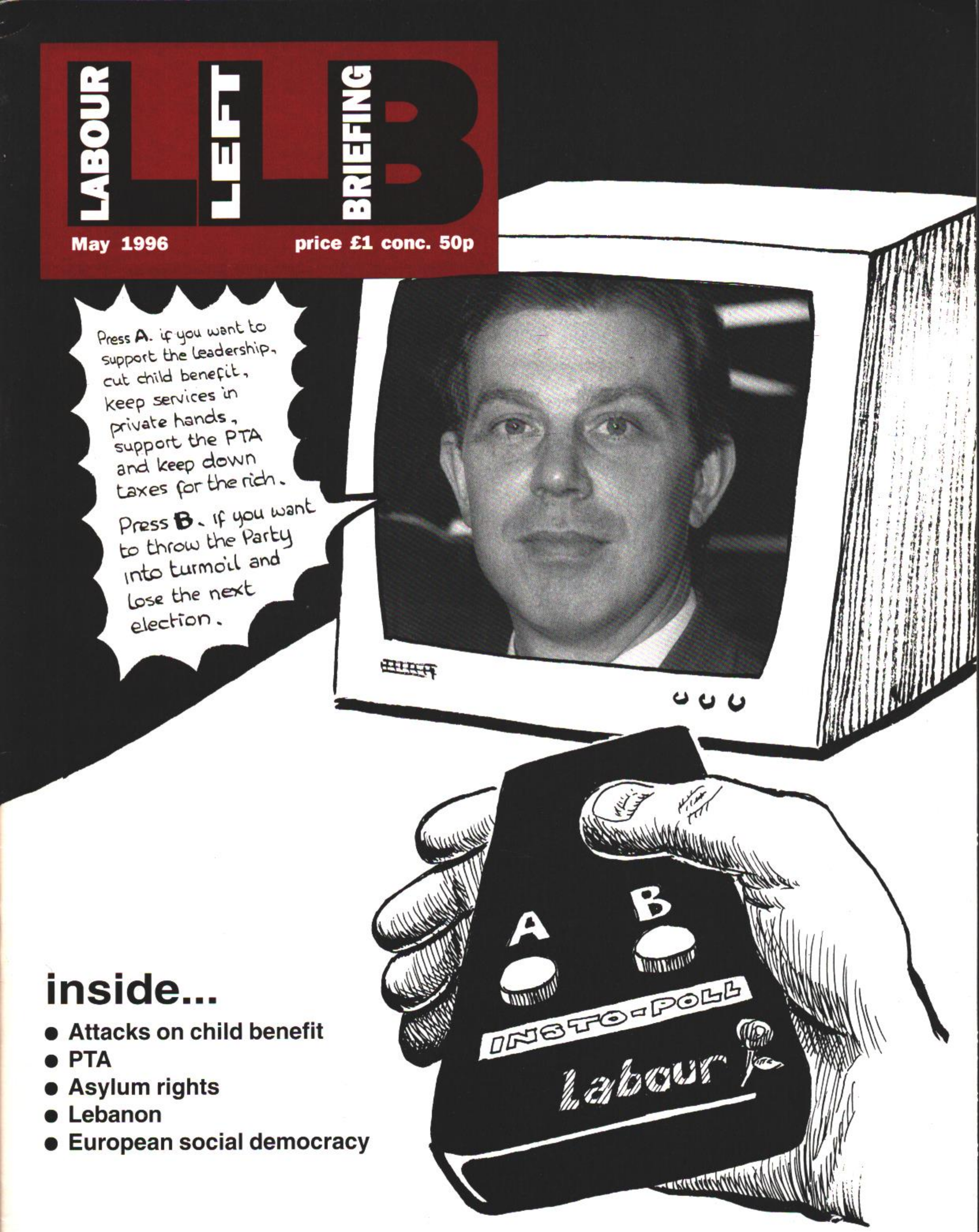
LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

May 1996 price £1 conc. 50p



inside...

- Attacks on child benefit
- PTA
- Asylum rights
- Lebanon
- European social democracy

call this democracy?

Labour Left Briefing

"Scurrilous, sometimes funny, very hard-left magazine supported by Liz Davies...The magazine has Trotskyist links, but insists that it is not an entryist organisation." - *Guardian* 26th March.

In fact *LLB* is an independent voice and forum for socialist ideas in the Labour Party and trade unions. It is managed by an editorial board elected at its AGM. Both EBs and the AGM are open to all supporters. We are happy to offer a right of reply to all members of the labour movement and we welcome criticisms and contributions. All the articles in *LLB* reflect solely the opinions of the authors, writing in a personal capacity, unless otherwise stated.

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Why Gordon Brown is wrong

GORDON BROWN has decided it is a good idea to restrict the availability of Child Benefit. In the first of a series of speeches which, according to Party officials, aim to "finally bury the idea that Labour is a 'tax and spend' party" he proposed that Labour should end Child Benefit for 16 to 18 year olds and redirect the money to means-tested education allowances for the poorest students. Brown said the savings would be channelled into a new system of grants to encourage children in low income families to continue in education and training after 16. This proposal is wrong both in principle and effect.

By Jeremy Corbyn MP, member of the House of Commons Select Committee on Social Security.

It is wrong in effect because it completely fails to appreciate the success of Child Benefit which plays a crucial role in helping to keep poorer 16 to 18 year olds in full time education. It means a cut in the income of many of the millions of families who survive on less then £100 per week. The replacement of Child Benefit by means tested education allowances will mean less money going to caring parents. As with all means tested benefits a high proportion of spending will go on administration.

There is a mass of evidence which shows the impact of Tory benefit cuts. The children of the poorest get the worst education, suffer the highest levels of underachievement and get the worst job opportunities. They are much more likely to be unemployed. Many students are unable to complete courses because they cannot afford to live, cannot borrow any more money or simply do not succeed at college because of the amount of time they spend working in low paid jobs. Any serious attempt to increase equality of opportunity cannot be achieved by cutting Child Benefit.



Instead a Labour Government should guarantee Child Benefit to all carer parents up to the age of 18, raise its level to the same for all children, and end the student loan system and replace it with an adequate grant for all students. Brown's proposal is wrong in principle because it is part and parcel of abandoning any commitment to redistribution. It comes only days after the Child Poverty Action Group report on poverty in Britain which showed that the proportion of the population living on or below income support levels rose from 14% in 1979 to 24% by 1992. Due to Tory tax changes and benefit cuts income differentials have grown faster in the United Kingdom then in any other developed economy and have returned to Victorian levels. The New Labour leadership is obsessed with reassuring the rich and well-off that none of the massive tax give-aways they have obtained in the past 17 years will be reversed and that any commitment to extra spending must be met by cuts elsewhere.

Universal benefits like Child Benefit mean that the better-off sections of society retain a stake in the maintenance of the welfare state. The Labour leadership has embraced the shift to means-testing benefits in the name of 'efficiency'. This means moving the terrain of the electoral debate on welfare spending towards US-style 'trade-off' between lowering taxes on an increasingly insecure working population - forced to spend a large proportion of their income to insure privately against the risk of unemployment and ill health - and getting these middle income groups to accept paying higher taxes for benefits which they cannot receive. The right will always win this argument.

Following the Staffordshire South-East by-election a Labour Government within the year is now a virtual certainty - but what kind of Labour Government? Gordon Brown talks of the need to make 'tough choices' - meaning any commitment to extra spending must be financed by cuts elsewhere. The tough decisions Labour needs to make are: how to close the growing disparity between rich and poor in Britain, how to create full employment, ensure decent wages, shorter hours and proper employment rights, and find more resources to invest in cash starved state education, health and social housing. Redistributive policies are a necessity if there is to be any prospect of reversing levels of inequality between rich and poor, which are now amongst the highest in the developed world. As a bare minimum Labour must increase direct taxation of those on high incomes, spend more on benefits and cut regressive forms of indirect taxation.

Even Robin Cook in his Scottish TUC speech appeared to understand the implications of the disastrous road down which the Labour leadership is going with its commitment to 'targeting' benefits in the name of efficiency. Speaking recently he said: "Labour must speak for the poor" and that: "We understand that if we accept a society that does not help those who are weak and vulnerable, then it will not help us when we are vulnerable and weak."❑

Teachers stand firm on grassroots democracy

Andy Dixon of Stockport NUT reports from the NUT Conference.

UNLIKE LAST year, this year's NUT Conference did not see the ruling group on the union's National Executive defeated on every important vote. The dwindling majority group on the Executive (the misnamed 'Broad Left' of Blairites, non-political careerists and Stalinists) narrowly defeated calls for serious campaigns on salaries, school inspections (Ofsted) and the casualisation of teaching through the growth of teacher employment agencies.

Nevertheless, this was an important and highly successful conference for the left in the whole labour movement. The NUT is now clearly committed to opposing Conservative or Labour front bench attacks on comprehensive state education. Campaigning alliances of teachers, parents, students and communities to defend state education were endorsed. The goal of an education system which is inclusive of children of all special needs was adopted as union policy for the first time. Policy on lesbian and gay equality was developed. Action to defend teachers and education against oversized classes and job losses was approved overwhelmingly and against Executive opposition. The left, indeed delegates generally, adopted a serious and sober approach to debate and policy-making, which put to shame both the juvenile and out of touch "super-militancy" of the SWP, and the attempts by the 'Broad Left' to turn a living union conference into a dead Blair/ Clinton style media event.

Most significantly, not just for this union but for the labour movement as a whole, were the large majorities rejecting the attempts to reduce union democracy by introducing a regime of plebiscite ballot in the hands of the General Secretary and Executive. If carried, the proposals, which McAvoy and the 'Broad Left' tried to smuggle through in the Executive's Annual Report, would have reduced Conference to an advisory role (something which has tended to happen in practice anyway as McAvoy and the 'Broad Left' regularly refuse to implement Conference policies with which they disagree). They would have massively centralised power within the union, and curtailed the ability of local associations to carry out a meaningful function. These decisions were not, as the media claimed, a rejection of "one member one vote democracy". The NUT, of course, has "one member one vote" in elections for Conference delegates, local officers and National Executive members as well as in action ballots.

The real significance of this NUT Conference, and the real reason why the tabloid press, the Labour leadership and the NUT bureaucracy are angry, is that there has been a rebuff to the Labour movement fragmentation and defeatism typified by Tony Blair, and a reassertion of the values of community, solidarity and living trade union democracy.❑

Labour CND AGM and dayschool

Saturday 8th June

- Why is NATO moving east?
- Can the UN be reformed?
- Nuclear disarmament and Trident.
- Defence spending cuts and defence diversification.

10.30 am to 4.30pm
Friends Meeting House
Euston Road,
London, NW1

Speakers include:
Tony Benn MP, Jeremy Corbyn MP, Janet Bloomfield (Chair of CND), Mark Seddon (Editor of *Tribune*).

Sponsored by the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs and the *Morning Star.*

New Labour's Bonapartist coup de farce

Vladimir Derer, CLPD, puts the case against Blair's plebescite proposals.

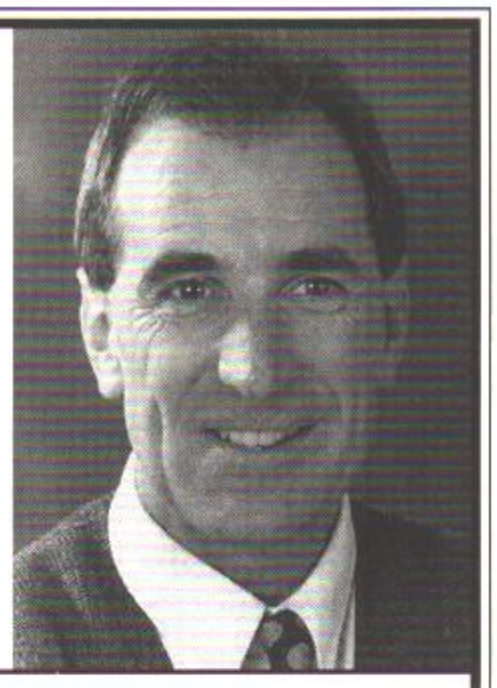
THERE ARE similarities as well as differences between New Labour's Bonapartes Kinnock, Smith and Blair and their French predecessor Louis Napoleon. Both use sham democracy to ride roughshod over democratic institutions. Louis adorned his autocratic rule with universal suffrage; Labour's Bonapartes do so in the name of one member, one vote. Both require of their subjects to answer an unqualified "Aye" or "Nay".

But although Louis resorted to a *coup d'etat* to provide a stable basis for French capitalist advance, Labour's Bonapartes are satisfied with a *coup de parti* in order to preside over British capitalism's decline. No *coup de force* for Labour's Bonapartes, only *coup de farce*.

The April issue of *The New Statesman* has a half-page colour picture of Blair as Napoleon apropos of his proposed plebiscite of members on Labour's manifesto. But they've got the wrong Napoleon: the uncle when it should be the nephew. It's Louis Bonaparte whose manoeuvres Blair's so closely parallel. He rescued the bourgeois society of his day and Blair looks set to rescue the free market economy of ours. Louis endorsed his own *coup d'etat* retrospectively introducing a form of universal suffrage. At every stage when he was under attack Louis "appealed directly to the people", who upheld his stay in power.

Today Blair is using OMOV as a plebiscite to keep New Labour in power. He proposes to legitimise his actions by making a direct appeal to the Party membership, bypassing CLPs, Party organisations and the trade unions. Unlike Louis, Blair is intent on seizing office, not power; he has no intention of changing anything. Not surprisingly therefore his coup is welcomed by the powers that be.❑

Tupperware parties and trade unionism



By Alan Simpson MP

WHEN I BEGAN my journey to the NUT Conference, I didn't realise I would be able to trace the evolution of a news story about the event itself. I was due to speak at an evening meeting on whether the teachers' leadership would 'get its way' over the Conference.

As I travelled, the wording of the news bulletins changed. Delegates became union activists, activists became, 'the left wing' and then 'the hard left'. Finally the teachers' leaders had lost out to the 'militants'.

In contrast to the strident tones the press loves to find when the charge of 'militancy' is around, the delegates described in quiet, subdued tones the growing pressures in the classroom, in schools, in budgets and in confused or contradictory education policies - and their unease about how their union had responded to these. The leadership response was that such criticism was unreasonable. Its only legitimacy could come through an individual ballot of all members. It wanted all union policies submitted to individual ballots before being acted upon. This, it was claimed, would be genuine democracy within the union. Upon such simplicities institutions and societies easily founder.

As the Labour leadership threatens to take the Party down the same path, it is worth exploring whether this is about the extension of democracy or the destruction of it.

We live in an age apparently obsessed with the individual: not in the way they function in connection with others, but in some sublime state of isolation and disconnection. It is as though the future will only be found at the end of a modem, somewhere in the Internet, in a Virtual Reality headset or at the orgasmic end of a postal ballot paper. Forget the dialectic of listening to each other, sharing in discussion and debate, or seeing common discourse leading to common action as the basis of social change. The future is angst-free individualism, politics without 'the pain' of debate. It is also part of the folly of a 'New Labourism' which seeks to turn Labour from a political party into a tuppaware party.

Teacher delegates were absolutely right to turn their backs on proposals for armchair unionism, which would only have transferred the real decision making powers to the leaders teachers complain about today. Socialists must be prepared to do the same to defend the structures of our own representative democracy, and the sanctity of conference policy making.

There is no perfect system of democracy. The same mechanisms can be used for common good and individual mischief. And this is the catch. The right of a people to decide - in a referendum, a plebiscite or an individual ballot - can be of enormous importance if used properly. Used mischievously it has no less a power to damage and divide.

Surely the Labour Party cannot believe that a healthy democratic socialist party can be forged from mail-order catalogue style politics. On the evidence of last year's Clause IV 'consultation', you are likely to be consulted in generalities and offered only a 'take it or fake it' choice at the end.

I can't see how a government could go into a Euro currency without the backing of over 50% of the British electorate in a referendum. The issue is clear, the question should be too, and the principle is that only the public have the right to make a constitutional decision which could be irreversible. Similarly if two unions want to merge - how this could be done without balloting both sets of members?

But you can't run a country or a party on this basis - not least because if postal ballot forms dropped through your letter box as regularly as double glazing leaflets, they would end up going the same way - and just as fast.

Worse still, the whole framework of decision-making would have been profoundly changed. Huge influence would have been handed over to the national leaders and the press. The leaders would determine the only questions which were allowed and the press would set out to instruct you on the only answers it would accept. Clause IV showed how quickly this process degenerated from a debate about issues into a completely loaded 'loyalty to the leader' test.

Representative democracy has limitations, but it also has strengths. As a councillor, I discovered that people soon knew who to blame when things went wrong. As an MP, I am discovering that the greatest level of complaints come in areas where people have, in theory, increased individual rights but no way of securing their delivery.

Societies are changed when people, acting in solidarity, decide to change them. The major historical democratic advances were not won on the initiative of a postal ballot from the leaders.

The pressures of the future will be for more local and accountable forms of decision-making - with big institutions needing to hear the messages coming from the grassroots. This will be as true for the labour movement. Directives from on high, from leaders offices cushioned from criticism, may turn out to have a most limited shelf life. They will also be seen as linked to the remains of totalitarian democracies of the 20th Century rather than connecting with any 'new wave' of devolved democracies which might see us into the 21st century.

The key issue at the NUT conference was, however, not "democracy" but "power" and "control". It is the same for the Labour Party.

VIDEO NEWS

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"I've never seen footage like this before," Jeremy Corbyn

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The fruit of

Tony Greenstein attempts to understand the horrific Israeli bombardment of Lebanon.

IT IS one of the ironies of the peace process that its effects are usually felt in an invasion of Lebanon. In 1982, following the Camp David agreements with Egypt, came 'Operation Peace for Galilee' and the siege of Beirut. Today 'Operation Grapes of Wrath' is the fruit of the Oslo Accords, the agreement between the PLO and the Israeli state.

The invasion and bombing of Lebanon serves a number of political purposes. First, its most immediate political aim is to secure the re-election of the Israeli Labour Government, whose popularity has been badly dented by Hamas bomb attacks on Israeli cities. Second, and of longer term significance, the target is Syria, the only Arab state surrounding Israel not to have made a peace agreement with it, and which exercises decisive political and military power in Lebanon.

