to the picket line at Hillingdon Hospital, Pield Heath Road, Hillingdon.

The women do feel a bit isolated at times, and in addition have been subjected to racial abuse and intimidation. If you can get yourself and some colleagues along there for a couple of hours you will be sure of a warm welcome and a hot cup of tea.

Get your union branch or Labour Party to make a donation. Cheques should be made payable to Unison Greater London Industrial Action fund and should be sent to Civic House, 8 Aberdeen Terrace, London SE3 0QY3.



Firefighters fight back

Firefighters around the country are mobilising against cuts in funding and services.

In Merseyside, after a two week suspension of the dispute agreed by both sides, firefighters struck on the 16th February. A second strike is due to occur on the 26th February, the day that Merseyside Fire Authority sets its budget. The Authority wants to carry over a £2 million underspend.

The London Fire Authority is due to set its budget on the 22nd February. Four stations are expected to close with the loss of 22 engines. 645 front line jobs are to be cut from a total of 6,000 which includes auxiliaries. Union members are to lobby the budget meeting and a ballot for a series of nine hour strikes is likely to follow.

Fire services across the country are facing budget cuts and all pay rises have to be funded by 'efficiency savings'. Strike ballots are likely to ensue in Essex, Surrey and Tyne and Wear.

Mick Shaw of London FBU told *LLB*: "The time has come to say enough is enough. There have been continual fire service cuts over the last decade. Now is the time to say no more."

Union lefts meet

On 17th February, as *LLB* went to press, representatives of a number of broad left organisations in different trade unions were set to meet in response to a call from the Socialist Teachers Alliance (STA) to discuss common ground and the possibility of organising left-wingers across the different unions. With representation expected from Unison, the TGWU, National Communications Union, print union GPMU, lecturers' union NATFHE, civil service union CPSA and actors' union Equity, as well as the STA, this meeting offers a valuable opportunity for unified lobbying of the TUC and of an incoming Labour Government.

● For more information contact: Trade Union Socialists, 3 Blades House, London, SE11 5TW.

Bank staff act

Midland Bank staff have been protesting over plans to axe over 1,000 staff in London and the South East. Staff have been out leafleting in London with a message that "it means a worse service as staff struggle to cover for sacked colleagues, whilst being forced to spend more time trying to sell you Bank products you may not want or be able to afford".

The Banking, Insurance and Finance Union (BIFU) points out that the Midland/HSBC Group is the most profitable bank in Britain, making over £8 million profit a day and paying its Chair over £12,000 a week.

● Protest letters should be sent to: Sir William Purves, Midland Bank Plc, 27-32 Poultry, London EC2P 2BX.

NUM moves into struggle

The NUM's National Executive is recommending that members employed at pits owned and operated by R. J. Budge Mining take part in a series of selective 24-hour strikes - if necessary - in support of the union's claim for full trade union recognition and meaningful negotiations to secure a substantial increase in basic pay - at last 8% for both 1995 and 1996.

At a Special National Conference of the NUM on January 22, delegates were told Budge had implemented (without any negotiation or consultation) a basic rate increase of 3.2 per cent. Mineworkers have not had a basic wage increase since 1991.

Arthur Scargill pointed out miners have increased productivity dramatically in the past year and Budge can well afford to pay a substantial increase. Budge is expected to make nearly £200 million profit for 1995, this is on top of over £400 million repaid to banks in respect of loans of £600 million. The Tories gave a £1.6 billion hand-out to Budge and other owners at the time of privatisation - amounting to a subsidy of about £6 per ton.

Redundancies threatened in Hackney

Elizabeth Short (Secretary of Hackney Unison) writes in a personal capacity:

"Hackney drops '£2 million for nothing' job policy" screamed the *Evening Standard* the day after the Council's Policy and Resources Committee voted to introduce compulsory redundancy for all displaced staff if not redeployed within six months.

The *Standard*'s fantasy isn't quite how the policy worked. Staff have been caught up in endless restructuring, but services still have to be delivered. When redeployees are moved, agency staff are hired to plug gaps.

The policy has already applied to higher-graded officers for three years and there is no redeployment in the LMS schools. The policy has disguised job losses whilst preserving industrial peace. Displaced staff opt for voluntary severance or early retirement rather than face working in restructured departments. The union has to deal with disciplinaries and sickness sackings designed to get staff off the payroll.

But now the chips are down. Hackney, probably under instructions from Walworth Road, has fallen into line and introduced compulsory redundancies. The Tories welcomed it with glee at P&R. The Liberals expressed their satisfaction. And the Labour councillors? Well naturally they had tears in their eyes as they brought the chopper down. A Committee Chair asked if I wanted them to set an illegal budget, putting his home in jeopardy. What about our members' homes when they lose their jobs and can't pay their mortgage?

But anything is easier than fighting the Tory Government over cuts. It's easier to take services away from vulnerable users - a sheltered workshop for the disabled here, a home for the elderly there - rather than join with workers and residents in a concerted fight to defend jobs and services. A "no cuts" budget would be better than capitulating to the Tories by chopping £15 million.

Hackney Council has held out longer than many other London boroughs. It was committed to winning contracts in-house under CCT so decent wages paid to the manual workers were recycled into the local economy. Hackney alone in London has a directly-employed manual workforce. But now the gloves are off.

Workers are under great stress to deliver even front-line services. This year's round of cuts, part of at least £30 million over three years, will add to the strain. But as another councillor said, ticking me off for the very idea of an illegal budget, "We can't do that, we're New Labour".

● What's happening in your Union? Please send all your trade union news to: *LLB*, Trade Union Notebook, PO BOX 2378, London E5 9QU.

Labour Camden set to sack all its staff

LABOUR-RUN Camden Council appears to have taken a leaf out of the book of Tony Blair's friend, Rupert Murdoch, and proposes to sack its entire workforce in order to force through an attack on conditions of service. The Council attempted to drive down the conditions of service of its workforce in the early 1990s, prompting a national NALGO boycott of all vacancies in the borough. The boycott ended with an uneasy truce, as new staff were progressively brought in on new - and less favourable - contracts, and other unions broke ranks and signed away some of their members' rights.

Since 1993 Camden has employed all 3000 new staff on the new terms, but 3200 are still on the old contract.