The desire to reduce Syria and its Lebanese protégé to client states, beholden to Israel's military and geo-political interests, is a goal shared by all strands of Israel's politico-military establishment, from Labour to Likud, Tsomet to Mapam. Their only differences concern the extent of concessions, in particular withdrawal from the Golan Heights, necessary to achieve this.

Compared to 1982, when it was reviled and berated throughout the world for its acts of genocide against the Lebanese and Palestinian population, the Israeli state is in an immeasurably strengthened position. The Gulf War has strengthened imperialism throughout the Middle East. The kings and sheikhs of Arabia no longer pay even lip service to opposition to Zionism and Arab nationalism. The 'radical' states and Ghaddaffi are silenced, their rhetoric meaningless. The PLO has been bought off with a patchwork of municipalities intersected and dissected by lush and expanding settlements, linked by modern roads to the heart of Israel. Israeli police and torturers have been replaced by their Palestinian counterparts, as the PLO does Israel's dirty

Lebanese blood buys Israeli votes

Bob Deed, an executive member of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, explains the motives behind the latest Israeli atrocities.

THE ISRAELI onslaught on Lebanon shows how the problems and injustices of the Middle East remain unresolved. It demonstrates the foolishness of placing any trust in the Israeli Labour Party.

The label "terrorism" may not have been affixed to 'Operation Grapes of Wrath' but Israel's artillery and aerial bombardment has wreaked death and destruction. Over 140 were killed in the first eight days and over 400,000 forced to flee.

The bombardment bears comparison with Israel's week-long 'Operation Accountability' in July 1993 when shelling killed 128 Lebanese. Many hands may have been shaken on the White House lawn since then, but the peace process does not stop the slaughter.

Israel still occupies Lebanese, Syrian and Palestinian territory. It dominates the region from a position of strength. Israel is no more willing to comply with UN Security Council Resolution 425 in Lebanon than any other UN resolution furthering a just peace in the region.

The motives for the latest aggression are largely electoral. The Israeli Labour Party lost its huge poll lead after 63 Israelis died in the Hamas suicide bombings. Israeli PM Shimon Peres is not viewed as sufficiently "hawkish" in "security" matters. He faced defeat at the hands of the Likud allied to the far-right Tsomet Party. In response, Peres repositioned his Party to the right.

Following the Hamas bombs, Peres imposed curfews and closures to socially and economically strangle the West bank and Gaza Strip. Revealingly, the Israeli President, Ezer Weizmann, commented: "When you are looking for a needle in a haystack and you cannot find the needle - burn the haystack." The pretence of "security" was flimsy as repression feeds violence in Palestine. In reality, Peres wanted to be seen to act - and collective punishment is popular with the Israeli electorate.

Recently, Peres' rightward shift has involved the surprise announcement that any final agreement between Israel and Arafat's regime would be voted on by the Israeli electorate. This manoeuvre was meant to weaken Palestinian negotiators rather than enhance Israeli democracy (there never has been any suggestion that the millions of Palestinian refugees would be able to vote in a referendum on their fate).

The settler news agency, Arutz 7, has even claimed that Peres was negotiating a deal with the West Bank settlers. In return for their endorsement in the elections, Peres would promise the settlers' leadership that no settlement would be dismantled.

The onslaught on Lebanon was entirely consistent with this move to the right. The Lebanese front is in the words of an Israeli journalist "the only section of the border in which the enemy operated". It offers an opportunity for Israeli politicians wishing to prove their hard-line credentials.

In addition, the Hizbullah remains a persistent irritant and a powerful symbol even if it counts its fighters in the hundreds. In recent months there have been successful Hizbullah operations in the security zone against Israeli troops. There have also been reports of defections from Israel's client South Lebanon Army.

The bombardment does not reflect any change in Israeli behaviour. It is consistent with the history of Israel's relations with its neighbours since its foundation.❑

●The Palestine Solidarity Campaign can be contacted at BM PSA, London WC1X 3NN.

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peace

work.

The Jordanian monarchy has concluded an agreement with Israel that accepts Israeli military and economic domination. Gulf states such as Qatar have open and direct economic relations with Israel. The Arab economic boycott has collapsed and, most ominously of all, Turkey has concluded a formal military pact with Israel. Turkey, a member of NATO and a key member of the Gulf War coalition, has joined with Israel to become joint custodians of western interests in the region, the gendarmes of the Middle East.

The pretexts for Israel's latest war are the terror attacks of Hamas and the planting of bombs in Israeli cities. No socialist can support such tactics, even though we should recognise that what motivates Hamas' martyrs is the continuation of Israel's occupation of Palestinian land and the feeling of sheer helplessness that Arafat's agreement has caused in the refugee camps for those who have gained nothing from the 'peace' accords.

Neither should socialists accept the Zionist/American conspiracy theory that there is an indivisible line of Islamic terror linking Tehran to the Gaza Strip via Beirut. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism - Hezbollah in South Lebanon, Hamas in Gaza, the Islamicists in Algeria - all have their own local roots. What is common to them all is the failure of Arab nationalism and the Arab left. Ultimately, it was the overthrow of Iranian radical leader Mossadegh in 1953 and the subsequent failure of the Tudeh Party to challenge the Shah that led to Khomeini's rise in 1979. It was the compromise of the PLO that led to the rise of Hamas.

What is abundantly clear is that the Islamic movements are incapable of generating any wider political support, even in the Middle East. Despite its political limitations, Nasserism generated huge political support, all but destroying Britain's military and economic presence in the Middle East after the Suez War. By contrast, the Islamic groups are pale and pathetic imitations of the enemy they fight.

Because of its religious chauvinism, Hamas is unable to reach out to any strand of Israeli Jewish opinion. This is one of the reasons they cannot be considered a national liberation movement.

Israel's leaders have indeed reaped their grapes of wrath in the blind, chauvinistic terror of the Islamic groups that in the case of Hamas they actually helped create (the child of Israel's secret police, Shin Bet, in the days when it was seeking to undermine secular Palestinian nationalism and the Intifada). Meanwhile, the civilian population of South Lebanon is paying a terrible price for imperialism's peace agreements.❑



Distraught Palestinian women outside their destroyed home, Lebanon 1982.

Bosnian miners appeal

Fikret Suljic, President of the Autonomous Trade Union of Coal Mine Workers of Bosnia-Herzegovina writes an open letter to workers in Britain.

FOR NEARLY four years the miners, their families and all the people of Bosnia-Herzegovina have suffered a terrible aggression aimed at dividing the country along ethnic lines.

Our miners' union and our miners have resisted this division but we have suffered appalling hardships. Many miners volunteered to go to the front to defend their communities. Many have been killed. Those who remained at work have tried to maintain some production, without which the cold and darkness for our people would have been even worse than it was. But it has been a hard struggle. We have worked throughout the war without pay. All equipment is worn out and much is now useless. Our mining towns have been often surrounded and blockaded.

Following the Dayton Peace Accord the actual fighting has stopped but the problems have not gone away. Now many miners are being demobilised and need their jobs back. But with destroyed machinery and limited markets due to the collapse of other manufacturing industry there is not enough work for all of us to do. We are facing privatisation and an uncertain future.

Against great difficulties we have kept our union alive through the war. We want to make sure our union continues to be able to help defend the rights of miners. But right now our situation is very hard. We need help. We are asking for help in the same way that in the past we have given help to other workers around the world when they had problems.

We would like to send to Britain a delegation to discuss our problems with you.❑

●Send donations to the Tuzla Miners Aid Fund, The Miners Hall, Red Hill, Durham DH1 4BB.

Don t mince your words!

Dan Carter puts some flesh on the bones of the BSE scandal.

IF YOU really want to be 100% certain of avoiding BSE, it's probably too late - unless you're one of the increasingly smug band of lentil-eaters. Not just British beef is affected. If you eat pork sausages (the skin contains beef ligaments), pepperoni pizza, oxtail soup, dumplings, pate, or biscuits, you could be at risk.

The biggest scandal of the Mad Cow Disease affair has been the Government's prolonged cover-up of the very real - if numerically small - threat to meat eaters. They haven't fooled the public this time round - mainly due to the press's thorough exposure of the whole sordid affair. After years of saying that BSE and CJD (Creutzfeldt-Jakob Disease - the one that kills people) are not the same disease, the Government has been forced to admit that in March ten people died from CJD after eating beef. For every cow identified with BSE and destroyed, it is estimated that two are missed. So why has the Government tried to hide the threat of BSE rather than alerting people to it? The answer is simple - British beef is big business and the National Farmers Union is by far the UK's most powerful lobbying body. Not only do they have the ear of the Government, they'd mince it and sell it back to them in a sandwich if they could. And no less than 34 Tory MPs are major farmers. Slaughter-houses were deregulated three years ago and latest figures show one in four fail to comply with European Union standards.

In France, the police have ordered farmers who have destroyed herds not to disclose the details - for fear of starting a similar panic. And the threat isn't just to cattle - the multi-million pound horse-breeding world has just latched on to the fact that it could affect them. The infection in humans may not develop for ten or even thirty years, so basically if you continue to eat beef it's a game of Russian roulette with Boris Yeltsin at the trigger. Probably the sickest part of the whole episode was McDonald's claiming they had withdrawn beefburgers made from British beef because the public looked to them for a nutritional lead; at least they will have lost hundreds of thousands of pounds in destroyed stock. The selective cull of cattle agreed to by the Government, will be paid by us - the taxpayers.

The only safe solution is to destroy the entire British herd and all products produced from it. What the Government has decided on, by implementing lesser measures, is that there is an acceptable level of fatalities.

Alternatively, you could stop eating animals altogether.❑



CSA - no way!

Sarah Cotterill, Manchester Central CLP, writes:

DURING ITS three years of existence, the only effect of the Child Support Agency has been to cut social security spending. Figures released by Frank Field, Labour chairperson of the Social Security Select Committee indicate that the number of lone parents receiving maintenance is no greater than it was before the agency was created.

The Child Support Agency's primary target has been parents receiving state benefits, threatening benefit cuts to those who refuse to co-operate. The aim has been to reduce benefit spending by making absent parents cough up. This is not about reducing child poverty or improving children's relationships with parents, but simply cost-cutting to reduce the amount of state benefits claimed.

Lone parents should have the right to financial independence from ex-partners. Some people choose to bring up children alone or with a partner who is not the biological parent. Some absent parents have fragile, occasional relationships with their children. Interference by an outside agency in that relationship, demanding cash, is unlikely to strengthen it.

Clearly there are many parents and children who want and need financial support from absent parents. An agency is needed to mediate between parents to achieve a financial settlement. Sometimes enforcement will be necessary. A return to a court-based system for deciding maintenance would be unsatisfactory because it is expensive, antagonistic and inappropriate.

A system of child support should not be directly linked to the benefits system. Its aim should be to maximise the income of families rather than cut benefits.

Much publicity has been given to the plight of absent parents who are ordered to pay maintenance sums beyond their means. It does seem that the CSA calculations are unfairly harsh to some, particularly those who have other children or partners to support. But the problems created by the CSA go further than simply refining the calculations.

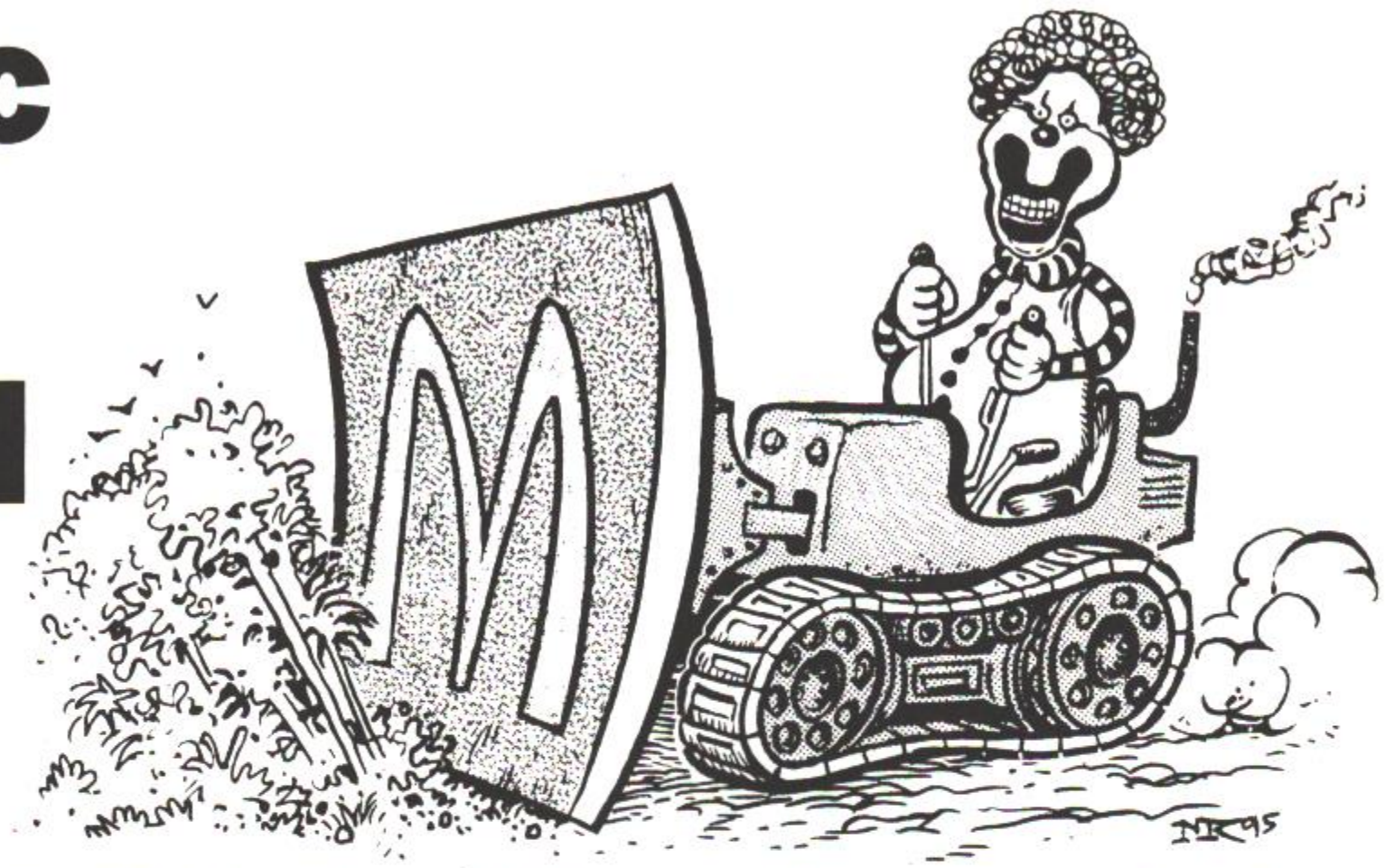
Field has suggested that the CSA be phased out. He proposes instead that maintenance be collected by the Inland Revenue, with a higher tax rate being levied on absent parents. This would repeat the errors of the CSA, forcing absent parents to pay into the social security budget to cover the benefits claimed by parents with care.

Reductions in social security spending can be achieved by a Labour Government implementing policies to get people back into work. Lone parents should not be made the scapegoat for the increase in benefit payments during the seventeen years of Tory Government.

Labour should promise now to scrap the CSA. A non-court based agency is needed, aiming to maximise maintenance payments for children rather than subsidise the benefits system.❑

LLB page 8

Big Mac still on the grill



Dan Mills from the McLibel Support Campaign reports on the progress of McDonald's vs. Helen Steel and Dave Morris, already the longest civil case in British history, which may go on until the end of this year.

WITH NO legal aid in libel cases, Helen and Dave are representing themselves against McDonald's team of top libel lawyers. But the tables have been turned. McDonald's and their business practices, rather than Helen and Dave, are on trial.

The issues being aired daily in the High Court are the links between diet and ill-health, the exploitation of low-paid non-unionised workers, the environmental damage caused by mountains of disposable packaging and by cattle ranching, the effects of advertising on children and the suffering of animals reared for the food industry. In fact, the union busting burger bandits are so worried about the way the case is going and the bad publicity they are receiving that they have twice flown members of their US board of directors to London to meet with Helen and Dave seeking ways to end the case.

Five former employees of McDonald's Colchester branch - 1987's 'Store of the Year' - gave evidence for Helen and Dave. They revealed the reality of McDonald's unethical, illegal and oppressive working practices. The testimony of Simon Gibney (former assistant manager) was reported under the front-page headline "What a McRipoff" after he told how supervisors ordered managers and crew members to water down products (milkshakes, ketchup, etc.). Gibney also said that on "at least two occasions" sewage came flooding up from the floor vents in the kitchen. Workers were forced to stand on bun trays to keep above the rising sewage while continuing to prepare food. The flooding, Gibney said, resulted from management's refusal to replace fat-filtering equipment, forcing employees to pour large quantities of fat down the drains, blocking them. Siamak Alimi, former crew member, told of the high pressure of work at McDonald's: long hours (including 20 hour shifts) with few breaks, low pay, and threats of the sack for joining a union or protesting against in-store conditions.

The court is currently listening to testimony on McDonald's connections with rainforest destruction. Ray Cesca (McDonald's director of global purchasing) said in court that "McDonald's opened the first of its restaurants in Costa Rica in December 1970" and that the meat supplied to them since that time "comes from ranches in areas which were deforested in the 1950s and early 1960s."

The sales director of the beef supplier to McDonald's stores in Costa Rica stated in a filmed interview in 1984 (shown in court) that they also supplied beef for use by McDonald's in the USA. McDonald's stated policy is that they only use US-produced beef in the USA.

McDonald's have now admitted that in 1983/4 they purchased Brazilian beef for UK use - something the company had always denied. This only came to light after McDonald's solicitors mistakenly disclosed documents concerning the shipments. In Brazil, McDonald's were at one time supplied by a meat plant at Cuiaba, which is inside the official Amazon region and borders deforested rainforest areas.

Howard Lyman, a fourth-generation cattle rancher from Montana, now an environmentalist, recently testified for the defence on the effects of cattle ranching on the environment. Lyman built up his family business to a huge corporate farm with 7,000 head of cattle and a $1 million a year chemicals bill. Then he was paralysed due to a tumour on his spinal cord. He recovered, sold most of his farm and decided to devote the rest of his life to being an advocate for sustainable agriculture and warning of the dangers of modern food production. He happened to be in the witness box just as the BSE crisis was reaching its height. Lyman told the court: "In the US up to 14% of cows are ground up and fed back to cows. I am very concerned that this will lead to the same sort of thing that is happening here."

It's clear that McDonald's aim of suppressing the "What's Wrong with McDonald's" leaflet has totally backfired. Over 1 million leaflets have been handed out to the public in the UK alone since the action was started and thousands of people have pledged to continue circulating the leaflets whatever the verdict. And now there is an Internet site called 'McSpotlight', an on-line library and campaigning tool, which makes available worldwide everything McDonald's don't want the public to know (http://www.mcspotlight.org/). McSpotlight was accessed over a million times in its first month.❑

The McLibel defendants need thousands of pounds to pay for the vital daily transcripts (withheld by McDonald's), the transportation of their witnesses, and administration costs. They are entirely dependent on donations from members of the public: so far nearly 200 affiliates, including Trades Councils, trade union and Labour Party branches, have pledged their support. Please send donations and/or requests for information to:
McLibel Support Campaign,
5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX,
UK. Tel/Fax 0171 713 1269.
dbriars@world.std.com
(Cheques payable to the McLibel Support Campaign.)

ILP, SLP: not the same

In last month's *LLB*, Tony Dale examined the 1932 ILP split from Labour and drew conclusions for the SLP. Here Paul Allender provides his alternative point of view.

I TAKE ISSUE with Tony Dale's historical account of the relationships between left-wing groups, the Labour Party and the lessons regarding the Socialist Labour Party in the April issue of *LLB*.

Although the Labour Representation Committee did start calling itself the Labour Party in 1906, it wasn't until 1918 that it became a political party with a constitution, a democratic structure and a national organisation.

But the main problems with the article are its characterisation of the Independent Labour Party and the comparison made between its departure from the Labour Party in 1932 and the setting up of the Socialist Labour Party. The ILP itself was a very 'broad church'. It included revolutionary Marxists, non-conformist Christians, idealist social reformers and trade union radicals, amongst others.

That is why the ILP found it so easy to agree to the vague aims of 'representation of working-class opinion' of the Labour Representation Committee in 1900. The ILP itself was a 'compromise party' in much the same way as the Labour Party was to become. The only difference was that the ILP was more left-wing than the Labour Party. After it left the Labour Party in 1932, it slowly disintegrated as a political force. It was itself hopelessly split.

Therefore the suggestion that the ILP was sectarian in its attitude to the Labour Party is ludicrous. The ILP was one of the least sectarian left-wing groups of the 20th century.

To compare the momentous occasion of the ILP leaving the Labour Party with Arthur Scargill setting up the Socialist Labour Party is absurd. Scargill may well wish to characterise his and others' actions as of momentous importance. But they are clearly not at all comparable with the events of 1932.

The first was the most important group involved in the creation of the Labour Party leaving it after MacDonald's 'great betrayal' in 1931. The second is the leader of the NUM and a small number of individuals leaving the Labour Party after the removal of Clause IV from the Party's constitution. The ILP failed because it was split itself and could only maintain its coherence within the much broader political alliance of the Labour Party.

The SLP will fail because it has been set up from the 'top-down' and with a hopelessly narrow ideology.❑

Scottish Socialist Alliance founded

Allan Green, convenor of the Scottish Socialist Alliance argues for a new regroupment of the left in Scotland.

THE SCOTTISH Socialist Alliance founding conference takes place on 20th April, following the decision of over 350 socialists in February. The SSA, the result of a gradual convergence of significant sections of the Scottish left, will participate in trade union, direct action and electoral struggles.

The SSA is for radical democratic socialism, for Scottish self-determination and for a political pluralism that respects the coming together of different viewpoints and traditions. It is along these lines that members will determine democratically aims and objectives and constitutional structures.

Among its founders are many ex-Labour members including the ex-council leaders of Dundee and Dumbarton; ex-SNP members like the convener of Edinburgh SNP and editorial board members of *Liberation* (the left nationalist journal); the editor of the monthly Bulletin of the Communist Party of Scotland; the Scottish Socialist Movement and Scottish Militant Labour. Many trade union activists and direct action campaigners have also joined.

What has brought such a broad spectrum of the Scottish left together? The prospect of the Tories being removed from office and the creation of a Scottish Parliament elected by proportional representation has highlighted the advantages of left unity. Even the Scottish media has recognised that there is space in Scotland for the left to win through PR elections. We believe to take full advantage of this opening it is crucial to start raising the profile of the Alliance now.

Last month saw a taste of things to come under a Labour-dominated Government at Westminster. The Tories do not control a single local authority in Scotland yet councils were implementing the most savage cuts in history. There was virtually no internal Labour opposition. Indeed, within days Tony Blair asked Scotland's Labour Party Conference to prioritise further cuts - and his speech won an ovation! There is fierce resistance in the communities to these cuts - 20 schools are set to close in Glasgow alone. But it was left to the forces around the Alliance to co-ordinate this opposition. Alliance meetings in Glasgow developed into a Save Our Schools campaign and called for mass occupations of schools and the City Chambers itself. A demonstration is being organised in Glasgow for 11th May.

It is natural that the SSA should be performing such a role. Its varied elements have been building united action for years: from the anti-poll tax campaign to the Hands Off Our Water campaign; from The Defiance Alliance against the Criminal Justice Act to the anti-motorway campaigns; and also in more pro-active campaigns such as the Scottish Campaign for a Shorter Working Week and a Minimum Wage.

The SSA is aware that it is made up of socialists from diverse backgrounds but we believe that this will be a source of strength rather than confusion. We believe, in line with progressive developments across Europe and internationally, that a united left is the shape of the future.❑

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New PTA powers: a further denial of civil liberties



Photo: Nick Craske

by Jeremy Corbyn MP

THE PTA is an oppressive and uncontrollable piece of legislation. There is not one iota of evidence that it has prevented terrorism. The effects of the PTA have now been compounded with the addition of new stop and search police powers. These 'Additional Powers' were driven through Parliament in one day in a complete aberration of so-called democracy. If Parliament is to mean anything, it must be able to represent the views of the people who have sent us here. It is simply not possible to do that if laws are rushed through less than 24 hours after the Home Secretary has suggested them in the media.

I was part of the campaign to get rid of the "sus" law. That law was used against large numbers of young black people who were stopped, intimidated and harassed in their home areas. "Sus" gave the police unlimited powers of stopping and searching on the streets. The 'Additional Powers' will lead to similar problems. It will not be just Irish building workers and people with Irish accents who are stopped. If the police do not have to give any reason for stopping someone, it will be young black people walking along the street who will be stopped and searched and there will be no comeback for them.

The police would be protected from any complaint of harrassment for a totally erroneous stop and search because they do not have to provide any evidence whatsoever of the need to stop and search somebody. It will create the utmost anger and ill feeling within the Irish community. Young Irish people living in London will find themselves constantly being stopped and harassed as soon as police hear their accent. This new power gives the police *carte blanche* to stop people for no obvious reason.

Even if the Government wish to elicit the co-operation of the community the new powers will have the reverse effect.

For far too long, constituents have phoned to tell me that they do not know what has happened to a son or daughter who was due to come over from Belfast or Dublin. After a Kafkaesque series of telephone calls, I've discovered that that person is being held under the PTA. Thousands have been held under the PTA in the past 20 years. Very few have been prosecuted as a result, but none has forgotten the experience of being taken into a police station and told that he or she has no rights of access to a solicitor or advice. That is the fear that large numbers of people particularly within the Irish community in London have about the draconian 'Additional Powers'.❑

●See back page for our model resolution on Ireland for Labour Party Conference.

Tony Benn MP

"This Bill will not contribute in any way to the ending of violence in Northern Ireland...I was in the Cabinet when the troops were sent in, and that was going to solve the problem. Partition was going to solve the problems. Stormont was going to solve the problem. Direct rule was going to solve the problem. Power sharing was going to solve the problem. Diplock courts were going to solve the problem, as were strip searches, supergrass trials, CS gas, and detention without trial. None of the policies pursued by successive British Governments has contributed to peace in Ireland.

The fighting ended not as a result of anything that came from Ministers but because Albert Reynolds...Mr Hume..and Gerry Adams persuaded the IRA to stop fighting in the hope of getting talks going...The police measures and the Sinn Fein ban did not bring about an end to the killing...The problem must be resolved within that island. Until we recognise that fact, all the police powers that the Home Secretary can think up...will fail to solve the problems. So far none of them has achieved the objectives that were in the minds of those who advocated them."

Dr. R. Conor Gearty, Director of the Civil Liberties Research Unit at King's College London and co-author of *Terrorism and the Rule of Law* spoke at a recent symposium on the question "Do we need permanent counter-terrorism laws?" We reproduce extracts from his speech.

"In the event of continuation of violence in Northern Ireland we should constantly question the assumption that terrorism requires special terrorist laws.

The First World War marked a dramatic increase in state power vis-a-vis the individual. The Defence of the Realm Act and regulations under it were passed which radically restructured the relationship between the individual and the state in quite an extraordinary way. Those regulations were used for example to declare martial law in Ireland during the Easter rebellion and afterwards. They were also used to destroy any organised opposition to the war and to smash organised labour's response to the recession that followed the war and in the General Strike.

Emergency laws, hitherto temporary in duration and explicitly special, were recreated as aspects of the ordinary law.

When first introduced in 1974 the then Home Secretary called the PTA unprecedented in peace time, and draconian. 'If I have to come back to this House,' he said 'looking for a renewal in six months time, I will have failed.' People in Parliament today accepted how extraordinary and unbelievable these laws were. Those same people now think them to be ordinary."

●A full transcript of the Symposium can be obtained from British Irish Rights Watch, 20-21 Took's Court, Cursitor St, London EC4A 1LB.

Rail rip off



By a privatised railworker.

"WE ARE going to make a clear distinction between rail privatisation as put forward by this government and our plans for a partnership." (Brian Wilson, Labour Transport spokesperson, November 1995).

Well you could have fooled those of us who work in the rail industry. As Tory plans to decimate the industry have gathered pace, Labour has backtracked as fast as possible. After the first two operating companies were sold, John Prescott stated that the "railways will be publicly owned and publicly accountable".

One week later the position became clearer when a close colleague of Tony Blair said "We are no longer committed to ownership for ownership's sake. We reserve the right to acquire an interest in Railtrack but only if they fail to meet the goals which we will set."

The Labour leadership has never made any pretence at renationalising the franchised train and freight companies, despite Labour Party conference resolutions year after year calling for a fully integrated, publicly owned transport system. But there was a lot of huffing and puffing about selling off Railtrack, until that sale was launched. Now Clare Short bleats about a "structured programme to retain the railway system as an integrated whole to ensure the public get the best value for money from public subsidies", whatever that means.

How will passengers and staff feel safe as the workforce is further decimated and increased hours and duties are imposed and stations and trains become even more destaffed than they are now? As passengers refuse to use trains late at night, at weekends and so on, more services will be cut and only profitable commuter services and long distance trains will run. Many passengers using these services can also look forward to the prospect of fare increases, knowing they have no alternative.

Sadly, rail union leaders have complicitly co-operated with the Labour leadership over these climb downs. Despite union policy calling for outright opposition to privatisation, including industrial action, the unions have hidden behind a campaign to stop the process by mobilising public opinion and winning over Tory MPs. Now railworkers and users will pay the price, unless the trade union movement is prepared to fight Labour in and out of office with its full industrial strength.

Those of us already privatised face increasing isolation from other railway workers as national bargaining has come to an end. And where there has been a "management and employees buy-out", we face the additional prospect of fellow workers also being shareholders.

Unless the unions take on both the Tories and Labour now, a nationalised railway system run as a service and not for shareholders will be a forgotten dream.❑

Breaking the Linc

Dan Carter, Lewisham East CLP, exposes shady Lib-Lab liaisons.

AN INSIDIOUS group of infiltrators is establishing a party within a party inside Labour in order to counter the Party's stated aims and policies.

Linc - the innocuously named Labour Initiative on Co-operation - has been set up by Labour politicians to support alliances with the Liberals in direct contradiction to Labour policy. It is headed by Calum MacDonald, MP for the Western Isles, who is desperate to cling to a seat. It is the logical progression of Frank Field's call for Labour supporters to vote Lib Dem in seats where Labour has been third in previous elections.

Linc provides a front for those councillors who have entered formal alliances and shared posts with the Lib Dems over the past two years.

If Labour had been tainted with the cuts and compromises often connected with such joint administrations, it would never have swept Conservative heartlands such as Hove District Council.

Close Labour-Liberal co-operation may reduce the likelihood of Labour winning enough seats to govern on its own. Perhaps that's the aim of Linc.

Linc is also set to become a fan club for Labour frontbencher Robin Cook, who has been Blair's gofer in negotiations with the Lib Dems over support for a future Labour Government with discussions on PR in particular. A Blair Government backed by an increased number of Lib Dem MPs would have no need to rely on its own left wing for support.

The Lab-Lib link has found its strongest support in *the Guardian*, so it is no surprise that amongst its sponsors are Will Hutton (*Guardian* journo turned *Observer* editor) and former Labour MP David Marquand, now part of the Blair policy machine. Steering committee member Roger Poole, Assistant General Secretary of UNISON and arch Blairite in the trade union movement, sums up what the policies of the Linc-ites mean for the rest of us: "The trade unions have to stop the last vestiges of class warfare in the knowledge that the emancipation of working people can be better achieved by providing them with the skills to help run the companies and services that they work for." Tell that to your members on strike against Pall Mall at Hillingdon Hospital who pay your wages, Roger!

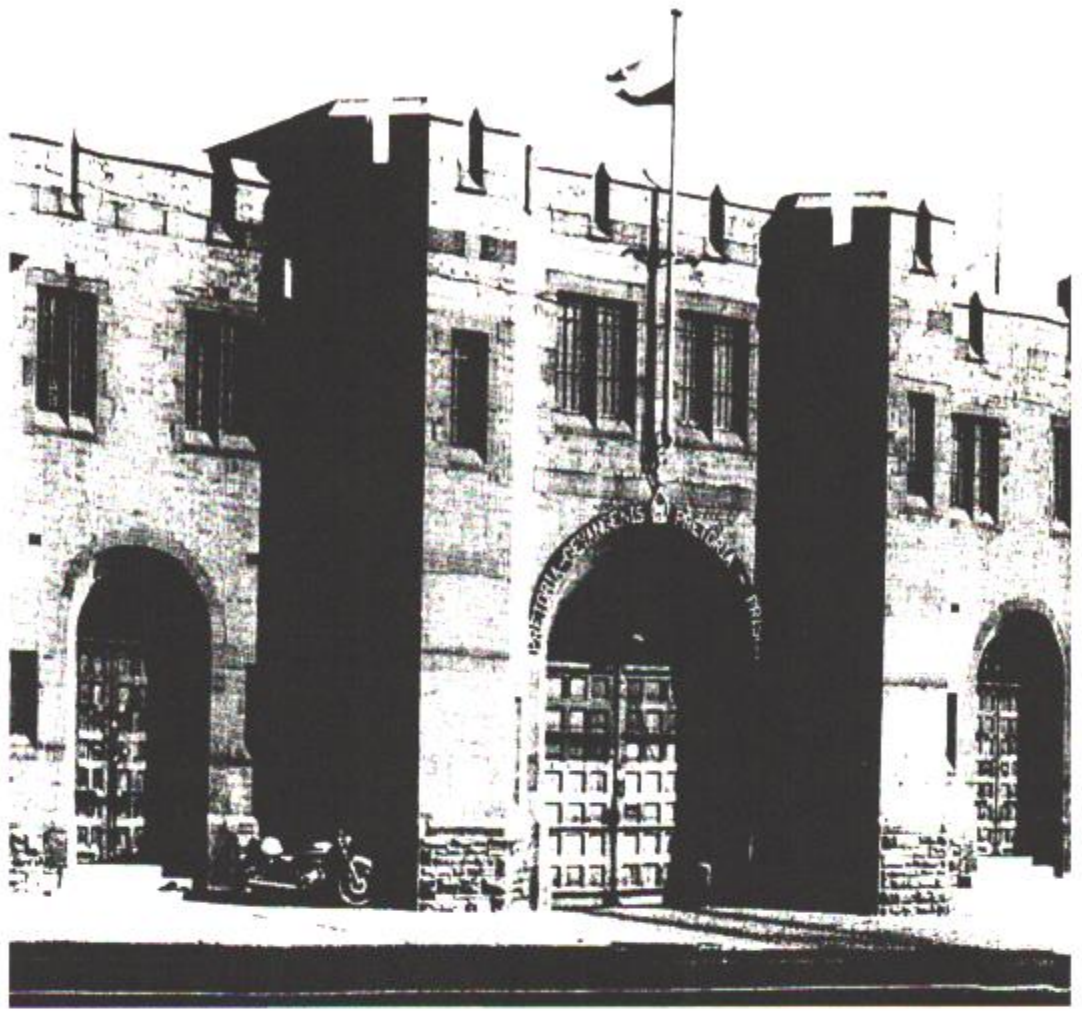
Linc "recognises that Labour and the Liberal Democrats have substantial policy agreement", but rather than joining socialists in fighting it, Linc wants "to develop such co-operation further".

Labour is now poised to seize a significant number of seats from the Tories where in the not-too-distant past it has been in third place. If Linc had existed in those days, it would have undermined the chance for Labour to win enough seats to govern on its own. Or is that what it wants? ❑

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John Lloyd should not stand!

***LLB* was wrong to defend Exeter CLP's choice for PPC. John Laredo, secretary of Pudsey CLP, and David Evans of Wallasey CLP, both ex-ARM members who spent five years in prison, state why.**



The Pretoria Local Prison, where the ARM prisoners (except John Lloyd) were held.