Ultimatum

Now, in a breathtaking ultimatum to the workforce, Camden has issued notices of termination to all staff. Opposition to this assault upon Council workers from within the Labour Party and local groups has been muted. However, a mass meeting of the main white-collar branch of Unison in Camden has voted overwhelmingly not to accept the new contracts and to ballot for six days of strike action. Labour Party members in Camden need to ask their councillors why they think that the best way to prepare for the General Election is to start an unprecedented fight with the local unions.

Workers strike

More than 40 workers walked out in protest at Camden Council's decision. The unofficial action closed the District Housing Office in Kentish Town on February 6th, and may be the prelude to what Camden Unison has warned could be the borough's biggest strike in years. "They were just very annoyed when they got their termination notices and walked out for the afternoon. I can understand it, but it was a spontaneous and unofficial action" said David Eggmore, branch secretary of Camden Unison.

Leading with the left



Geoff Martin: slightly left of centre.

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

● Sick and tired of jibes along the lines of "Who ate all the pies?" I contacted the *LLB* high command and asked them to sort out a new picture to go with this column. Could they get it together to haul themselves down to the Plough with the office Instamatic to do the business? Could they bollocks!

So, as a special treat this month I have dug out a copy of a PR shot of South London's finest red rebel rock and roll band, Secrets Now!, circa 1981.

Who's the geezer with the quiff and the Woodbine second from the left? Yep, that's me at the tender age of 19 when I thought that you could change the world with a Telecaster in one hand and a copy of *Das Kapital* in the other.

● At a recent meeting of the Unison London Political Committee (Provisional Council of the London Workers Soviet) we heard reports about Blairite Labour councils going hell for leather for privatisation. As I launched into my standard rant about Labour councillors embracing privatisation, I was interrupted by one of my comrades from a South London borough: "Embraced it! EMBRACED IT! In our borough they've taken it to bed and shagged it!"

● I was sad to see poor old Jack Dromey dropped through the mud after deciding to send one of his kids to a toff's school. I first met Jack back in the early eighties when Drone-on was still close to the tankies and I was just an angry hospital porter with severe attitude.

Drone-on later married into the aristocracy and I married a woman who owned the Kray twins' get-away car. That's life, I suppose. Our paths crossed again years later during the Clause IV bust-up. Waiting in hospitality for a live head-to-head on Newsnight I was amazed when Jack turned up dressed as an undertaker. I kid you not. Even Paxo thought it was a bit odd.

Any suggestions? The best entries will win a copy of the deleted Secrets Now! single "Somewhere in the Metropolis".

● I have to confess that in the wake of all that Harman business I was giving serious consideration to joining Britain's newest political party. After lengthy discussions with my closest political advisers (my mum and Freddie Fingers down the Plough) we decided to hold fire until after the Hemsworth by-election. The result confirmed my worst fears - the Mark Thomas Friday Nights Channel Four Party managed to pull in just 122 votes. Sorry Mark, but I'll be sticking around for the inevitable tear-up with the Mods after the general election.

● A bizarre letter found its way into my in-tray last month. I'll quote it here in full:

"Dear *LLB*, Why oh why do you continue to give that Geoff Martin a platform in your magazine? Can't you see that he is obviously an MI5 plant, a running dog of the bourgeoisie, Bickerstaffe's bag-man, the secret love-child of Tony Blair and Harriet Harman? The Hampshire Popular Front is demanding the immediate sacking of Martin, public ownership of his Chelsea programme collection and the house arrest of his cat. Act now, *LLB*, before this man causes any further damage.

Yours for sectarianism, Paul Anorak, Hampshire Unison."

I gently suggested to Alistair Ward (*LLB*'s editor) that he reply. He drafted this:

"We will continue to offer Geoffrey a platform because:

1. He's a principled socialist and all-round hero of the revolution. 2. We're desperate to fill the space and he gives us a bit of street cred. 3. He's got loads of scary mates."

● By the time you read this column I will have taken up my new position as Unison London Regional Convenor - elected unopposed despite this column!

Paths to democracy

Mike Phipps previews the ideas behind the events of Central America Week.

'PATHS TO Democracy' is the theme of this year's Central America Week (17th to 24th March). But defining exactly what democracy means in the region has become the focus of a major ideological battle.

Since the fall of the dictators in the 1980s and the negotiated end to civil wars in much of the region, an 'elite democracy' has emerged. Human rights violations continue, most notably in Guatemala, and the burden of indebtedness to the IMF and the World Bank continues to grow - Nicaragua's is the highest per capita in the world.

Elites that once depended for their survival on the military, as in El Salvador, now cover themselves in electoral legitimacy. But despite the democratic openings, the vast majority of people are excluded, and for one good reason: nowhere is social reform seriously on the agenda.

Existing democracy in Central America is a cover for the interests of global capital. As Noam Chomsky put it, "the guardians of world order have sought to establish democracy in one sense of the term, while blocking it in a different sense".

It is that different sense to which the Central American left has attempted to give meaning. For the left, democracy means political participation for the masses; basic civil rights, free trade unions, accountable state institutions, economic redistribution, land reform, free education and health care are preconditions.

"There is no true democracy without economic democracy," says Nicaraguan human rights activist Vilma Nunez. "We have to rescue democracy in the real sense of the word, with its essential components of human rights and development, to expose the falsity of the democracies in which we live".

Contact the Central America Human Rights Committee, 83 Margaret Street, London W1N 7HB, tel: 0171 631 4200.

● Paths to Democracy conference, 9.30am - 5pm, Saturday 23rd March, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London. Speakers include writer Hugh O'Shaughnessy; Juan Garcia Melara, Mayor of El Paisnal in El Salvador; Alejandro Bendana of the Centre for International Studies, Managua; and Maria Morales from Maya Defence Group, Guatemala.

● Who's Shaping the Future of Central America? organised by the Camden-Nicaragua Association and SOAS Student Union, 7.00pm, Monday 18th March, Assembly Hall, SOAS, Malet Street, London. Speakers include Central American specialist Patrick Costello and Jacaranda Fernandez of the Nicaraguan health union, Fetsalud.

Black Peoples' Congress

THE BLACK PEOPLES of the Americas First Congress was held in Sao Paulo in November 1995. Members of several black organisations from a dozen countries in Africa and the Americas met together to celebrate their cultural roots, discuss social and economic exclusion and propose joint strategies for political action.

The event was co-ordinated by groups from the Brazilian black national movement. Brazil has one of the largest black populations in the world - 65 million.

"Land has been a fundamental matter in our lives, not only in terms of our subsistence but also in relation to our identity," states one of the main documents to come out of the meeting. The Congress also discussed racial segregation, violence against black women, racial harassment at work and better living conditions in the inner cities.