SINCE THE piece in the April *LLB* defending his selection the NEC has asked John Lloyd to stand down as Exeter PPC, failing which he will be de-selected. When the NEC endorsed him last year, the extent of its knowledge of Lloyd's involvement in the South African liberation struggle was that he had assisted in acts of sabotage against power pylons as a member of the Armed Resistance Movement (ARM); that he had been detained; that a fellow member John Harris had placed a bomb in the Johannesburg railway station, killing one and injuring others; that Lloyd had given evidence against Harris and Hugh Lewin; that Harris had been hanged and Lewin jailed; that Lloyd had come to England late in 1964. If others, including the people of Exeter, were relying on Lloyd's public statements they almost certainly knew much less. When first chosen as PPC in 1990 he said, "I was arrested and detained without trial for about 120 days. I didn't think I was a revolutionary and I didn't think I could keep quiet after that, so I decided to leave."

In fact his involvement with Harris was much greater than he admitted and his evidence against Harris and Lewin more important than he admitted. In the case of Lewin (a close friend) and two others, Lloyd sent a message that he would not give evidence against them, but then did so. It was his evidence which forced all three to change their pleas to guilty, receiving seven, five and nine year sentences.

Lloyd's justification for giving evidence against Harris is that the latter broke the ARM code by intending to kill people (even though Harris had made a telephone call warning the police to clear the station concourse, which was ignored). However, the trial judgement found that Lloyd had discussed with Harris the station bomb, a bomb in an underground car-park and bombs in Pretoria Post Office, concluding that Lloyd was essentially an accomplice of Harris.

Lloyd's initial statement to the police further contradicts his version of events. It gives details of his activities with Lewin and others and mentions a discussion of the three projects with Harris, stating that he (Lloyd) suggested the post office as a target, having rejected the others. It states that in answer to his objection to any scheme that might endanger lives, Harris said, "Innocent people had been killed by bombs during the war and it was a risk that everyone would have to take", a far cry from Lloyd's trial evidence when he stated Harris had said, "If a few lives were taken this would be tactically advisable because it would save so many lives in the future", which Harris stoutly denied and which assisted in obtaining a murder conviction and the death penalty. Despite this Lloyd assured Walworth Road that his evidence had nothing to do with the Harris trial but later claimed that his evidence "played no material part" in Harris' conviction.

In March 1965, safe from further prosecution in England, Lloyd was approached on three occasions by people known to him and asked to retract his 'intent to kill' evidence in attempts to save Harris' life. He refused. He has admitted publicly only to the approach by Jill Chisholm, Hugh Lewin's close friend whom he knew well. Others were made by fellow campaigner Randolph Vigne (who had escaped to London), and Ruth Hayman, Harris' solicitor. Harris' wife also cabled an appeal from South Africa, to no avail. In justifying his refusal to agree to Chisholm's request Lloyd said, "I didn't know what her game was. For all I know she could even have been working for the South African Special Branch", something quite inconceivable to anybody who knew her well but typical of the way he has responded to criticism. After first saying he "feels justified in having given evidence" against Harris, Lloyd later said, "If I thought it would have had a chance of influencing the appeal for clemency, I would have done it." But he had been told Harris' legal team was convinced that his retraction could have been decisive and that arrangements had been made to 'splash' it in the world press.

Lloyd again misled when he said that his evidence was not cited once in the Harris appeal, since it could only have been had he offered new evidence. He has claimed that the ANC "cleared" him and that in South Africa there is a "general amnesty". The ANC has recently stated that it did not clear him and that anyone seeking amnesty must apply to the Truth Commission.

Lloyd seems to have started out in England on a damage-limitation exercise, being economical with the truth about his South African activities then trying to justify both these and his subsequent failure to make amends for betraying his comrades. The notion that he is the victim of a Blairite plot is risible and nobody in possession of the full facts should be in any doubt of the correctness of this NEC decision.❑



Immigration Service staff fight inhuman start times

Trade union members in the Immigration Service are taking strike action against starting work at 5am. David Pope, chair, PTC - Department of Transport London Branch, reports.

FOR NEARLY a year members of the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC) have been taking limited action at Heathrow and Gatwick. The action was backed by a seven to one majority in a ballot, which proposed continuing the early shift at 7am, instead of the 5am start that Immigration Service (IS) management sought to impose.

The dispute spread to Portsmouth in March, when management without consultation announced new rosters with the 5am start. PTC members refused to comply and seven of them were suspended without pay. A meeting of all PTC members voted overwhelmingly to continue the action.

PTC has sought meetings with every level of senior management and has been willing to discuss the dispute without pre-conditions but management has denied all requests and even refused to meet under the auspices of ACAS unless PTC 'wave the white flag'.

The Immigration Service has insisted on their right to 'unfettered discretion' over terms and conditions. The Home Office Permanent Secretary Richard Wilson has also refused to meet the union.

Management has resorted to bullying tactics to dissuade members from taking action. Assistant Director Alan Harris has turned up at the office at midnight and early in the morning and made personal attacks on members, who described his attitude as 'grossly intimidating and provocative'.

PTC has decided that only sustained industrial action will alter management's position. The union's National Disputes Committee has agreed to a ballot for a national one-day stoppage across the whole Immigration Service and for a rolling programme of five-day strikes at ports and airports. The ballot closes on 25th April and action is scheduled to start from 2nd May.

This action cannot be viewed in isolation. If management is allowed to succeed, managers in other areas of the Home Office and ultimately the rest of the civil service will be given the green light to follow suit.❑

●Messages of support can be sent to Keith Wylie at PTC HQ, 5 Great Suffolk St, London SE1 0NS or fax to 0171 960 2001.

Union gains continue in north London

Workers at "Euroscene" textile factory in Tottenham have come out on strike (18th April) over conditions and the boss's ill-treatment of workers.

At JJ's Fast Food, the workers already in the union asked the boss for double pay for working over the Easter Bank Holiday. Boss Mustafa Kamil reluctantly agreed. When the other (non-unionised) workers got to hear of this, a number of them decided to join the union, too!

At a textile factory in Tottenham High Road, workers asked for higher pay when they were given different, harder work. The boss refused. All 60 workers stopped work. After five hours, the boss conceded the new rate of pay and agreed to talk to the union. Union membership has increased at this workplace too.❑

Greetings from Alf Lomas MEP

working for peace and socialism in Europe.



Group of the Party of European Socialists.

Solidarity on the waterfront

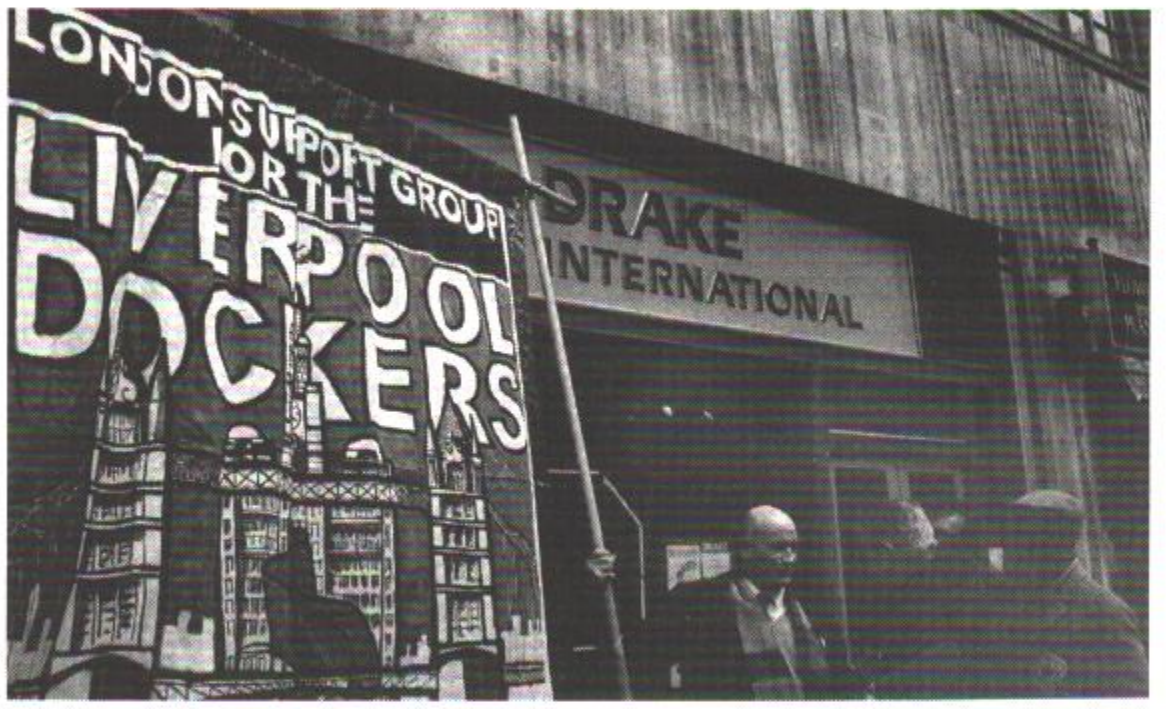
Liz Knight reports on the continuing struggle of the Liverpool dock workers and the international support for their campaign.

THE LIVERPOOL dockers are calling on supporters to attend a national conference to be held in Liverpool on 27th April. International support continues to grow since talks with the port bosses collapsed on 2nd April. The dockers continue to reject the bosses' offer to sell their jobs for £25,000.

Women of the Waterfront organised a successful mass picket of the docks in early April. Strikers from the Hillingdon and J.J. Foods disputes have become regular supporters of demonstrations organised for the dockworkers and the clear links between all their respective disputes.

On the following Friday morning, scabs deliberately drove at the dockers' picket line, hospitalising two pickets. One of them was arrested by the police, charged with breach of the peace and criminal damage to the scabs' car and summoned to appear in court the same day.

The dockers are standing firm in the face of continuing attempts at intimidation from bosses, scabs, police and the courts. Understanding full well the significance of this dispute, the right wing press is maintaining a complete media blackout. Circulate *LLB* to spread the truth!



Dockers picket the offices of the Mersey Docks Board parent company. PHOTO: Colin Hayward

●At the dockers' rally in March, a group of mainly Turkish and Kurdish activists from the North/East London Textile Branch of the TGWU met the dockers' shop stewards' committee. As a result, dockers Bill Jenkins and Kevin Robinson flew to Turkey the following weekend, to a tumultuous reception. They spoke at a rally of 10,000 in Izmir, celebrating the launch of the new Turkish Labour Party, which (Tony Blair please note) is led by internationalists and class fighters. Bill and Kevin went on to meet the general secretary of the Transport Workers' union and to speak at meetings of dockers and seamen in Izmir and Istanbul. Workers at Turkish ports are organising go-slows and other action in support of Liverpool dockers.

●STOP PRESS: On 20th April, dozens of Los Angeles dockers walked off a ship which was attempting to unload cargo from Liverpool and have established a picket.

Docks Diary

●27th April: Conference called by Liverpool dockers for all union and other supporters. Transport House, Liverpool, 11 am. Information: 0151-207 3388. Coach details from London: 0956 138496.
●30th April: London benefit for Liverpool Dockers. 7pm, Rona Rooms, Shacklewell Lane, E8.
●May Day: Liverpool rally and march: contact Transport House, Liverpool.
●3rd May: Special meeting of London Dockers' Support Group, with speakers from the Liverpool shop stewards' committee. East Ham Town Hall, 7 pm. Information: 0956 138494.
●18th May. London celebrates the launch of the Turkish Labour Party! Speakers: Jimmy Nolan (Liverpool Dockers' Shop Stewards' Committee); Sabri Topeu (General Secretary, Turkish TGWU); and the mother of Metin Goktepe, the murdered journalist. Kurdish and Turkish music, poetry, dance. Michael Sobell Sports Centre, Hornsey Rd., N7, 5 pm. Details: 0181-800 0783.
●London Dockers' Support Group meetings fortnightly. Details: 0956 138496.

Liverpool FBU escalate the action

Neil Thompson, Brigade chair Merseyside FBU, provides an update.

THE FIRE Brigades Union on Merseyside have now been taking strike action since 17th August 1995. Two ballots for strike action - one yielding 84% yes, and another 91% for escalation - show the resolve of our members. Why does the Merseyside Fire Authority feel the need to continue with this dangerous and damaging dispute? At last, the Fire Authority has sought redetermination of the shortfall in their 1996 budget and been successful. We argued that this course of action should have been taken subsequent to the 1995 budget being set. The Fire Authority would not have taken this course of action had the 1,500 FBU members on Merseyside not been taking strike action. Continual Government underfunding is the cause of the problem, but implementation is by Labour councillors. We have to address this major problem if we intend positively to promote a new Labour Government.

At present FBU are balloting once again to escalate their strike action: this will include two-hour strikes as well as 24-hour strikes. Surely this cannot be good for the people of Merseyside or the service; but the FBU feel that there is no option when our views are not being listened to and our advice is disregarded. This includes the advice from KPMG, an international firm of auditors.

Both the FBU and the Fire Authority have been to ACAS to find some common ground. In their latest "offer" the Fire Authority states that our members' leave agreements should be dependent on the amount of sick leave they have taken. As a trade union we have no control over the amount of sick/injury leave the employees of Merseyside Fire Brigade take. To link the two together is an unacceptable way of settling the dispute. As far as we are aware no other industry or public service operates this kind of penalising system. Annual leave is a national condition of service. How can you expect to sort out a local dispute by attacking national conditions?❑



Brent Tories beat the retreat

TORY BRENT Council is backing down from the threatened derecognition of UNISON. The proposals, agreed by the Personnel Sub-Committee were noted by the Policy Committee on 1st April, but at the same time, the Chief Executive of the Council has written to UNISON London Region to state that the Council's relationship with UNISON is "unchanged".

All the indications are that Brent Tories would like to retreat in the face of the widespread support for the union - UNISON has recruited members and shop stewards in Brent as a result of a vigorous campaign waged by one of the two local branches.

The London Regional Committee of UNISON has backed the campaigning response to the threat of derecognition and, as *LLB* went to press, was preparing to lobby Brent Council on 22nd April. ❑

Local Government pay fiasco

FOR THE first time in 1996 a single settlement date for manual and white collar local government workers offered the opportunity of a united fight for a decent pay rise for a million plus workers. Unfortunately, this opportunity has been lost - and a squabble between the unions is now likely to set back the chances of unity next year, and for some time.

UNISON, the largest local government union with a majority on the negotiating committee for APT&C (white collar) workers, held a "consultation" exercise on the employers offer of 2.9%, in which members were asked to opt for either acceptance or strike action (which would have been the subject of a further ballot). The result was a disappointing rejection of strike action by a margin of two to one. Meanwhile the GMB and the TGWU, which between them can outvote UNISON on the negotiating committee for manual workers, also "consulted" on the offer - although without asking members to back strike action as an alternative - and decided to reject the offer.

The outcome of all of this is that UNISON has opted to accept the offer - and has accepted on behalf of all white collar workers, while the GMB and TGWU are holding our for a better deal for manual workers (although the employers are unlikely to come up with more unless the unions can pull off some strike action).

GMB and TGWU leaders are now talking tough and complaining of a UNISON 'sell-out', while UNISON's Local Government Service Group Executive will not be looking forward to explaining their role in this fiasco to the UNISON Local Government Conference in June. ❑

Liverpool budget crisis

A Liverpool UNISON member writes:

LIKE MANY Labour councils Liverpool City Council has attempted to bridge a £44 million gap by attacking its workforce. The Council gave unions the option of accepting a 5% pay reduction, cuts in holiday entitlement and further reductions in service conditions, or 900 compulsory redundancies.

Despite the bureaucratic nature of Liverpool Joint Trade Union Committee (JTUC) and its tendency to operate to the lowest common denominator, it has shown a united front against cuts and has given notice of its intention to ballot for all-out strike action.

This response has surprised management. They have now abandoned the option of a pay cut and have decided instead to impose compulsory redundancies.

This budget option is much more insidious. Over 300 compulsory redundancies are still on the table, as are the sacking of supernumerary staff and the abandonment of the employment protection agreement - meaning the end of job or salary protection in future reorganisations.

This strategy by the Council poses a difficult challenge to the unions. Issues like collective agreements sometimes seem too abstract for members. This attack could also divide workers, who do not often see the immediate threat from reorganisations. Despite this UNISON has had several large mass meetings and members have voted overwhelmingly for all-out strike action.

The reasons for the budget crisis are obvious. Anyone with experience of local government knows the Tories are clawing money back to pay for tax cuts in preparation for next year's election. However the abysmal response from Labour councils has been to pass the cuts on to their workforce.

In fact Labour's eagerness to show it can control the trade unions and is not controlled by them can only be matched by the national union's willingness to show its compliance to these attacks. The Kinnock era of "the dented shield" has now been replaced by the "don't rock the boat" philosophy.

Liverpool is not alone: Brent is facing derecognition, Coventry and Camden are facing attacks. UNISON's response has been muted to say the least.

The TGWU bureaucracy's similar failure is increasingly meaning that local branches and rank and file members are filling the vacuum. The Liverpool Dockers' dispute shows this most clearly. Despite the inertia from the TGWU the dockers have gained tremendous international solidarity for their boycott of the port.

Notwithstanding the ferocity of these attacks it remains to be seen if there will be a yes vote in the coming strike ballot. Despite the effort being put in by UNISON's branch leadership, the branch has been considerably weakened by the continuing witch-hunt of some of its leading activists by UNISON. ❑

CFDU Conference against the Asylum and Immigration Bill

(non-UNISON members welcome)
Saturday 11th May, 10am - 3pm
NATFHE , Britannia St., London WC1.

Hillingdon strikers fight on

Geoff Martin reports:

After battling through seven months of one of the longest and hardest winters in recent years, the striking cleaners at Hillingdon Hospital are in good spirits as the milder spring weather warms up the picket line.

The women's determination has not been dented despite a hard-nosed attitude from the private contractors, Pall Mall, long hours outside the gate in bitterly cold weather and racist abuse from some passers-by.

At the end of March, the women and their supporters descended on the Pall Mall building in Lambeth to lobby the company's directors only to find that they'd all opted to take the day off work rather than face their sacked workers.

In June the women are planning to lobby shareholders at the Annual General Meeting of Pall Mall's parent company. The date and venue haven't yet been announced but details will be available from your local UNISON branch a bit closer to the time.

It remains vital that the strikers get as much outside support as we can mobilise.

●Everyone who believes in high quality health services should do their best to get along to the picket line in Pield Heath Road, Hillingdon between 8am and 4pm. Donations to the strike fund should be made payable to London Region UNISON and sent to Civic House, 8 Aberdeen Terrace, Blackheath, London SEY 0QY.

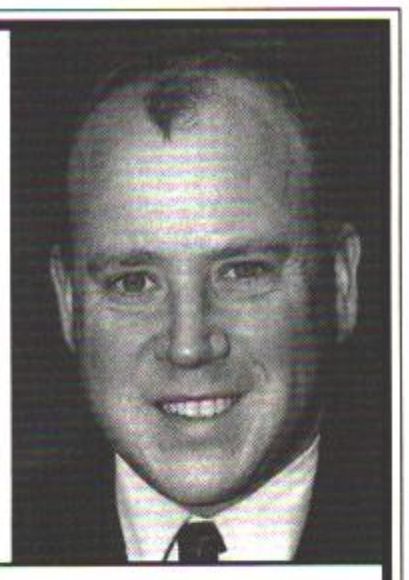
MSF LONDON REGIONAL COUNCIL

Salutes workers in struggle everywhere

President:
Sue Michie

Secretary:
Hugh MacGrillen

Leading with the left



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

● Yeah, yeah, all right I know that those of you who bother to read this drivel and who hate Chelsea must have really been having a good old gloat after the semi-final defeat. I was there at Villa Park, so I don't really need any reminding about what happened. I'm convinced that the reason we're losing these key games is down to the fact that the majority of Chelsea fans will persist in singing a bastardised version of the Red Flag along the lines of "We'll keep the blue flag flying high ...". It's got to stop.

● During a recent televised game, the Manchester United fans were singing the original Red Flag, which provoked John Motson to comment that "it sounds like the United fans have picked up on the old Chelsea song there". Nice one, Motty!

● One of the perks of having been elevated to the upper echelons of the trade union bureaucracy is that I get to make regular visits to the TUC. This enables me to pass on useful snippets of information on the world that exists behind the doors of Congress House. For example, did you know that they cut the crusts off the sandwiches at the TUC? I presume that this is so that the majority of toothless bureaucrats can actually manage to chew their way through lunch.

● After last month's tip-off that the Princess of Wales is well on the way to becoming a New Labour MP, I notice that Prince Edward is now falling into line with Blairite philosophy. The Prince has made a statement to the effect that class is no longer relevant in Britain today. If that's the case, why don't you ever see members of the Royal family working as pizza delivery bods?

Watch out for Fergie with a sponge and a squeegee next time you stop at the traffic lights around Sloane Square. The good thing is that you wouldn't have to pay her 'cos the woman already owes us millions.

● This mad cow disease business has left the veggies among us looking smugger than ever. I've warned them not to start counting their chickens (or whatever the vegan alternative is) too early. I understand that a report is due to be released shortly which will confirm the existence of Barmy Lentil Syndrome (BLS). Remember where you read it first.

● I look forward to seeing you all at the May Day festival on Clapham Common on Monday 6th. I'm down to make a contribution on the subject of Sex and Drugs and Rock 'n' Roll, so why not come along and heckle. Members of the Hampshire Democratic (Fighting) Popular Front will get a very special welcome.

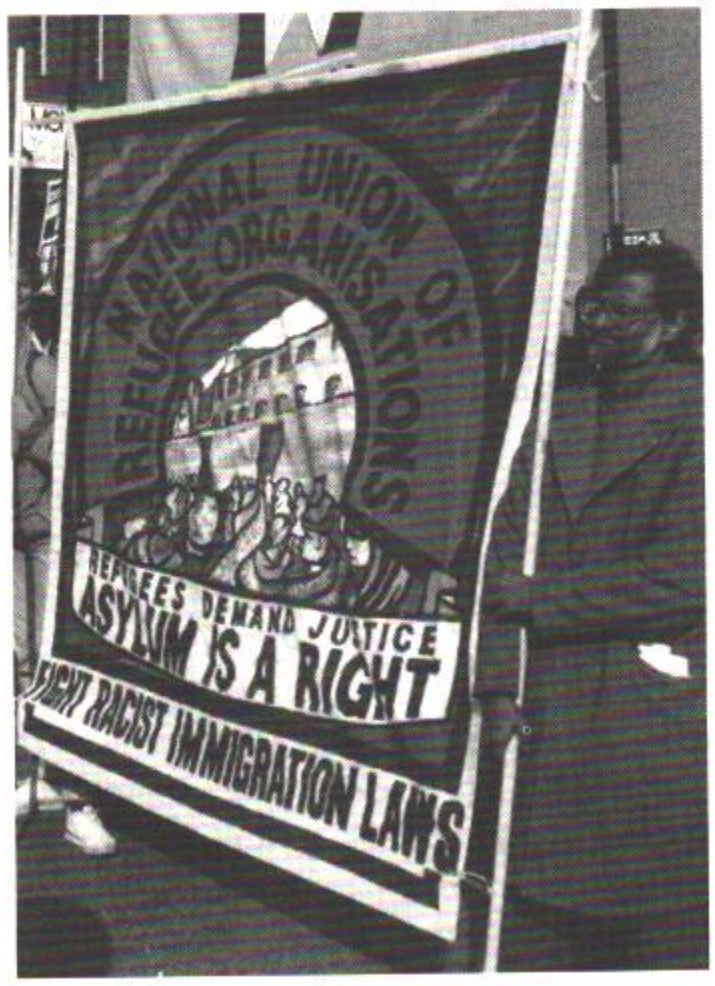
FIGHT RACISM

FIGHT TO DEFEND

An amnesty for all refugees

***LLB* spoke to Mike Rahman who is chair of the National Union of Refugee Organisations (NURO). Mike fled Guyana from the repressive dictatorship of Forbes Burnham who ruled the country for more than 25 years. In 1980, he and a number of his associates were charged with treason.**

Q: Why do you think the Government has chosen to target refugees and asylum seekers, so soon after enacting the Asylum and Immigration Appeals Act in 1993?
A: They have chosen to launch a sweeping attack on refugees, asylum seekers and unregistered immigrants (so-called illegal) in preparation for the election. Desperate to retain political power, they will do almost anything - including playing the race card - in the hope of re-election.



Mike Rahman

Q: Have Michael Howard's tactics of denouncing refugees as "bogus" and "benefits fraudsters" succeeded ?
A: The Conservative Party has over-played its hand. The tactic has back-fired. It has underestimated the intelligence of the British public and has thus far failed to whip up race hatred. The majority of people do not believe anything it says. This country has a long tradition of welcoming people who have been persecuted. Look at the case of the Saudi Arabian dissident, Professor Muhammad Al Masari, who the Tories failed to deport to the tiny island of Dominica. For them human rights come second to trade interests. Howard and Portillo's parents came to this country as refugees. People recognise this as hypocrisy.

Q: What is your view of the campaign against the Bill?
A: The campaign against the Bill was hijacked by people who have no genuine interest in refugees or black people for that matter. The main figures presented in the media have always used such issues for their own narrow political ends. The others hide behind what has, unfortunately, become a "refugee industry" or a "race relations industry". Refugees themselves and their representatives are treated as kids and regarded by some as too stupid to represent themselves!

Q: How then do you explain that the Bill has progressed so swiftly through Parliament?
A: The simple truth is, there was not enough grass roots pressure on the PLP. The failure to place the victims (refugees) in the leadership of this campaign robbed it of wider support. People are tired of the hollow sloganeering that goes on among the British sectarian left groups. Their only purpose in getting involved in such campaigns is to recruit vulnerable people.

Q: Do you believe that the PLP front bench has put up a serious fight?
A: The Labour leadership is not interested in refugee or black issues. Labour Governments have implemented some of the immigration laws. They have the same approach to immigration as the other parliamentary parties. They have pursued foreign policies that were not fundamentally different from the Conservatives or Liberals. They failed to recognise the root causes of mass migration. An incoming Labour Government will impose the same harsh economic and monetary policies - through the IMF, the World Bank and the Structural Adjustment Programme - on the underdeveloped countries. The Labour leadership will not take any risks on such sensitive issues.

Q: Are soup kitchens an adequate response?
A: They aren't a long term solution to the loss of refugees' welfare benefits or the threat of deportation. The answer is an unconditional amnesty.

Q: Tell us about the launch of the Amnesty Campaign last year ?
A: The campaign for an amnesty for refugees and unregistered immigrants had a successful launch in the House of Commons. The idea was conceived by the National Union of Refugee Organisations (NURO) after the introduction of the draconian Asylum And Immigration Appeals Act in 1993. Our campaign, Amnesty for Refugees And Unregistered Migrants (ACRUM) is supported by a significant number of trade unions, anti-racist organisations, MPs , and MEPs. But a section of the churches unilaterally sought an official meeting with Michael Howard. He flatly refused to entertain any such suggestion. Despite this we continued to build a serious campaign for Amnesty laws.

Q: Some would say that this is an extreme demand and that amnesty for people who have broken laws is something that no political party will give.
A: This is not utopian. There has to be recognition that people cannot be sent back to their deaths or civil wars. Portugal has recently renewed its policy of granting amnesty to so-called "illegal immigrants" and refugees. France, Spain and Italy made similar gestures.❑

INQUEST - Campaigning for Justice

INQUEST campaigns for the Government to lift the veil of secrecy and silence surrounding deaths in custody.
Join INQUEST and/or make a donation to our legal fund (there is no legal aid for families represented at inquests).
Membership £10/£2 individuals; £30 local organisations; £50 national organisations and TUs.
● INQUEST, Ground floor, Alexandra National House, 330 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 2PJ. Tel: (0181) 802-7430. Fax (0181) 802-7450.

ASYLUM RIGHTS

Sue Lukes (Islington North CLP), writes on the Amnesty Campaign for Refugees and Unregistered Migrants.

NO-ONE knows how many people actually live in the UK. In the shadows of all Britain's cities live people who cannot go out alone at night, cannot leave their violent husbands, are now afraid to register their children for school, cannot seek medical help after an accident and can work only in the worst paid, dirtiest and most dangerous jobs.

Unregistered refugees and migrants clean London's most fashionable shops, turn back the sheets in many of the gentlemen's clubs in St. James, dust and sweep the offices of the DSS, the courts and even the Home Office. Their employers will not be affected by the new controls in the Asylum and Immigration Bill, because they are already operating outside the law. They know that their workers cannot protest, and will put up with £1.50 an hour, with verbal and physical abuse, and even sexual exploitation. They will stand by and laugh at any legislation for a minimum wage, knowing that it will never apply to them and their workforce.

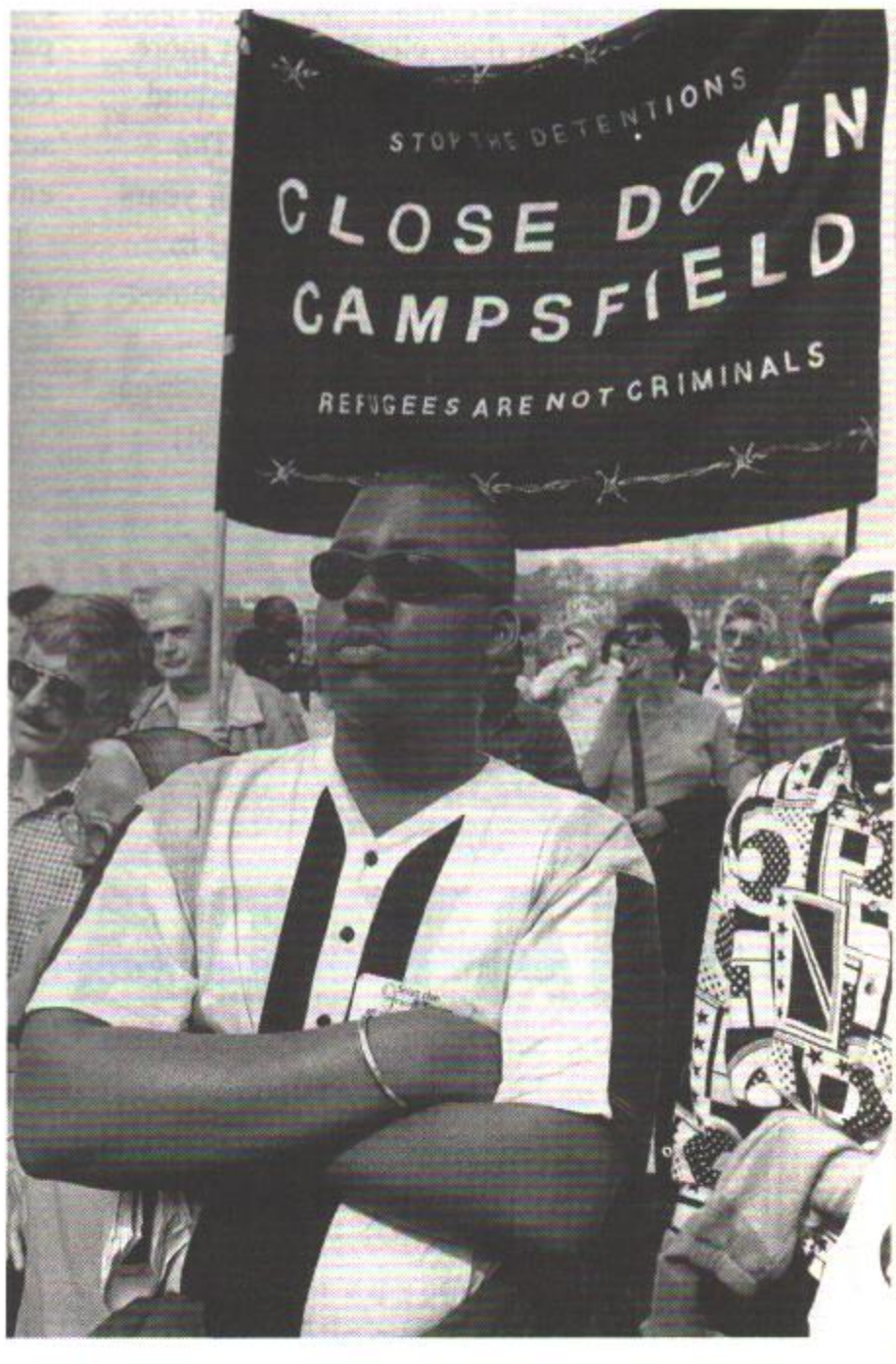
Some people come here to seek refuge from political persecution, fall foul of immigration laws, and "disappear" into the shadows. Some, especially women, come to marry but find the relationship unbearable or physically dangerous. Immigration laws make their and their children's legal stay in the UK entirely dependent on the goodwill of their spouses for the first year or more. Some come to stay with relatives and then move on. Some are brought by agents who hold out the false prospect of eventual legal stay and employment, but steal passports and entrap them into work or even criminal activities.

The Government seeks to portray "illegal immigrants" as a threat to Britain, while really targetting legal immigrants and settled people, who Ann Widdecombe says, "should be in this country for a limited period only" and should not require long term security. Illegal immigrants pose no threat to the Government: their existence (and their importance to developing the sort of low wage economy based on insecure employment that the Government wants) is an open secret, and they are far too convenient as scapegoats to remove entirely. Propaganda campaigns may well silence and cow them, although the successful unionisation of some workplaces, and the anti-deportation campaigns mounted by many are tributes to their spirit and determination.

But the existence of this exploitation and repression, which is only made possible by Britain's draconian immigration laws, is an affront to us all. It undermines everything we stand for as socialists. We cannot campaign for workers' rights while ignoring the most exploited. We cannot talk about women's rights and turn our backs on women forced into violent relationships and sexual and domestic slavery. We cannot talk about community and solidarity while living off the terror and misery of people who share our dignity and humanity but are divided from us by racist laws and our ignorance.

That is why socialists should support and build the Amnesty Campaign for Refugees and Unregistered Migrants. The demand is simple, limited and easy to explain: amnesty for those who are here. Similar amnesties have been given in other European countries. Such an amnesty will end forcible deportations, and will allow the victims of decades of racist immigration controls to live with dignity in the country to which many of them have contributed so much. It would ruin the shadow economy and deprive the quasi-criminal world of its cheap labour. It would put many slum landlords out of business. It would allow women to prosecute their attackers. It would allow refugees to find safety and work openly to bring dictators down. Any new Government that wishes to build a decent society based on solidarity and honesty cannot escape the force of these arguments. It must declare such an amnesty.❑

● Contact the Amnesty Campaign for Refugees and Unregistered Migrants, 365, Brixton Rd, London SW9 7DB. Sponsorship: £10 - local groups, £3 - individuals.



Anti-asylum bill demo 20th April photo - Paul Mattsson

Ibrahima Sey Memorial Campaign

Last month *LLB* reported the death in police custody of Ibrahima Sey, a young Gambian asylum seeker, on March 16.

MR SEY, a father of two, was arrested without resistance in Manor Park, East London. He was accompanied by a friend to Ilford police station, where he was set upon by a number of officers, handcuffed and, by the police's own admission, sprayed with CS gas spray. A few minutes later he was dead.

The campaign is making an urgent appeal for funds, to enable Ibrahima to be laid to rest and for longer term campaigning costs.

Affiliation fees: national organisations £75, local £25, individual £5 to PO Box 273, Forest Gate, London E7.

Social democracy

Andrew Coates, Ipswich CLP, takes a global view of recent defeats for social democratic governments and draws links with the Blair "project".

ALFONSO GUERRA of the socialist party, the PSOE, was not downcast at the results of Spain's March *16,* 18.3.96) Many the PSOE have had their past from 48% in 1982 to 37% in 1996. Spanish social democracy's difficulties are not unique. The parties of the Socialist International are in deep trouble.

In the 90s, there has been a near-universal electoral shift to the right. As Guerra consoled PSOE supporters, the Australian Labour Party lost their elections after more than a decade of power. The New Zealand Labour Party was trounced in 1991. The German SPD failed in 1994. Fourteen years of socialist presidency came to an end in France in 1995. Scandinavian social democracy no longer enjoys undisputed rule. Spectacularly, Italy's Clean Hands investigation revealed the Italian socialists' (PSI) corruption, destroying it by 1994.