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

Spain recognises International Brigade

Mike Ward writes: The Spanish Parliament has decided to grant citizenship to all who fought in the International Brigade during the civil war. Originally promised by Juan Negrin if the Republic won, it has been taken up in recent years by the Communist Party. Jack Jones, a former volunteer now into OAP politics, said it was 'very gratifying'. He would like to go back to receive his citizenship. Adding perhaps cynically, 'I wonder if it includes pension rights'.

Well Jack, the so-called socialist government in Spain doesn't even pay pension rights to Spanish-born citizens who fought against Franco unless they had a rank in the Regular, or the CP-reconstituted army that destroyed the revolution. While the International Brigade leadership happily subsumed itself to the whims of Moscow, many Spanish workers remained in their own self-controlled militias. Those who fought against fascism in the anarchist resistance that followed the Republic's defeat in 1939, Spanish or not, often spending years in prison as a consequence, get nothing at all.

LLB page 24

You can't keep a mass movement down for long !

Sean Coyne gives an update on the struggle in Sierra Leone.

LAST MONTH we carried an interview with James, a Sierra Leonean socialist who outlined the impact of the civil war (which he described as bloody but essentially phoney), the actions of South African mercenaries hired by De Beers to protect the diamond mines in readiness for privatisation, and despite all odds, the spectacular growth of a popular movement for peace and civilian rule.

As if to underline the precarious rule of the Strasser military clique, as the article went to press, a 'palace coup' sent Strasser off into exile and his deputy took over.

The big question was, were the new military leaders going to allow the elections planned for February 26th or were they going to play the 'war' card in order to justify their hold on power?

On Friday 9th February, despite threats from the regime, a huge demonstration took place in Freetown. The gathering attracted very large numbers of women, who were the main organisers, and demanded that the elections go ahead, and not be deferred.

On Saturday and Sunday, large meetings took place all over Freetown and other towns demanding the right to vote.

Activists of every description recognise that the only way to stop the carnage, and the displacement of the population, is to hold democratic elections, put in place a government with a clear mandate for peace and reconciliation, and return the military to their barracks, and out of politics.

On Monday 12th February, political parties, peace groups, trade unions and others gathered together at the request of the Independent Electoral Commissioner to discuss whether or not the elections should go ahead, or be postponed pending a resolution of the civil war. Despite the best efforts of the military, the voting at the meeting was decidedly in favour of proceeding with the elections. The size of the majority for peace and the popular base it successfully mobilised, meant that the military had to give way.

In a telephone conversation with James from Freetown he insisted that the meeting represented a major breakthrough. "For the first time in many years, the democratic mass organisations who have been painstakingly reconstructing their base, were able to match the power of the military with people power. It tasted so sweet".

The elections are to take place on February 26th under the watchful eye of international observers. They are being conducted on a national-list proportional representation basis because of the displacement of the population, two thirds of whom live in Freetown, where the mass organisations have been most active.

As we go to press, many of the registered political parties are engaged in merger talks, and there is strong pressure to present a united candidate for President who is not drawn from military circles. Either way, the mass organisations have asserted their influence, and are determined to do so whatever happens in the election. ❑



Nigerian repression continues... the world stays quiet

AS WE GO to press we have received reports of further arrests in Nigeria of democratic and civil rights activists. Recently Fela Kuti the musician famous for his popular songs against military rule and corruption, was arrested.

His brother Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, a leader of the Campaign for Democracy, is currently serving a fifteen year prison sentence handed down by a secret military tribunal last year. Fela who has been arrested many times was later released but remains defiant. Fela's lawyer, Femi Falana who is also a leader of the Lawyers for Human Rights and Democracy, was also arrested and is still being held.

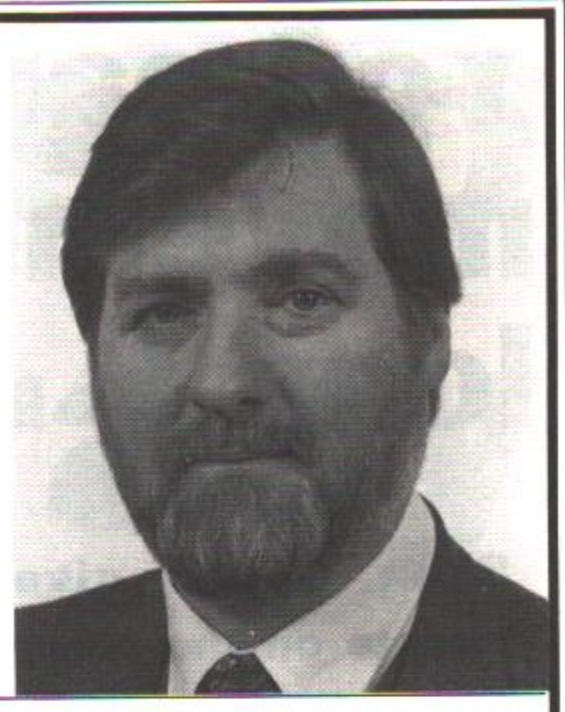
Also arrested were Femi Aborishade a progressive human rights lawyer (who is also in detention), and trade unionist Comrade Dabibi who was the Secretary of one of the oil workers unions until its leadership was banned by the regime in 1994. Not one of these people have been charged.

If evidence was needed for stepping up the pressure on the Abacha regime, this must surely be it. Hundreds remain incarcerated in some of the worst prisons known to humankind.

Quiet diplomacy and threats of sanctions have clearly failed to impress the Abacha regime, or their friends in Shell International. Now is the time for *action*.

LLB page 25

Euro, I'll not



Michael Hindley, MEP

I AM AGNOSTIC on the issue of a single currency. I realise that the capitalists are mostly for it, but we should be wary of rejecting an idea just on those grounds.

In his memoirs Nigel Lawson recounts the debate about locking the UK into the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) and rehearses in a letter to Geoffrey Howe the arguments in favour. The decisive argument for the ERM - and by extension the same applies to a single currency - was that it would give the Tories a cover to get away with controlling public expenditure. Lawson, with disarming frankness, explains the need for further cuts in public expenditure with the unpopularity this would entail. The alternative, he declares, would be to let the ERM do the dirty work for them - meeting the demands of the ERM would force the cuts. This holds true still.