A world shaped by the strongest capitalist economies confronts us. Many argue that socialists must modernise to keep up with its development. Labour's leadership claims to be at the forefront of this move. A robust capitalism backed by social partnership and communitarian cohesion is the objective. For all their admiration for the US Democrats, Labour's decision-makers have taken over the policies of the European and Australasian parties now stuck in opposition. A prime cause of their defeats is that modernised social democracy helped create the economic environment now hemming in the left.

The 1980s saw the heyday of the modernisers of 'post'-social democracy. Holding power in France and Spain socialist parties replaced class struggle, and egalitarian socialism, with a nineteenth-century Saint-Simonist admiration for the application of organised finance to industrial innovation. In Italy under Craxi and in New Zealand during Roger Douglas's control of finance, economic liberalism ruled. Support for European integration and competition, in the Single European Act of 1986, and building the South Asian trading zone for the Australasians took precedence. The practical reformism of the past, based on full employment, a strong public sector and redistribution, was replaced by a drive for efficiency, opportunity and equity within a market economy.

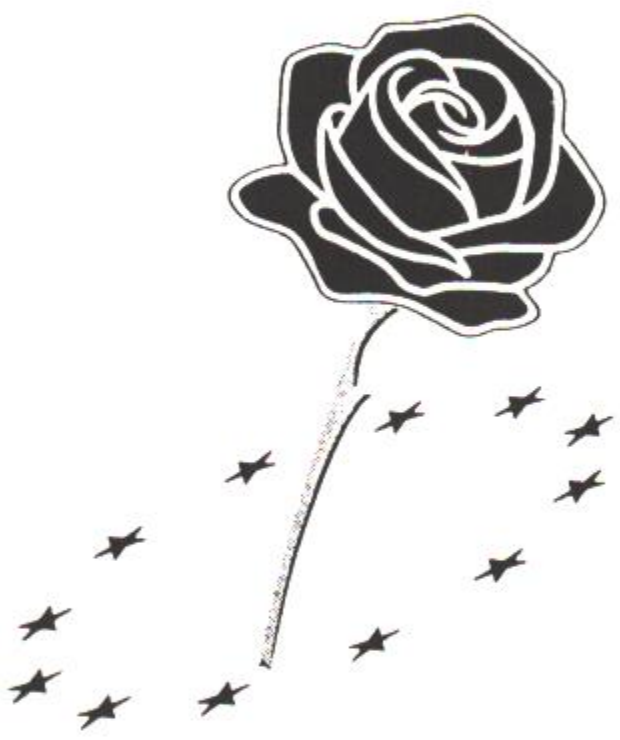
By the early 1990s many modernisers were becoming exhausted. Combining economic management with social goals proved to be difficult. The 'global economy' was used in Europe and the southern hemisphere to justify labour market flexibility and an opening to competition. Even partial privatisation of industries had, in many cases, become accepted as a means to withstand international rivalry. In New Zealand the dismantling of public services was under way before the National Party won

Towards the Socialist victory based on open, fraternal policy debate

MAY DAY GREETINGS

from
Michael Hindley

Member of the
European Parliament
for Lancashire South



Group of the Party of European Socialists

in turmoil

in 1991. In France the Socialist Party (PS) tried to fill an ideological void with declarations of human rights but failed to tackle poverty and marginalisation. Prime Minister Pierre Beregovoy's term of office (1992-3) was marked by dole queues approaching 3 million. In Spain, conscious of the widening social gulf, the largest union federation, UGT, demanded a 'giro social' (social policy shift), which was largely ignored. By 1996 Spanish unemployment had reached 22.7%. Social democracy surrendered to capital and has been unable to provide renovated and egalitarian social provision.

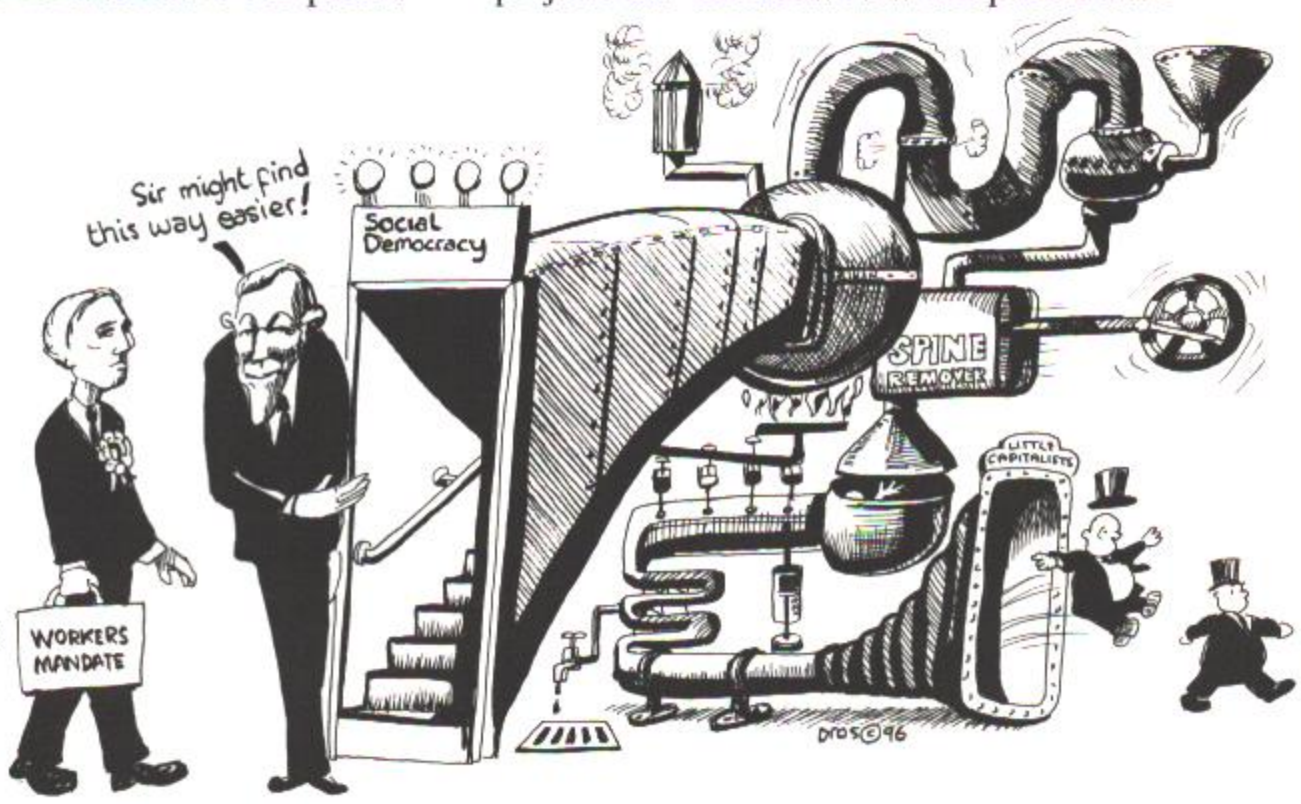
Riding the wave of economic liberalisation were tightly organised parties. Ten years ago the Italian 'rampamti' (yuppies) rallied around Craxi, described as a minor Stalin. The PSOE was dominated by obedient Felipistas. Mitterrand had his courtiers. Hawke and Keating had their inner circle of 'mates', and the New Zealand Labour Party appeared to be run by finance. Governments favourable to business encouraged patronage. This has long been the right's practice where ties between capaital and state are the norm. This practice spread to social democracy. Funders, legal or illegal, could expect rewards, from the PSOE's network of public appointments (over 50,000 posts) to contracts masterminded by French parties. A hidden tax on public and private funds, the 'lottizzazione', set up by the Christian Democrats, illustrated how connections between the Italian and Flemish socialist parties generated bribery.

Modernised social democracy has been unable to master the economic crisis. It is now barely able to resist pressure for the plunder of public resources that goes with full-blown market economies. Last year many Gallic socialist and unionist modernisers gave a sympathetic hearing to Prime Minister Juppe's plans to cut France's welfare. The result is that social democracy's social base has shrunk; its appeal to those with a stake in economic liberalisation leaves organised labour, public employees and the unemployed out in the cold. As a result opposition to liberalism has spilled out on to the streets; in the 1994 Italian mobilisation to defend pension rights, and in the French movements of last winter to protect the public sector.

Socialists world-wide have been deeply affected by these changes. In Britain Blair's platform and organisational reforms appear to follow the general pattern - if ten years later on. Rampant young apparatchiks and a desire to reach partnerships with private enterprise suggest ominous parallels. The Socialist Labour Party, taking its cue from the ditching of Clause IV, is attempting to build an alternative to New Labour. Others, not necessarily in agreement with the SLP's structure and programme, are looking for new bodies on the left to replace social democracy. Many have found models in the independent European left and ecological groups which have won some representation over the last ten years.

These parties at most hover around 10% of the electorate, i.e., in no position to make up a serious governmental alternative. They face great internal difficulties.

First, the basis for alternative left parties has been changing. The German movement against Pershing missiles in 1982 and the Spanish referendum on joining NATO in 1986 were respectively the catalysts for Die Grunen's entry into the Bundestag (1983) and the formation of the Izquierda Unida (United Left). Pacifism has declined as an issue. The Green parliamentary group has even gone so far as to back NATO involvement in Bosnia (in disregard of their own internal 'basis' structure). Since the 1980s both formations have also been confronted with the need to co-operate with social democracy in local government. A third of the United Left, with support in the trade union CCOO (Workers' Commissions), has formed the 'New Left', which advocates collaboration with the Socialists (*Cambio 16,* 8.4.96.) Faced with a new competitor, the ex-Communist Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), the German Greens have moved right.



Second, all the electorally significant alternative left and ecologist parties are coalitions. There are those who back class struggle politics and those who support 'post-materialist' demands, which range from ecology to a new international order based on human rights. Debating these issues, or constructing electoral blocs around approved programmes, takes up a lot of the activists' energy. There is therefore a tendency to look inwards, content to represent a radical constituency, without prospects of power.

Social democracy has not stood still. The crisis of modernisation has thrown up new left forces inside the French socialist party (the Gauche Socialiste), and in the PSOE, Antonio Santesmases' Izquierda Socialista (Socialist Left). Full employment is now a major issue. Throughout the European social democratic parties, a very significant battle is taking place over the future of socialism.

The key issue is how to build an international movement capable of replacing economic liberalism with new socialist projects and alliances. New left parties have a role, but risk being sidelined. The British Labour Party has, despite the wishes of post-social democrats, a direct link to the organised working class. It is therefore the site of potential conflicts between support for robust capitalism and socialist ideas. However, alternatives to modernisation will not emerge easily if Labour wins power. If the record of social democratic rule is a guide, flare-ups between the grassroots and the leadership will take time to develop. It is inside governmental structures amongst the newly powerful supporters of the leader that the most serious problems will occur. It will be through the demonstration of practical alternative policies that the left will be refounded. Some of the most decisive battles are being fought inside the most intense and contradictory arenas, the social democratic parties. To abandon intervention in these debates is a serious mistake.❑

Central America in transition

Have the civil wars of the 1980s given way to a new era of peace and democracy? Helen Collinson of the Latin American Bureau sounds a note of caution.

ON PAPER, Central America looks more peaceful and democratic than it has for a very long time. Peace has been brokered in all countries bar Guatemala and even here accords could be signed soon. Recently Guatemala's newly-elected President Arzu travelled to Mexico to meet URNG guerrilla leaders in person - an unprecedented move by a Guatemalan President. The URNG too reversed its longstanding boycott of the electoral process, calling a ceasefire during the run-up to the elections and urging Guatemalans to vote. Although the URNG did not participate, it openly supported the fledgeling Democratic Front which won 16 town councils and six seats in Congress, in spite of the fact that the party was founded only halfway through the election campaign. In El Salvador too, popular forces seem to have rallied round the electoral process. In 1992 the FMLN guerrilla forces laid down their arms after the signing of peace accords. The FMLN then formed itself into a political party and went to the ballot box. Meanwhile in neighbouring Nicaragua, the FSLN clearly regards elections as a legitimate means of regaining the power they lost at the last elections in 1990 and is hotly contesting presidential elections taking place later this year.

But this is only half the picture. Take another look at democracy in Central America and it all looks rather fuzzy. In El Salvador, entry into the electoral process has exacted a heavy toll on the fragile unity between the five organisations which made up the FMLN. The ballot box did not secure state power for the former FMLN guerrillas apart from some seats in the National Assembly and a few town councils. Their percentage of the vote in 1994 was 31% compared to 68% for the right-wing ARENA party (whose triumphant candidate, Calderon Sol, is widely thought to be a former death squad leader). Since the elections, the FMLN has split down the middle with two of its five



organisations forming a separate Democratic Party.

In Nicaragua, the right's defeat of the Sandinistas in the elections of 1990 led to a reversal of most of the social and economic changes brought about during the revolutionary 1980s. But defeat also created a crisis of direction within the FSLN which came to a head when Sergio Ramirez and other prominent Sandinistas broke away to form the Movement of Sandinista Renewal. The FSLN and Ramirez's party are just one of 26 registered political parties in Nicaragua today. But none of this seems to be of much interest to Nicaraguans these days. A friend recently returned from Nicaragua claims that even amongst many of those most involved in the Sandinista Revolution, politics has now become a taboo subject.

In Guatemala, abstentionism in the first round of the recent elections was 52% and 63% in the second round. A frightening proportion of Guatemalans who did take part in the elections cast their vote for a party effectively led by General Rios Montt, the man held responsible for the liquidation of some 300 Mayan villages in the early 1980s.

For all its supposed triumphs, Central America's democratic process in the 1990s is marked by apathy and disillusionment amongst the general population, and divisions and confusion amongst the left parties. The Nicaraguan economist, Xavier Gorostiaga explains why: "Although democracy now has the support of all Central American political actors, it does not have the minimal material foundation needed to guarantee the survival of the vast majority of the population who are suffering ever greater poverty and unemployment...In Latin America democracy does not reach more than one third of the population and thus the majority of people are marginalised or excluded from the benefits of the democratic system."

The real issue for most people in Central America is not elections but sheer, material survival which the electoral process seems unable to address. In Guatemala the added dimension is the continuing abuse of human rights by the military, despite all the talk of peace and democracy. Last October saw the most blatant violation of human rights by the Guatemalan military for many years when soldiers opened fire on a community of returned refugees, killing eleven people and injuring thirty.

But amidst all the doom and gloom, there is still hope. Politics at a national level may have become increasingly irrelevant to ordinary people, but there are still thousands of initiatives going on at a grassroots level, demonstrating a type of local democracy which remains an inspiration: FMLN mayors in El Salvador such as Juan Garcia Melara work wonders with an annual budget of $1,000 in his district of El Paisnal; the Community Movement and the network of highly organised local women's groups in Nicaragua; the unique forms of internal democracy and collective organisation promoted by displaced and returning refugee communities in remote jungle and mountainous areas of Guatemala.

In the 1990s ordinary people are not in a position to shape the future of the whole of Central America. But large numbers are taking control of their own lives and the future of their communities. The paths to democracy they are building may be small, but are clearly a more genuine democratic experiment than the electoral comings and goings of national presidents.❑

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Towards a US labour party

Steve Seltzer is an American socialist active in Labor Party Advocates, the movement seeking to set up a labor party in the US. *LLB* asked him what kind of people are involved in Labor Party Advocates when he spoke in London recently.

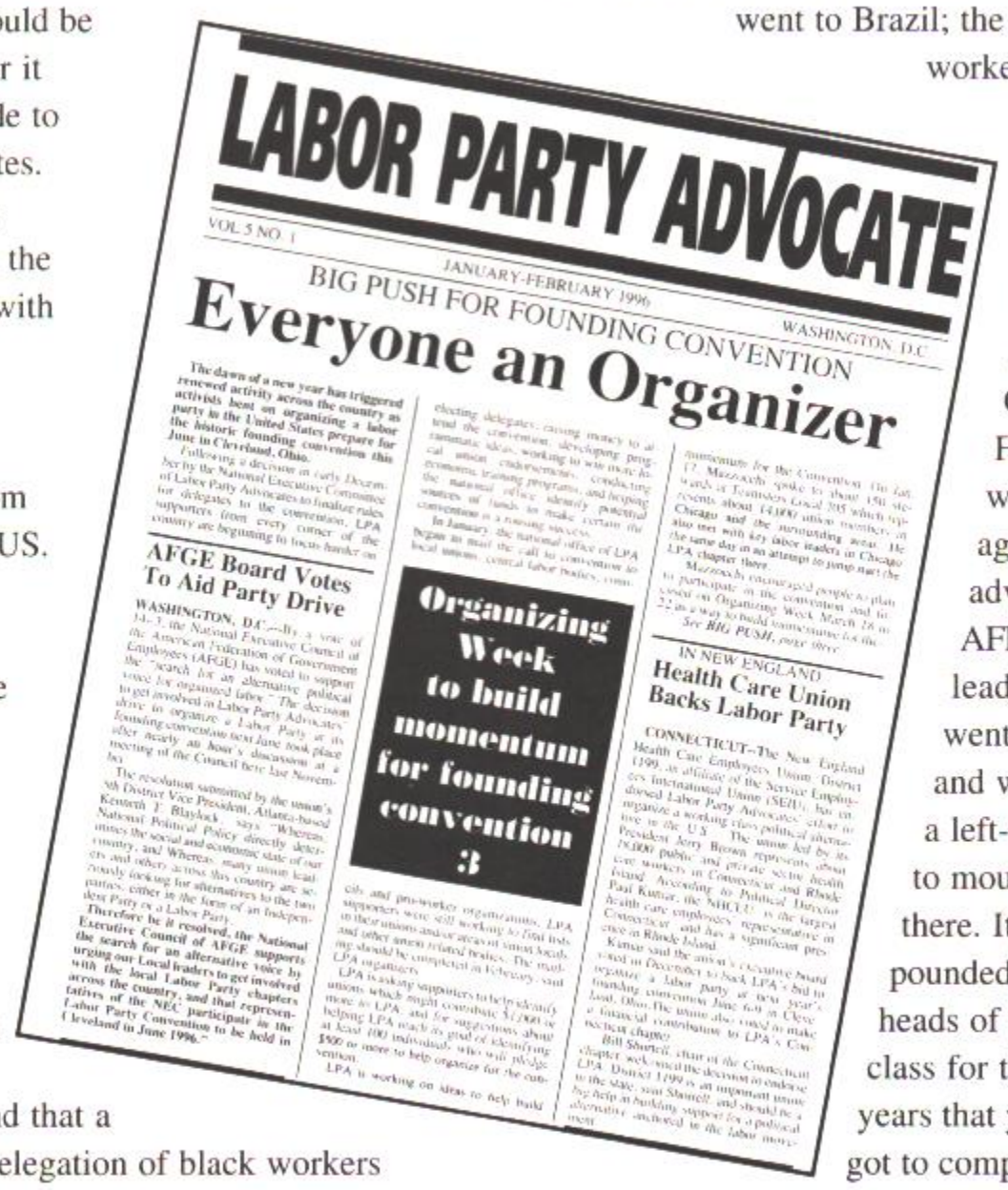
MANY DIFFERENT kinds are involved, union activists, shop stewards, presidents of union locals (branches) - in fact, it's a weakness of LPA that it's so union-based. There is an effort to recruit women and minorities to LPA and to have platforms that deal with their needs. We want a Labor Party and a programme that will reflect the interests of the entire working class. If it is to be successful it has to broaden out and include other forces in society and deal with issues like the media, housing and health care. Now the largest health care local in the Bay Area - 30,000 members - has endorsed LPA. They face massive attacks - managed competition, deskilling nurses and bringing in untrained people.

In the US, trade union leaders are getting more militant. The next head of the AFL-CIO said he would be corporate America's worst nightmare. Workers are angry. They want action and this is a new political development in the union movement, with workers not only fighting on a local level but going nationally to their union leadership and saying you had better fight for us or get out of the way. For example, the leader of the Teamsters organised a caravan against the North American Free Trade Agreement in California and brought an independent union leader up from Mexico to explain to workers why NAFTA was an attack on Mexican and US workers.

A lot of people are shocked that Pat Buchanan's rhetoric against Wall Street has had such a good hearing in America, including from some workers. But it indicates the level of political crisis and the contradictions that have developed in the US. The last 20 years have seen millions of workers laid off by major multi-nationals and then hired back at 50 % less as part-timers. You have massive privatisation, deregulation, the introduction of non-union competitors for lower wages for airlines, communication and utility workers. All this is creating an explosive situation in the US.

I have been fighting in the US for a Labor Party along with others for about 25 years. In 1991 Tony Mazzocchi who was Secretary-Treasurer of the Oil, Chemical and Atomic workers, formed an organisation called Labor Party Advocates which began to recruit and grow. Its ranks now include the International Longshoremen and Warehousemen's Union which has about 60,000 West Coast dockers, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers with about 70,000, the Maintenance Way workers, who repair the railroads in the US, and the United Electrical Workers, a small electrical workers' union witch-hunted during the 1950s by the AFL-CIO.

The next step is a national convention of LPA, which will be a founding convention for a Labor Party in June in Cleveland, Ohio. There are different points of view in LPA both about what its program should be and whether it should decide to run candidates. This will be discussed at the convention with over one thousand delegates expected from all over the US. Such a convention would be the most representative of US workers in modern times. This would be a historic gain for us.



LABOR PARTY ADVOCATE

VOL. 5 NO. 1 JANUARY-FEBRUARY 1996 WASHINGTON, D.C.

BIG PUSH FOR FOUNDING CONVENTION

Everyone an Organizer

The dawn of a new year has triggered renewed activity across the country as activists bent on organizing a labor party in the United States prepare for the historic founding convention this June in Cleveland, Ohio.

Following a decision in early December by the National Executive Committee of Labor Party Advocates to finalize rules for delegates to the convention, LPA supporters from every corner of the country are beginning to focus harder on

AFGE Board Votes To Aid Party Drive

WASHINGTON, D.C.—By a vote of 34-3, the National Executive Council of the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE) has voted to support the "search for an alternative political voice for organized labor." The decision to get involved in Labor Party Advocates' drive to organize a Labor Party at its founding convention next June took place after nearly an hour's discussion at a meeting of the Council here last November.

The resolution submitted by the union's 9th District Vice President, Atlanta-based Kenneth T. Blaylock, says: "Whereas, National Political Policy directly determines the social and economic state of our country, and Whereas many union leaders and others across this country are seriously looking for alternatives to the two parties, either in the form of an independent Party or a Labor Party...

Therefore be it resolved, the National Executive Council of AFGE supports the search for an alternative voice by urging our Local leaders to get involved with the local Labor Party chapters across the country, and that representatives of the NEC participate in the Labor Party Convention to be held in Cleveland in June 1996."

electing delegates, raising money to attend the convention, developing programmatic ideas, working to win more local union endorsements, conducting economic training programs, and begging the national office to make certain the resources of funds are there to make certain the convention is a rousing success.

In January, the national office of LPA began to mail the call for convention to local unions, central labor bodies, com-

Organizing Week to build momentum for founding convention :3

cils, and pro-worker organizations. LPA supporters were still working to find invitations in their unions and/or area of union locals and other union related bodies. The mailing should be completed in February, said LPA organizers.

LPA is asking supporters to help identify unions which might contribute $1,000 or more to LPA and for suggestions about helping LPA reach its goal of identifying at least 100 individuals who will pledge $500 or more to help organize for the convention.

LPA is working on ideas to help build momentum for the Convention. On Jan. 17, Mazzocchi spoke to about 150 stewards at Teamsters Local 205 which represents about 14,000 union members in Chicago and the surrounding area. He also met with key labor leaders in Chicago the same day in an attempt to jump start the LPA chapter there.

Mazzocchi encouraged people to plan to participate in the convention and to attend an Organizing Week March 18 to 22 as a way to build momentum for the...

See BIG PUSH, page three

IN NEW ENGLAND

Health Care Union Backs Labor Party

CONNECTICUT—The New England Health Care Employees Union, District 1199, an affiliate of the Service Employees International Union (SEIU), has endorsed Labor Party Advocates' effort to organize a working class political alternative in the U.S. The union led by its President Jerry Brown represents about 70,000 public and private sector health care workers in Connecticut and Rhode Island. According to Political Director Paul Kumar, the 5,000 LU is the largest health care employees representative in Connecticut and has a significant presence in Rhode Island.

Kumar said the union's executive board voted in December to back LPA's bid to organize a labor party at next year's founding convention June 6-9 in Cleveland, Ohio. The union also voted to make a financial contribution to LPA's Connecticut chapter.

Bill Shortell, chair of the Connecticut LPA District 1199 is an important union in the state, said Shortell, and should be a big help in building support for a political alternative anchored in the labor movement.

I understand that a significant delegation of black workers will be coming to the convention. Jesse Jackson may be willing to return the support he has received in the past and back the new party. Clinton is not liked in the black community because of what he's done with affirmative action - taking on board many of the right-wing Republican arguments.

The reaction of the American left towards the proposed Labor Party is a mixture of confusion and sectarianism. Many still cling to the old idea of working in the Democratic Party but Clinton has only confirmed what we know to be true - the Democrats are a big business outfit who use union support to con the workers of America. Their record under Clinton has led to growing disillusionment which is why so many poorer people don't bother to vote and why increasing layers of organised workers are swinging behind our new political movement. Others on the left are not getting involved because they know the new party will be too big for them to dominate. This is the wrong approach - they should come off the sidelines and help develop the movement.

Another very important aspect of the formation of a Labor Party in the US at this time is internationalism. Workers who work for multi-nationals see that they need to link up internationally. The Caterpillar workers went to Brazil; the Staley workers went to visit Canadian Tate and Lyle workers; and the Gridstone Firestone workers, against the advice of the AFL-CIO leadership, went to Tokyo and worked with a left-wing union to mount a protest there. It has been pounded into the heads of the working class for the last 20 years that you have got to compete with the Japanese and Korean workers. Now US workers are thinking globally.❑

LLB page

Ecofascism

Leonora Lloyd reviews *Ecofascism - Lessons from the German Experience* by Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier (AK press)

IT IS only too easy to assume that ecology is a good thing. This pamphlet is an eye opener. The first of two essays details the history of ecological theory and practice *in fascist Germany. Many Nazi leaders and theorists were ecologists. Yet their ecology can produce good results, but the opposite:* "Even the most laudable of causes can be perverted...in the service of criminal savagery."

The post-war neo-fascists have again tied ecology to their racial theories. Some respected names are part of the historical background of these theories. Rudolf Steiner, education theory, was also the founder of the *Anthroposophical Society. Anthroposophy postulates a theory of sequential evolution of each of the 'European fatherlands' to have* space for their *volk* to thrive without interference - immigration - from outside. Their ideology is social Darwinism, and its most prominent interpreter is Hubert Gruhl, who was a founder of the German Greens and of the slogan: "We are neither left nor right; we are in front." When the left won the struggle supporters departed, but *publish books on 'ecolo The pamphlet concludes underlining the importance of seeing our* political theories as a whole and not allowing progressive ideas to be captured and deformed.❑

Review

Bill Dixon reviews a new pamphlet The Transition in South Africa *by Carl Brecker.*

OUTSIDE South Africa, President Nelson Mandela is widely credited with having the moral courage of M K Gandhi and the miraculous powers of Jesus Christ. In the squatter camps and townships back home the credentials of this secular saint and his Government of National Unity (GNU) are coming under more searching scrutiny. Brecker quotes a poster from the wave of strikes that swept the country last year: "Democracy doesn't pay the rent". Almost two years after the ANC's historic election victory, this pamphlet presents a searching analysis of the "counterfeit miracle" worked by the GNU. For Brecker, this miracle involves a normalisation of post-apartheid bourgeois democracy but rigorously prohibits the organised working class from owning, controlling and redistributing the wealth their labour creates.

Much of the pamphlet takes the form of an extended critique of the "Strategy and Tactics Document" produced by the South African Communist Party (SACP) in 1995. The SACP's stubborn refusal to abandon a threadbare version of Stalinist "two-stage" theory in its analysis of developments in South Africa is subjected to the most sustained criticism. A polemic against the SACP left is particularly sharp - the final paragraph of one chapter consists of no less than five rhetorical questions addressed to one luckless SACP ideologue.

In many ways this is an old-fashioned political tract: old-fashioned in its uncompromising analysis of an almost universally acclaimed transition to bourgeois democracy, and old-fashioned in its commitment to revolutionary socialism as the only certain route to a more thorough-going democratisation of post-apartheid South Africa. But as a theoretically informed and politically astute antidote to the cult of "national unity", this hard-hitting pamphlet takes some beating.❑

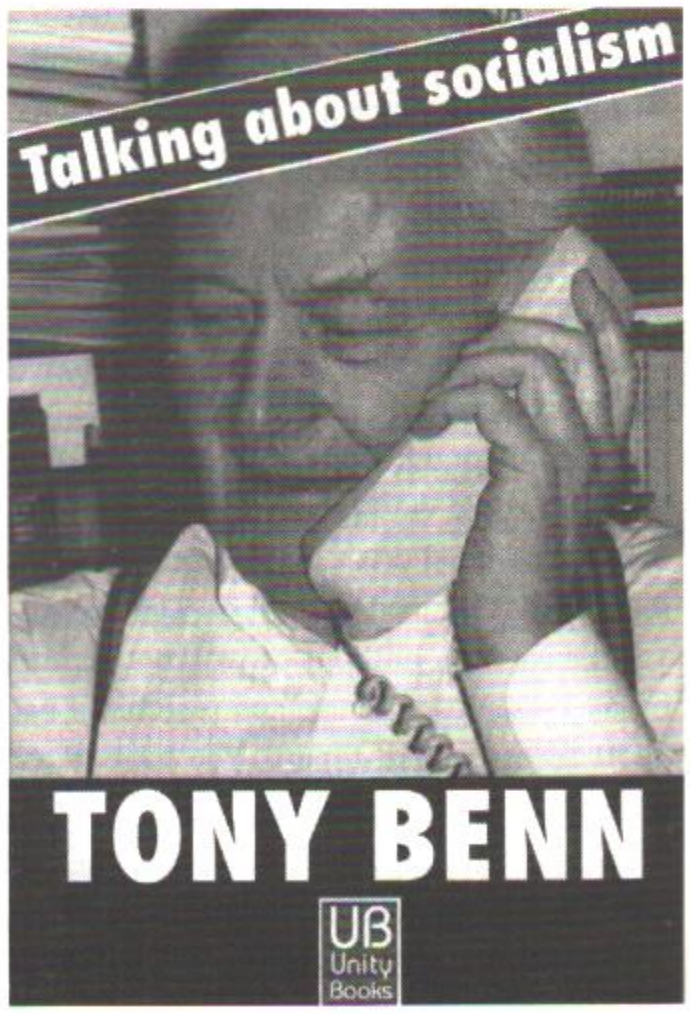
● To obtain the pamphlet, send a cheque for £1.50, made out to C. van Gelderen, 40 St Vincents Close, Girton, Cambs., CB3 0PG.

MAY DAY GREETINGS

from Stan Newens
Member of the European Parliament for London Central, Group of the Party of European Socialists

Talking about Socialism

UNITY BOOKS has published a new pamphlet, *Talking about Socialism* by Tony Benn, based on an interview conducted by John Foster at the end of last year. Benn develops his argument across a range of issues - the concentration of capital, the military underpinning of capitalist 'growth', the class nature of the courts, the growth of unemployment as a political strategy, the prospects for socialism and the need for constitutional change. Accessibly written and highly suitable for new converts, *Talking about Socialism* is available, price £1.50, from Unity Books, Unit 21, Hayburn Lane, Glasgow G11, tel/fax: 0141 337 3776. ❑



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The post-war neo-fascists have again tied ecology to their racial theories. Some respected names are part of the historical background of these theories. Rudolf Steiner, commonly associated with progressive education theory, was also the founder of the Anthroposophical Society. Anthroposophy postulates a theory of sequential evolution of human races, each subsequent race superior to the one before. Steiner's modern counterpart is Rudolf Bahro, once seen as a socialist with a human face, now a critic of the left who calls for the rehabilitation of National Socialism. Other strands of neo-fascism want each of the 'European fatherlands' to have space for their *volk* to thrive without interference - immigration - from outside. Their ideology is social Darwinism, and its most prominent interpreter is Hubert Gruhl, who was a founder of the German Greens and of the slogan: "We are neither left nor right; we are in front." When the left won the struggle for control of the Green Party, Gruhl and his supporters departed, but he continues to publish books on 'ecology'.

The pamphlet concludes, not by denying the importance of ecology, but the necessity of building an ecological left with firm roots in internationalism, with a rational humanistic and egalitarian critique of social oppression. For those of us who are concerned with green issues, this pamphlet is required reading, underlining the importance of seeing our political theories as a whole and not allowing progressive ideas to be captured and deformed.❑

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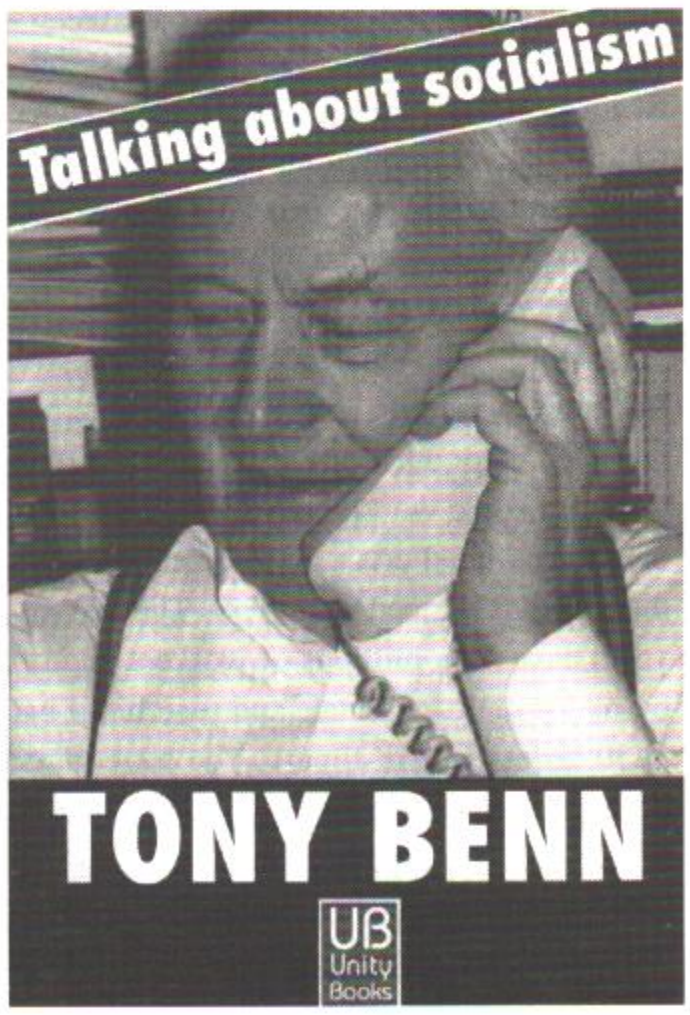
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LLB page 24

science

A female conspiracy?

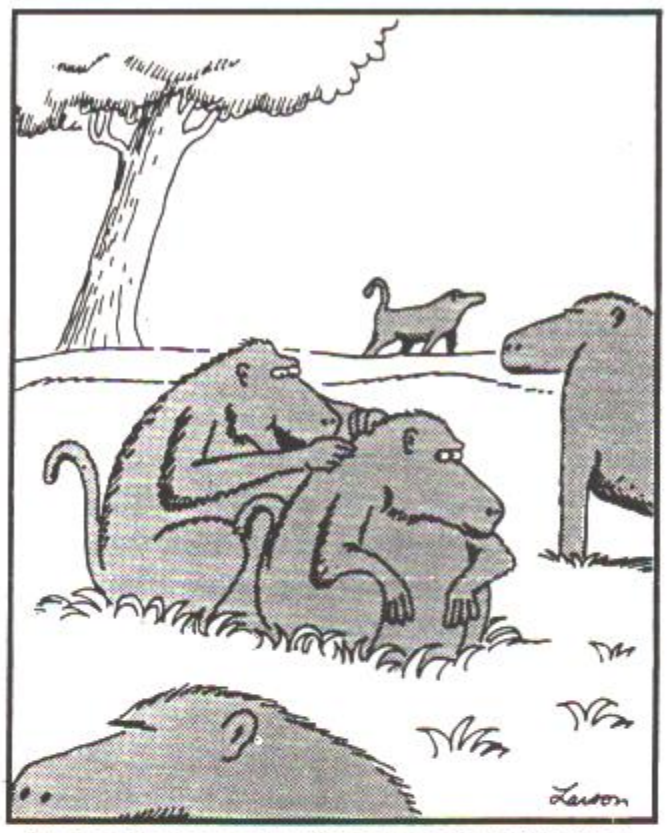
Our science correspondent Dr. Chris Knight (Senior Lecturer in Anthropology, University of East London) looks at the origins of speech.