The other major consideration is the notion of competition in the global economy. Jacques Delors - who also is franker out of office that in - has recently doubted the wisdom of the very criteria he himself insisted upon for monetary union. Delors made much of the need for "Europe" to compete with "Asia". Sadly, many Labour Party MPs and MEPs go glibly along with this myth of "competition". I want a co-operative world economy, not a competitive one, and besides, I've always refused to identify with stockbrokers and futures traders because we accidentally share the same country of birth. I refuse to identify with a common "European" identity on the same grounds. Now one significant "advantage" Asia has over Europe is low wages and low social costs. To compete, wages can be depressed and social expenditure cut in exactly the same way on a European level as Lawson spelled out for the UK.

This is precisely what lies behind the Maastricht Treaty with its demands for massive cuts in deficit spending (which for example would effectively hinder any large scale public house building programme) for control of inflation (which curbs wages) and for cuts in public expenditure as a percentage of GDP (which means more cuts in education, health etc). This will force convergence of the European Union's economy but at enormous costs to the social fabric - costs which the advocates of a market economy are prepared to face.

One group exempt from the cuts will be the police who will have to keep the discontent in check; hence the calls for "law and order" heard from New Labour. At the time of the Maastricht debate, some of us advocated convergence of the EU economy on a different basis.

The major problem in Europe is unemployment caused by under-investment, so why not cut unemployment progressively by an agreed percentage each year; why not have all countries reinvest an agreed percentage of GDP in job creation, directly and indirectly in education. By such simple mechanisms we would shift the focus towards a people-centred, not money-centred economy. There could then be a case for single currency but it would have come about the right way round - currency union would be based on economic convergence, rather than forcing economic convergence by currency union.

Finally, some reluctant Labour advocates of single currency argue that the EURO would stop speculators; as if George Soros would suddenly pack up once the EURO was in place. What simplistic nonsense - the speculators would just play the yen against the EURO, against the Dollar - and when the Federal World Government introduced a MONDO, then the Soroses would move into commodities.

If speculators are the problem then there are simple administrative mechanisms to be put in place - you can discriminate by tax between investment in industry and manufacturing which would be encouraged and investment in currencies which would have punitive levels of tax. Even right-wing financial experts are alarmed about the uncontrolled zillions of money sloshing round between the world's computers and not being invested in industry.

We are closer to a crisis than New Labour imagines; how typical that we are becoming more uncritical of a system which saner people have long since seen through. ❑

National Assembly Against Racism

Saturday 9th March, 10am - 5pm

York Hall, Old Ford Road, London E2.

Diane Abbott MP, Brendan Barber (TUC Deputy General Secretary), Bob Purkiss (TGWU national officer), Sukhdev Sharma (CRE Director), Lola Onibiyo, Neville Lawrence, and many many more.

Contact NAAR, 28 Commercial Street, London E1.

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A life of struggle

Mike Phipps reviews Albert Meltzer's I couldn't paint golden angels, *published by AK Press (£12.95).*

MELTZER'S POLITICAL autobiography spans 60 years of activity in the class struggle. His odyssey charts his adventures as a schoolboy anarchist, boxer and professional joke-writer in the 1930s and goes on to detail his reincarnation as a printworker who experienced first-hand the violence meted out by the police to pickets outside Murdoch's New International plant at Wapping in the late 1980s.

In the meantime, Meltzer participated in the Soldiers' Councils in Cairo after the war, was a founder of the anarchist paper *Black Flag* and campaigned indefatigably for Spanish political prisoners in Fascist jails in the 1950s and 1960s.

This extract describing how, by the 1970s, Spain was beginning to change gives some of the flavour of this hugely enjoyable book.

It was incredible how Spaniards had come to distrust one another, but also how they were unwinding. An American we knew became friendly with a girl who was at the University, also an anarchist. But she implored him not to say anything about it when he met her parents. She had no idea how they would react. Her mother questioned him closely about his job and wanted to know to which union he belonged in the States. Thinking she wouldn't know what it was, he said: "The IWW". She lit up immediately and confessed she had been in the CNT in Tarrassa. When her own father had been taken by the Falange, her mother had gone to beg for his life. They not only shot him in her presence, they gave her castor oil, shaved her head and made her run down the street with bullets flying at her feet. Thereafter the widow had warned her children never to say a word about their beliefs, not even to their spouses or children when they married.

She had kept silence all these years and now found she had an anarchist daughter. When the son came in, mother and daughter were still talking about what the father's reaction would be. The surprised son confessed he was in a clandestine CNT union, and they were all laughing about their newfound discovery of each other and if Papa would say he was in a nest of vipers, when the latter came in from work and wanted to know what the joke was. They plucked up courage and told him whereupon he whipped the CNT rulebook out of his pocket and asked for their back subscriptions.

The whole family had kept their secret from each other all those years and it needed an American novio to act as catalyst.

Progress - another step backwards

Dan Carter, of the East Lewisham Labour Party, reviews the new magazine of the Labour right wing.

THE LABOUR right have never had a theoretical - or any other kind of - magazine, mainly because they are so devoid of any type of radical thought. *Progress* is the brainchild of Peter Mandelson's parliamentary assistant, Derek Draper, and a bunch of the New Labour, Young Labour, New Young Labour types who have set up camp in the tea rooms of the House of Commons and appeared to be running Dromey's campaign for the TGWU leadership and lobbying for the Labour Co-ordinating Committee's slate for the NEC and wherever else there is a threat to socialism raising its ugly head. In this project they are backed by a number of Walworth Road hacks in a magazine that mixes support for New Labour policies with reports of practical activity.

Fortunately, the magazine fails to live up to its promise. Sad articles by would-be frontbenchers on 'Why New Labour is radical' sit side-by-side with reprints of articles Tony Blair wrote for the national press some time ago. Enough money has been raised - apparently there's some suspicious Eurodosh behind it - to mail 50,000 glossy copies out to, amongst others, all Constituency Party offices and Prospective Parliamentary Candidates (you may wonder how such confidential addresses have been obtained by a particular political faction).

With enough funding before any subs are sold to last well into the first term of Labour Government, it is clear *Progress* will try to give weight to the vacuous line being put by New Labour apparatchiks in constituencies up and down the country.

The exciting layout of the magazine belies the tedious articles regurgitating bland nonsense. I was beginning to doze until I reached page nine, when a picture of Peter Mandelson smiling leapt out of the page at me and made me physically sick. As a contribution to left-of-centre journalism, *Progress* certainly isn't.