SPEECH IS an anomaly. For Noam Chomsky, who has dominated theoretical linguistics over the past 30 years, we humans can speak because we have a tiny extra bit in the brain, which chimpanzees lack. This "Language Acquisition Device", however, is too extraordinary and uniquely human to be explained by Darwin's theory of natural selection. Chomsky prefers to say it's just there: it's what makes humans special. Christian and other fundamentalists, understandably, have long exploited such strange statements, claiming that it all helps to prove divine intervention. Darwinians retort that they should be able to clear up the mystery - it's just that they don't yet happen to have a theory!

Speech has seemed more and more odd with each advance in our understanding of how animals communicate. No primate uses a code allowing messages to be constructed inventively by combining different signals. Had apes evolved something along similar lines, matters would be simpler, but speech seems to be all-or-nothing. The languages of Kalahari hunter-gatherers - technologically still in the Stone Age - are quite as complex, grammatically, as contemporary Japanese or English. By contrast, no ape call system has a trace of syntactical complexity.

Noam Chomsky sees humans, thanks to those extra bits in the brain, as "instinctively" sociable, creative and articulate. Theoretical linguists of all persuasions assume that the earliest users of speech must have been organised co-operatively, taking turns to listen, pooling information for the common good. To Darwinians, however, the problem is to explain all this: among apes, social intelligence reaches its acme of sophistication not in honest co-operation but in deceit.

Why don't chimps possess even the rudiments of language? It is not lack of intelligence: to a very limited degree, they can be trained to use American Sign Language, which is a true language used by deaf people in the United States. Ironically, it turns out that in the wild, chimps have no use for any such system because they are just too clever! Their brains have evolved to that critical point where they can grasp that other chimps have minds. They know that by manipulating signals, they can manipulate each other's thoughts. The unfortunate result is that if an ape signalled to you that there were bananas concealed to your left, a wise course would be to search the foliage to your right! Chimps, in fact, are so competitive and devious that it would pay no individual to take cheap volitional signals at face value. This, then, is why speech does not even begin to evolve among them: words are cheap, and any sensible chimp would do well to ignore them even if they were invented!



"So then Sheila says to Betty that Arnold told her what Harry was up to, but Betty told me she already heard it from Blanche, don't you know . . ."

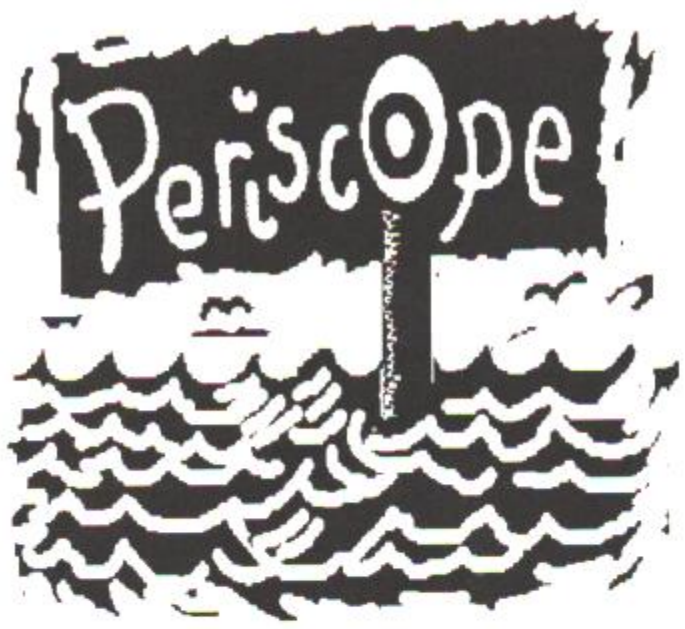
Biologists who study animal signals have a technical term, "conspiratorial whispering", to describe communication of a certain kind. When genetic interests are closely shared - as they are within a colony of ants - signals become quiet and efficient. There is no need to roar because listeners have solid reasons for trusting the information; they can therefore afford to invest energy in picking up even the quietest of signals.

A biologist looking at human speech notes at once that it fits the pattern of "conspiratorial whispering". Its low-cost, low-amplitude, information-rich specifications are the design-hallmarks of a system for communicating reliable information at speed. From this we can infer that it evolved for in-group use in the service of some kind of "conspiracy". Think literally in terms of a secret code and you won't go far wrong.

In his just-published book, *Grooming, Gossip and the Evolution of Language*, Robin Dunbar of Liverpool University has begun modelling the kinds of conspiracies our ancestors were involved in. Apes and monkeys cement their alliances by manually grooming one another. Humans "groom" one another through gossip. An advantage of using the voice instead of fingers is that you can service multiple allies simultaneously, freeing the hands for tasks such as food-gathering. In Dunbar's view, a gradual shift from physical to vocal "grooming" enabled evolving humans to maintain larger and larger alliances - up to a maximum of 150 individuals, all known to one another and interacting. Modern western folklore, says Dunbar, condemns "gossip" as at best trivial and at worst malicious, but where real communities exist, it is what people do most of the time. It is how news gets around and how communities cohere. Speech, in this perspective, emerged among alliance-builders, mainly females, gossiping to ensure that sexual and other misdemeanours became common knowledge so that everyone could be held to account.

Speech, in this view, was a female conspiracy. The theory still has some gaps in it, but Dunbar's entertaining best-seller makes persuasive reading. Better than stories of divine intervention anyway.

●Robin Dunbar's *Grooming, Gossip, and the Evolution of Language* is published by Faber & Faber (London 1996), and costs £15.99.



Guess who's (not) coming to dinner?

LLB has clearly been rehabilitated - one of the editorial board members, **Leonora Lloyd**, has been invited (by **Lord Attenborough** CBE no less!) to a Labour Party Gala Dinner at the Savoy Hotel on 11th July - **Ruth Rendell** will be there and so will **Gordon Brown**. "The Gala Dinner", says Lord Attenborough, "will provide an opportunity for Labour supporters, old and new, to enjoy a summer's evening with the Leader of our Party and members of the shadow cabinet." Obviously this will be a fun event - and a great opportunity for Leonora to sell a few copies of *LLB*. However, we will need to raise a bit to pay for her ticket. Rush your donations to the "*LLB* Summer Gala Ticket Fund" at the address on the inside front cover - if we book before 30th May we can get the very reasonable discounted rate... ...of just four hundred and fifty pounds for a single ticket!

Short-circuited?

A lively discussion has broken out at Fortress *Briefing* on why one Sunday morning every couple of months, **Clare Short** puts her foot in it. One unkind commentator suggested that it had something to do with not quite having sobered up from the night before. We rejected this thinking it too unfair to judge Clare by the standards of the *LLB* EB. Another suggestion was that as we enter spring an NEC member's thoughts turn to rebirth and renewal (ie re-election). Possibly *LLB* was only half right when we described Clare as a "useful idiot" for the leadership. The theory that we prefer to subscribe to is that Short is more principled than we think. This option has the added pleasure that Short might actually be having sleepless nights over the way she treated Liz Davies.

Bring back John Evans

The successor to **John Evans** MP, hard-right Political Secretary of the National Union of Labour and Socialist Clubs, was a hard-fought fight. That's because with it comes the NULSC's nomination for the Socialist Societies' section of the Labour Party NEC - and as the NULSC has more votes in this section than all the other societies put together, it's a nomination worth having. Periscope is delighted to announce the election of right-wing **Ian McCartney MP**, because the defeated candidate was the even more right-wing **John Spellar MP**, ex of the EETPU. Cheers!

Join a trade union for higher pay

Captains of industry are not the only fat cats around. They are joined by such horny handed sons of toil as union leader **Gordon Taylor**, head of the Professional Footballer's Association, now a TUC affiliate, kicking in with a total package worth nearly £300,000 in 1994. Also doing well that year were **Alan Jinkinson** who, as General Secretary of UNISON, leading some of Britain's lowest paid workers, earned £77,546 and NUT secretary **Doug McEvoy** who took home £76,404. Others who negotiated good packages include **John Edmonds** (GMB) with £73,000, **Bill Morris** (TGWU) with £71,213, **John Monks** (TUC) at £66,120, **Garfield Davies**, leader of Britain's low-paid shopworkers, with £65,914 and **Arthur Scargill** (NUM) who totalled £62,526. All this despite the fact that 1994 was the 15th year of declining trade union membership. It's good to know our subscription increases are going to such worthy causes.

National Union of Smears

What's the big issue facing students in 1996? The danger of members of the tiny Islamic fringe group **Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HZT)** being elected to any NUS office, if the amount of energy being spent on the issue by NUS President **Jim Murphy** is anything to go by. The Committee of Vice Chancellors and Principals were reportedly "taken aback" when Murphy suggested that they and the NUS should join forces against the threat of 'extremism' in the form of HZT. But Murphy seems to have overlooked the fact that HZT's stated policy is never to stand for office. Perhaps this latest bout of scare-mongering is aimed at creating a wider climate of intolerance and smearing a broader layer of radical opposition to the NUS leaders' New Labourism?

Deadwood

In an attack on the NUT, **John Redwood** MP wrote that a study has shown that spelling, punctuation and grammar have all deteriorated since 1980.
"Recent tests showed that half our 11-year olds cannot read, write or do sums to the required standard. Mental arithmetic has slipped...." Our maths is none too good, either, but we calculate that 100 percent of 11 year olds have been born and educated under a Conservative Government.

Slippery Sue

Sue Slipman, former "Communist" NUS leader turned failed SDP candidate, did her bit for animal welfare on a recent 'Any Questions' radio programme. After **Tony Banks** launched into an attack on foxhunting. Sue leapt to defend what is obviously still a major feature of Islington life with, "I have no really strong views about field sports and... and hunting as it is practised is in the best of the English traditions."

Jobs for the girls too

Maureen O'Mara, the former Head Office staffer who advised on selection of Parliamentary candidates but failed to get selected herself, has joined the merry throng of Labour Head Quarters apparatchiks moving into PR - joining the Advocacy Partnership as an account director. About the only consolation of the Tories' getting in again would be that all the lobbying and PR firms signing these people up would have no further use for them.

No one likes us

A goodwill football match with a multi-ethnic team in **Bosnia** has to be welcomed as a step towards a lasting peace. But the English team chosen to visit Banja Luka? South London's **Millwall** - surely a Serbian plot to provoke hostility?

Clear as Mud

"If we are to govern well we must have a clear mandate", says **New Labour's** trail-blazing document excitingly entitled *Road to the Manifesto*. Inside: "The four main pillars of Labour's platform will be clear: Economic opportunity, a one-nation society, political change, leadership in Europe." Just to clarify: "This might be characterised as a stake in the economy, a stake in society, a stake in politics and a stake in the world." Or it might be characterised as a heap of meaningless feel-good jargon designed to hide the fact that New Labour is terrified of saying anything that might add up to one real commitment to sort out the mess created over the last 20 years. Don't worry, though - more will follow: "Each of the new papers and speeches will tell a story. Taken as a whole, they tell a bigger story." The document is written in a style familiar to Lord Archer fans. Simple words. Short sentences. Many without verbs. Remember verbs? - the doing words. Clearly New Labour is not promising to do anything. Watch this space.

Blue is the colour...

So **Pepsi** spent nine months and six million pounds changing its colour to blue. And all it took the Labour Party to elect **Tony Blair** was... one day.

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



Paul Wozny has never been one to let the facts stand in the way of a good insult: but even he has got carried away with his own invective against Geoff Martin (Correspondence, April).

Geoff can defend his own politics and unfortunate footballing allegiances for himself, though I would say that Wozny's definition of him as a right-winger will come as a surprise to most on the left and to many more on the right in UNISON.

But I do take exception to Wozny quarrying still further into his own apparently inexhaustible store of ignorance and malice to raise the allegation that Geoff's "day job" (as Campaigns Director of London Health Emergency) "depends on the patronage of UNISON's leadership. By putting the boot into the left he can earn brownie points, or is it brown-nose points."

In case any *LLB* reader is naive enough to believe this rubbish, I would point out that:

(1) LHE is not, and has never been, in any way dependent on the "patronage" of UNISON - or any other individual trade union. We work with all of the NHS unions and with others; (2) The sum total of the UNISON leadership's support for LHE is a £250 fee for the union's national affiliation - which was itself the result not of a bureaucratic decision, but a conference vote; (3) £250 may be enough to buy Paul Wozny for a year, but it would not be enough even to pay the postage for an issue of our newspaper, *Health Emergency*, which prints 10,000 copies and is financed by affiliations and donations from over 200 trade union organisations; (4) LHE is proud of its work with regions and branches of UNISON to promote campaigns and issues - including the current NHS pay campaign. In each case this work is commissioned by lay committees of the union. I challenge Paul Wozny to show a single example of LHE's policies being dictated by "UNISON patronage"; (5) Paul Wozny should also explain to *LLB* readers why in his view it is wrong in principle for campaigns like LHE - and therefore by implication any left campaign - to seek affiliation and support from national unions. Perhaps he should prepare for this by reading useful antidotes to sectarianism such as Lenin's *Left Wing Communism, an Infantile Disorder*.

In the meantime a retraction of his unfounded smears against LHE and an apology would be a constructive step forward. Is Paul Wozny big enough to admit his mistakes, or does he believe only other people get things wrong?

John Lister,
Information Director,
London Health Emergency

Llew Smith's argument for the abolition of the monarchy is presented largely on the grounds of costs which, as he points out, are exorbitant.

We should also recognise the mutually supportive link between monarchy and aristocracy. The hereditary system underpins both the House of Lords and royalty, so the disappearance of one would threaten the survival of the other. If all hereditary peerages were bereft of political power, the power of the monarchy could be reduced to the token Scandinavian model. Were all aristocrats, both hereditary and life peers, removed from the upper chamber of Parliament (a move to bicameral democracy), monarchy would lose further political support.

The Lords is probably easier to reform than the monarchy and this move might prove popular. Provided a republican strategy is kept in view, an assault on the Lords might be the best tactic in undermining royalty.

Rene Gimpel
Bayswater, London

Steve Smith's remark that "Oliver Stone has done more to popularize the notion that American bourgeois democracy is a sham than the likes of Noam Chomsky ever will" (*LLB*, April) is a bit naive.

Stone has done nothing of the kind. In *Wall Street* the millionaire broker with a conscience saves the jobs of the poor workers by challenging the millionaire broker without a conscience. In *Platoon*, America's murderous atrocities in Vietnam are seen as an inner struggle between good and evil in the heads of American soldiers. The Vietnamese appear merely as footnotes to Stone's psychological 'insights'.

Fortunately there are a few real anti-imperialists around like Noam Chomsky who have written prolifically to unmask the real character of the war in Vietnam and its relationship to the interests of American capital. A rich liberal like Stone doesn't come up to his boot-caps.

Mike Phipps,
Brent

Bernard Misrahi (*LLB* April) tells us that in "deprived working class areas" the "local comprehensive does not cater for bright children". Thus Harriet Harman's dilemma is shared by "many socialist parents". What is it about "socialist" parents that leads them to produce "bright" children? Would a socialist parent fortunate enough to produce "dim" offspring - or a reactionary parent with bright progeny - avoid the dilemma? Or is parental ideology the paramount determinant of educational success?

The Tories measure a school's success by bald facts such as percentages achieving 5 GCSEs (grades A-C). The Labour leadership probably will too. So does comrade Misrahi - by assuming that in "low performing" schools, peer pressure discourages individual pupils from obtaining GCSEs. First, several inner city schools achieve low league table rankings by producing a number of 8 or 9 GCSE "success stories" and a large number of pupils who reach - against personal odds including not having English as a first language, household poverty, or high teacher turnover - the kind of full educational potential the system cannot measure.

Second, just because others measure "success" in GCSEs, why should we? I know of no research which suggests, as comrade Misrahi does, that boys have a far more prevalent ethos against showing interest in school, although I know that in east London boys have lower GCSE scores than girls (with white boys often scoring lower than Asian boys). Is this just down to peer pressure? Or have some of these young men realised that unemployment levels depend on how many jobs there are, not how well qualified you are? Spotting what the Tories are up to on that one would be quite bright really.

Finally, how do socialist parents explain to their child that the other kids on the estate or in the streets are good enough to play with after school but not good enough to be company at school? The only way you can explain it is by telling your child that s/he is "different from the others" and destined for a different future. Using anything other than the local comprehensive is not just being taken in by the prevailing ideology that success is measured in GCSEs, it's having confidence in the future of, and consciously taking part in propping up, class society. No surprise that Harriet and Jack are at it then.

Jenny Fisher,
Tower Hamlets

A.O.B.

"It's like a conspiracy to stop politicians talking honestly, so you get robots who just clone what they are told to say out of press releases" - **Clare Short**.

"My first reaction to the news (that Blair intends to hold a manifesto referendum) was that it was simply a way of trying to marginalise the growing dissent in the Party (and I think it is growing again) about Blair's governmental agenda..." - **Martin Kettle, 30/3/96, *Guardian*.**

"Soon we're going to need secret societies where we can have honest discussion" - **Clare Short**.

"...the reality is that they were taken for a ride...Jack Straw...has been a sucker. The greatest fear that anyone can have about a future Labour Government...is that they will do nothing." - **Martin Kettle, 3/4/96, *Guardian*, on Labour's "Cowardice in the face of the ruling class" and support for new police PTA powers.**