● *Open Eye* editors John Murray and Matthew Kalman have been at the forefront of exposing former Green Party leading light David Icke as a "New Age Nazi", supporting the theory of a 'World Jewish Conspiracy' and in particular stating "a Jewish clique worked to create the First World War, the Russian Revolution and the Second World War". *Open Eye* itself offers exposes from around the world as well as Britain. How accurate they are, I would leave the reader to decide. Suffice it to say, they print the news others won't!

Open Eye, magazine challenging Media Censorship, sub of 3 for £5 from BM Open Eye, London WC1N 3XX.

Education: challenging the myths

Liz Davies reviews
State Education, What's Left?
by Bob Spooner
[Gerbil Books, £5.00].

BOB SPOONER is a retired teacher, NUT activist and former Labour Councillor. He has spent the whole of his adult life campaigning for comprehensive education. For twenty years, he was headteacher at Leeds' first comprehensive school and was instrumental in developing comprehensive education in West Bromwich.

State Education, What's Left? is a short book, defending the principles of comprehensive education. Bob Spooner deals with the history of the struggle and arguments for comprehensive education from the end of the war until 1965, when the Labour Government came out supporting comprehensive education. He deals with many of the false myths about comprehensive education - that inner city schools are against competitive sports, that radical teachers are not interested in academic results - whilst making a clear and compelling argument that education is about more than exam statistics, or educating the brightest children to pass exams. His clear commitment to an education system that educates the whole child is cogently argued and a riposte to those who argue that radical teachers let children down.

In today's climate, obsessed with league tables and statistics, Bob Spooner's arguments are a welcome breath of fresh air. The values of education are becoming increasingly bipartisan - Labour authorities compete for places on the league tables of exam results, Harriet Harman has no difficulty convincing her colleagues that her local Southwark schools were simply not good enough. Bob Spooner places emphasis both on exam results, and on wider educational values, developing each child's creative potential.

Short chapters deal with all aspects of school education and debate - the national curriculum, streaming and mixed ability, testing, opting out, truancy, single-sex schools, religious education and sport. The book usefully rehearses the arguments in favour of comprehensive education in today's context, taking on the Government's "back to basics"ideology. Useful for all activists in the education world.

'Between the lines'

SOLD MAINLY at gigs, this cheaply produced but exciting new magazine covers politics and culture from an original angle - people who don't support a particular political line! With a healthy criticism of the Labour Party and an encouragement to direct action, it is an optimistic little publication that will definitely appeal to newer and younger activists. Just the sort of do-it-yourself, outspoken mag that should be springing up in the mid-1990s.

● *Between the lines*: £2 stamps/postal order for sub of 4 issues, *Between the lines*, Box 32, 136 Kingsland High Street, E8.

Murdoch moves in

Dave Hammond considers the long-term prospects for sport, the latest target of the Murdoch empire.

SPORT IS big business. The BBC were slow to twig it, ITV and Channel Four had a vague idea, but that Wizard of Oz, Rupert Murdoch, learned quick. Murdoch recognised the commercial value of sport and has gone for it. Sport is cheap to produce and the viewing figures pull in advertisers. Inevitably commercial television cottoned on. So far the story is pretty straightforward: a tale of capitalism and commercialism. So what is the fuss about at the moment?

Well, there are two major problems. First, because Sky is stumping up all the money and winning all the contracts, sport is being launched into a parallel universe where many mortals cannot go. But the segregation of sport presents problems not just for skinflints like me who won't buy Murdoch's dishes. It means that television cannot be used to win over a new audience. And if Murdoch pulls out at the end of his contract, where does that leave the sport that has taken his gold? What will happen to Rugby League in five years if it cannot be a TV sport? Will it return to its roots? Not likely. Even up north, its roots are not that deep; to secure the deal with Murdoch, League dug them up.

Secondly, because of the size of the cheques, programmers are able to dictate the way games are played. Barry Hearn, the owner of Leyton Orient FC, has stated that he will schedule football matches whenever the TV people want him to; he believes that Orient fans will come and watch, even if kick-off is at midnight. Sharp man, Hearn. A whole generation of football fans (myself included) would follow their team over land and sea. Problem is, Bazza me old son, that the next generation will tell you where to get off. Do you reckon that TV will then pay to televise cold, empty football stadiums? Will it attract the same sort of viewing figures? Will the advertising rates be the same?

In the final analysis, sponsorship is not a charity; it is paid because there is a return on it. Certainly televised sport is good for everybody: fans, armchair followers, advertisers and TV companies all get something out of it. But if the deal becomes one-sided somebody is going to lose out. Why do I have the feeling that it could be working-class sports fans?

Dave Hammond wrote *Foul Play: A class analysis of sport* available from Ubique, Box 3104, London SE13 6EU for £4.75, £1 p&p.

Sports *Briefing*?

Should *LLB* have a monthly (anti-racist/anti-sexist/anti-capitalist) sports column? Would you contribute? Write to Alistair Ward, *LLB*, PO Box 2378.

Science



Civil war in the womb?

Camilla Power (Department of Anthropology, University College London) looks at a revolutionary new model of pregnancy which sees conflict as well as harmony between mother and foetus.

"FORGET THESE male fantasies of warfare in the womb!" cries one American Professor of Rhetoric, Language and Culture. "So long as biological theories echo patriarchal ideologies, women will be at risk in pregnancy", runs another feminist professor's response to the "outrageous suggestion that genetic conflict has created an evolutionary struggle between a woman and her foetus".

Harvard biologist David Haig provoked these tirades by proposing a "selfish-gene" model to explain the common - occasionally critical - ills of pregnancy. He explains morning sickness, miscarriage, gestational diabetes and high blood pressure as effects of an ongoing "argument" between mother and foetus over the allocation of nutrients in the womb. His theory promises to revolutionise gynaecology.

Mother and foetus share 50 per cent of each other's genes. That's plenty of common ground - but there's room for disagreement. The foetus carries an alien complement of paternal genes into the mother's body. Through evolution, foetuses have increased their chances of survival by securing more nutrients from their mothers. Obviously, it's no use pushing demands to the point where they endanger mum's life - but a "fit" foetus is expected to extract that bit extra.

Mother, meanwhile, has to consider herself, existing children, future children. She can't spend all on one greedy foetus. So she has evolved mechanisms to resist foetal demands.

The result is a "tug-of-war", with mother and foetus pulling harder and harder over evolutionary time. If both are healthy, they can take the strain. But if one collapses, disaster ensues: miscarriage for the foetus, or life-threatening illness for the mother.

In this conflict, the foetus has evolved a powerful arsenal of chemical weapons. Greedy for blood sugar, it secretes placental lactogen (hPL) into Mum's bloodstream to tie up her insulin. Mum counterattacks with increased insulin, reducing her blood sugar. By the end of pregnancy she has 2,000 times more hPL in her system than at the start. If for any reason she can't produce sufficient insulin to match, she is at risk of diabetes.

The foetus also deploys chemicals which constrict mother's arteries - effectively raising her blood pressure so that more blood gets to the placenta. This can lead to hypertension and pre-eclampsia, now the major cause of perinatal maternal mortality.

Early in pregnancy, the foetus has to 'persuade' its mother to carry it to term. The foetus has much to lose - its single shot at life. Mum can always try again next time - possibly with a different father. Up to 78 per cent of fertilised eggs are aborted in early stages. Mothers have evolved to exercise quality control, detecting abnormal embryos and aborting these. At an unconscious bodily



level, evolution has conferred on women a 'right to choose'.

Countering this, the foetus releases another hormone into the maternal bloodstream - hCG - which allows it to stay implanted in the uterine wall. The huge volume of hCG produced is a kind of 'shout' - a very loud signal from foetus to mother - to say "Have me because I'm going to be a great baby!". The maternal body, Haig suggests, reads this signal as a measure of the viability of the offspring. The production of hCG coincides with the period of morning sickness during the first trimester, when the foetus may be especially susceptible to toxins ingested from certain foods.

In Haig's approach, women and foetuses are assumed to have "intelligent" bodies. After all, they have been designed by a million years of natural selection and there were no intensive care units in the Pleistocene. Our foremothers survived. This is light years removed from the traditional medical view prevalent from the ancient Greeks to the Enlightenment that treated women as "weak vessels", imperfect versions of men.

Haig's model is elegant, illuminating and woman-empowering, as well as foetus-empowering, since it clarifies the workings of pregnancy. 'Feminist' rhetorical accusations of abusive patriarchal metaphors menacing harmonious mother-and-baby relations are no use to anyone. While 'feminists' moan about metaphors, the new gynaecology of maternal-foetal conflict at gene level will be saving lives. ❑

Reason in Revolt

Marxist Philosophy and Modern Science

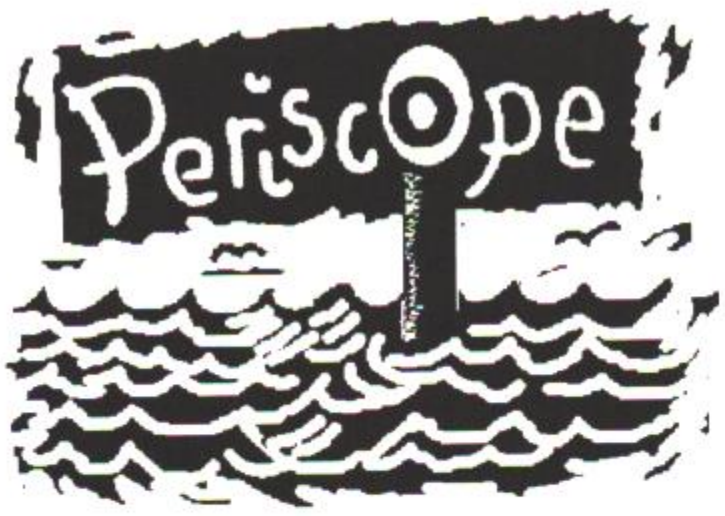
by Alan Woods and Ted Grant

"... a well researched, scholarly account" - Chris Knight, Senior Lecturer in Anthropology, *LLB* December 1995

"Most non-scientists will learn a lot from this book..." - Paul Morris, reviewed in *Workers Power*, October 1995

"... *Reason in Revolt* is more serious than most efforts. It contains genuinely interesting material." - Jonathan Joseph, *Socialist Outlook*, No 87

443 pages, price £9.95, plus £1.50 p&p. From Well Red publications, PO Box 2626, London N1 6DU. Cheques, etc payable to Well Red.



Opportunity Harmanised

LLB has carried out some research into **posh schools**. Imagine a school which has: 10 science laboratories, a computer lab, an indoor swimming pool, an 18,000 book library, an arts centre, a 340 seat theatre, archery, fencing and rowing classes; adventure training camps, ski trips, international exchanges and a choir which performs Purcell, Britten and opera. Sounds like "Fast Track Socialism"? Well all this wasn't good enough for **Hatty** and **Jack**. Instead of these facilities at Brother **Blair's London Oratory**, they sent their nipper off to **St. Olaves**.

*ack*arman

Jo Bland complains that sometimes it's quite hard to get good reception on Teletext. She recently tuned in to see the headline "**Blair** *acks **Harriet Harman**". Well done, Jo thought, you've sacked her. Sadly, after retuning the screen revealed that it was a "b" that was missing, not an "s".

Selection problems

Never mind **Harman** and **Blair** sending their kids to selective state schools, what about those Labour MPs who sent their kids to private, fee-paying schools? Lewisham based Birmingham MP **Roger Godsiff** spends £9,000 a year on sending his kids to posh South East London schools. If the NEC allows it, Godsiff faces a tricky re-selection. **Roy Hattersley** thinks that an Asian might get selected instead. Some of Roger's MP chums are trying to help out: six Tory MPs have tabled a motion congratulating him for "putting his children above his Party's dogma".

Beyond Barking?

Who was **Roy Hattersley** refering to when he stated: "One Labour MP suggested that childless colleagues had no right to express opinions on the way in which our schools are organised. No doubt, according to her, views on top tax rates should be limited to those members whose daddies were millionaires". Surely this must be a New Labour MP.

Market testing

A multiple-choice questionnaire is to be used as a test of organisational awareness for senior managers in **Lewisham Council**. One question it asks is: "What do you call a leading Labour councillor who tries to use his DLO connections to poach public-sector work for his private company?' A) a traitor; B) a skilled entrepreneur; or C) **Councillor Sullivan**?"

Peasants revolt?

Jack Straw has a thesis: working class and unemployed jurors are more likely to disbelieve police witnesses than the professional classes and are thus more likely to acquit. So what is Straw saying? Does he believe that workers are too thick to convict the guilty or too astute to be duped by the fuzz?

Mephistopheles claims another victim

Peter Mandelson has finally achieved his ambition of remaining Labour's Director of Communications - permanently. Garlic and stakes have no effect. Following his departure as the Party's professional "spin doctor", he saw off first **John Underwood** and now **Joy Johnson**. Both were respected professionals who soon tired of Mandelson's constant criticism. Johnson's daily briefing to MPs lost her by-line the day she announced her resignation. You can see why she had to go: she was convinced that Labour would win by "getting our policies right." You can add your name to our briefings any time you like, Joy!

Liddle & Piddle

Mandelson, meanwhile, has been hawking the serialisation rights of his new book on the 'Blair revolution'; unfortunately the original asking price of half a million has been slashed to under £50,000. A Mr Evans at **Faber & Faber** is quoted as saying: "We are trying to sell it for whatever we can get."

Ellis Hillman

Ellis Hillman, an *LLB* supporter who was probably the longest-serving Labour councillor in London, has died at the age of 67.

HE STARTED HIS political career in 1958 on the London County Council. He served on the GLC from 1968 to 1981 and chaired its Arts and Recreation committee in the 1970s. He thought up the idea for the Thames barrier and served on innumerable public bodies and boards of governors. In 1986 he became a Labour councillor in Barnet. On becoming the borough's first ever Labour mayor in 1994, he took great delight in replacing the bust of Margaret Thatcher in the mayor's parlour with one of Aneurin Bevan.

His fascination with mathematical theory drew him to the work of Lewis Carroll. He founded and was honorary president of the Lewis Carroll Society and edited its fanzine, *Jabberwocky*. He also served as president of both the Flat Earth and Fairy societies, not because he believed in either but because he relished the intellectual debate.

An expert on the Talmud, the Jewish book of law, his office at County Hall boasted a bookcase full of learned Jewish works; it revolved to reveal a collection of the works of Lenin and Trotsky, neatly demonstrating his varied intellectual and political convictions.



ELLIS WAS A lively comrade with many interests. He was active in politics all his adult life and although he veered to the right at one point he found his way back to a principled socialist position in recent years.

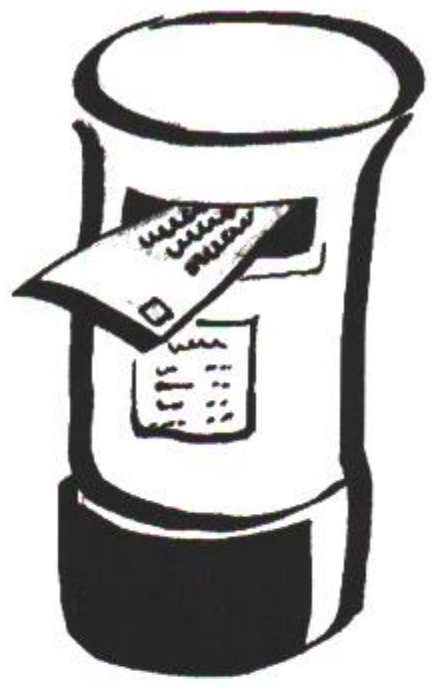
Like most politicians Ellis knew how to publicise his activities. He did so superbly well during his year as Labour Mayor of the formerly die-hard Tory Borough of Barnet.

However, Ellis did much good work for which he sought no publicity or thanks. His respect, devotion and attention to Francis Ridley, former leader of the ILP, in his old age, was an example of the best side of Ellis. When Ridley could still manage the few yards from his flat to his local to meet and enthral his friends with his vast knowledge, Ellis asked if I would take Ridley for a short drive from time to time as he had been confined to a narrow area of Bloomsbury for ages. When Ridley, in his nineties, went into a nursing home and was no longer able to converse as before, Ellis was a regular visitor. This kindly side of Ellis, together with his lifelong enthusiasm for new ideas will remain my strongest memories of him.

Mildred Gordon MP.

CORRESPONDENCE

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



Write to:

Labour Left Briefing
PO Box 2378
London E5 9QU

The February issue was essential reading, as always. The article by Bryn Griffiths on the SLP was spot-on. I was waiting for the Hemsworth result before writing and I think it confirms what he said. Maybe it would be interesting to have something about the ILP in this context. There were other particularly good articles - by Dan Carter (it is quite true that one has to work with 'soft-lefts' on the ground) and Chris Knight in particular.

Andrew Coates
Ipswich

Bryn Griffiths' piece "Arthur's tragedy" misses the point. He asserts that "By leaving [the Labour Party] Scargill will have sidelined himself from the main terrain of battle against a Blair Government that failed to deliver." How so, Bryn?

Whether the battleground is the workplace, the community or the street, working people have challenged the Government without a Labour Party membership card.

The standard excuse for being in the Labour Party (because that's where the class is) is nonsense. It is true that certain elements of the left are hiding there, organising jumble sales and having irrelevant debates with all sorts of right-wing scum, but none of that is impacting either the working class or the class struggle.

If people want to play around in the Labour Party, trying to get a toe-hold of power in a politically castrated government, fine. But be honest with yourselves boys and girls.

Arthur Scargill is the best class-fighter and union leader of my political lifetime. Sadly, his influence is on the wane and the truth is that his Socialist Labour Party is too close to the old (new) Labour Party, but don't use that as yet another excuse for your inability to extract yourselves from the clutches of a right-wing, anti-working class organisation.

If you wish to collapse Blair's tent, the best way is to get outside and remove the pegs. Somebody will and you don't really want to be inside when that happens, do you?

Dan Todd
Independent Working Class Association

Bryn Griffiths argues that the formation of the Socialist Labour Party is mistaken as it comes at the wrong time. There are two interesting aspects to his argument. Firstly it implies that at some point in the future the right time for a departure from the ranks of New Labour will present itself. If that is so, then comrades such as Bryn will be delighted that the SLP has already been formed for them to join. Secondly, his argument wrongly assumes that the SLP is only a split from the Labour Party.

Certainly the SLP is partly a reaction against structural shifts in organisation and philosophy within the Labour Party, but the SLP also offers a political focus for socialists who could never have joined the Labour Party in the first place. For socialists such as these, now is the right time for the formation of the SLP as it allows them to become politically active on their own terms. Isn't that what socialist democracy is all about?

Steven Cowan
SLP Member
west London

I support *LLB* because it still holds to those principles which drew me to the Labour Party back in 1945. I still see no reason for rich people to grab the profit from our labour when we can all share it and thus provide jobs for those at present permitted only half a life.

I cannot see what all the argument is about in relation to the recent defections except that they hope to continue to use your facility to propagate weird views. I hope that it encourages your readers to work harder to support you.

I still have my copy of *Let Us Face the Future*, Labour's 1945 Manifesto. Its headings are still relevant today.

Brian Bastin
Reading

Andres Cortes "France waiting for a new flare-up?" provokes some hard thinking.

The strikes against Juppe's austerity budget parallel the situation in Italy last year and presage the possibility of similar situations in Belgium and Germany.

The Italian and (numerically small) French unions have mobilised millions in the fight against austerity. Lower key but stubborn actions elsewhere have slowed privatisation and preserved the welfare states of the major EU countries more or less intact. This is not due to the political influence of their Socialist and Social Democratic parties, which have been complicit in, or even the authors of, austerity budgets. French unions, including those linked to the Socialist Party, fought a long battle in defence of their welfare state against the last Socialist government, whose claim to run capitalism better than the capitalists is the same as New Labour's.

In the UK, where employers' social costs and taxes on the rich are among the lowest in the EU, in spite of a relatively large TU movement, austerity and privatisation have ruled the roost. Fear of endangering a Labour election victory inhibits actions by the unions demanding more public spending or increased taxation, but this rules out the essential thing that would undo the damage to our welfare state. Other EU countries' unions have looser links with socialist parties, so they can act without concern for electoral consequences and have been better able to defend the interests of the working class when attacked.

Hugh Lowe
London

Well done and keep up the good work. Without a doubt *LLB* is the best socialist paper printed.
My wife and I enclose £2 to help. Sorry it can't be more but we're OAPs.

Jean and Jim Irving
Glasgow

The item in your last issue about Bob Ainsworth MP standing for election as President of MSF at this year's conference illustrates the paranoia of the right within the union. Our democratic structure is based on the involvement of ordinary members at all levels, including an elected lay President and Vice-President. Traditionally, the Vice President was elected without opposition as President the following year. Putting forward an MP to oppose the current left-wing Vice President is a way of trying to capture the votes of undecided, less experienced members.

But the real question is the role of Tony Blair, who publicly wants to distance the unions from the Party. Why is he allowing Ainsworth's challenge? What is Ainsworth's motive? He only sought sponsorship from the union 18 months ago. He left last year's conference after a day or so.

MSF is still struggling to overcome sectarian and political differences following a series of mergers. The cynical use of Ainsworth by the union's right-wing leadership and the Labour Party leadership will not aid this process but exacerbate our problems.

Brendan Russell
Wolverhampton

LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

Arms and lies

Government ministers denied they were supplying the murderous Iraqi regime with arms to Parliament. Harry Cohen, MP, examines the issues.

THE GOVERNMENT approved exports of weapons and weapon making tools to Iraq in the middle of the Iran-Iraq war while they were telling Parliament that they were not supplying anything. They were lying to Parliament while facilitating the arms trade.

One of the companies was Matrix Churchill, which was actually owned by the Iraqi regime. They were sending weapons parts, including machinery for dealing with plutonium, for making a nuclear bomb and materials that could make chemical weapons. They were giving Iraq the facilities for making nuclear and chemical weapons just after a period when the Iraqis had gassed the Kurds.

● The Exports Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) is part of the DTI which helps exporters by underwriting loans, and providing interest rate subsidies. ECGD backing for an export means that if the buyer does not pay back the loan, the Government (taxpayer) guarantees to do so. Without this backing, many arms deals to high risk countries would not go ahead. In 1994 almost half of all ECGD cover went on arms deals, totally out of proportion to the arms trade's percentage of total exports. The net cost to the taxpayer of ECGD support for arms exports in the five years from 1989/90 to 1993/4 was £261 million per year.

I went with Jeremy Corbyn to see William Waldegrave at the Foreign Office to say how outrageous the gassing of the Kurds was and that we really should have taken strong action against the Iraqis as part of the Geneva Conventions - we were co-chairs with Russia at that time.

The Matrix Churchill affair illustrates the Government's lies and hypocrisy, especially lies to Parliament. Margaret Thatcher knew that the guidelines had been changed, but in an answer to a question I raised in Parliament in April 1989 she denied this. They deceived the courts as well because they withheld information by using the corrupt Public Interest Immunity system. Under it, a Government can say it wants to keep something secret because it is in the national interest. It is in its party political interest to cover up things like that.

● The government underwrite arms exports by £1 billion per year. A subsidy of £12,500 per job per annum. This subsidy takes many forms including: the cost of running the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO), the cost of Export Credits Guarantee Department (ECGD) cover for arms sales, a subsidy for military research and development, overseas promotional tours , military assistance and training to support sales.

But it is about more than just lies and hypocrisy, though that is bad enough. It is really about the arms trade and the fact that it is big business for the Tories and other merchants of death who sell to wicked regimes all around the world. The Iraqi contacts helped Mark Thatcher get rich quick and generally the arms trade has been a great boost to Tory Party funds. All at great human cost.

There is supposed to be an export control system, but in practice arms traders have a free hand. They are international capitalists and they just run the system. The Government lies down in front of them. The traders run the show with a whole export department, For example, Britain was supplying Saddam Hussain with credit - using taxpayers' money - to enable him to buy arms. It was only cancelled when the Gulf War started.



There has been an enormous increase in growth of the British arms trade internationally. It was one of the very few growth industries during Thatcher's Government. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the United States took over most of the arms trade around the world, around 70 percent. Britain moved into second place with 15-16 percent. So we were busy selling these weapons and spreading death around the world. These weapons were used against British troops eventually in the Gulf.

I support the excellent proposals of the Campaign Against the Arms Trade. A starting point would be to try and stop the sale of arms to undemocratic regimes - we should not be selling Hawks, for example, to the Indonesian Government, who have killed hundreds of thousands of people in East Timor. No regime without a solid record of democracy and human rights should be sold weapons. That means that we have got to convert a large part of the arms industry into making civil goods. We should not be subsidising the arms industry in this country.

We also need to change the export control system so that it is absolutely transparent. When everybody knows who we actually sell things to it will be harder to sell weapons that will be used to prop up dictatorships.

● The Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) is part of the Ministry of Defence set up in 1966 to assist military exporters. DESO provides marketing assistance and military advice to military exporters, as well as organising arms exhibitions and promotional tours. The net cost of the DESO in 1993/1994 was £16.02 million.

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