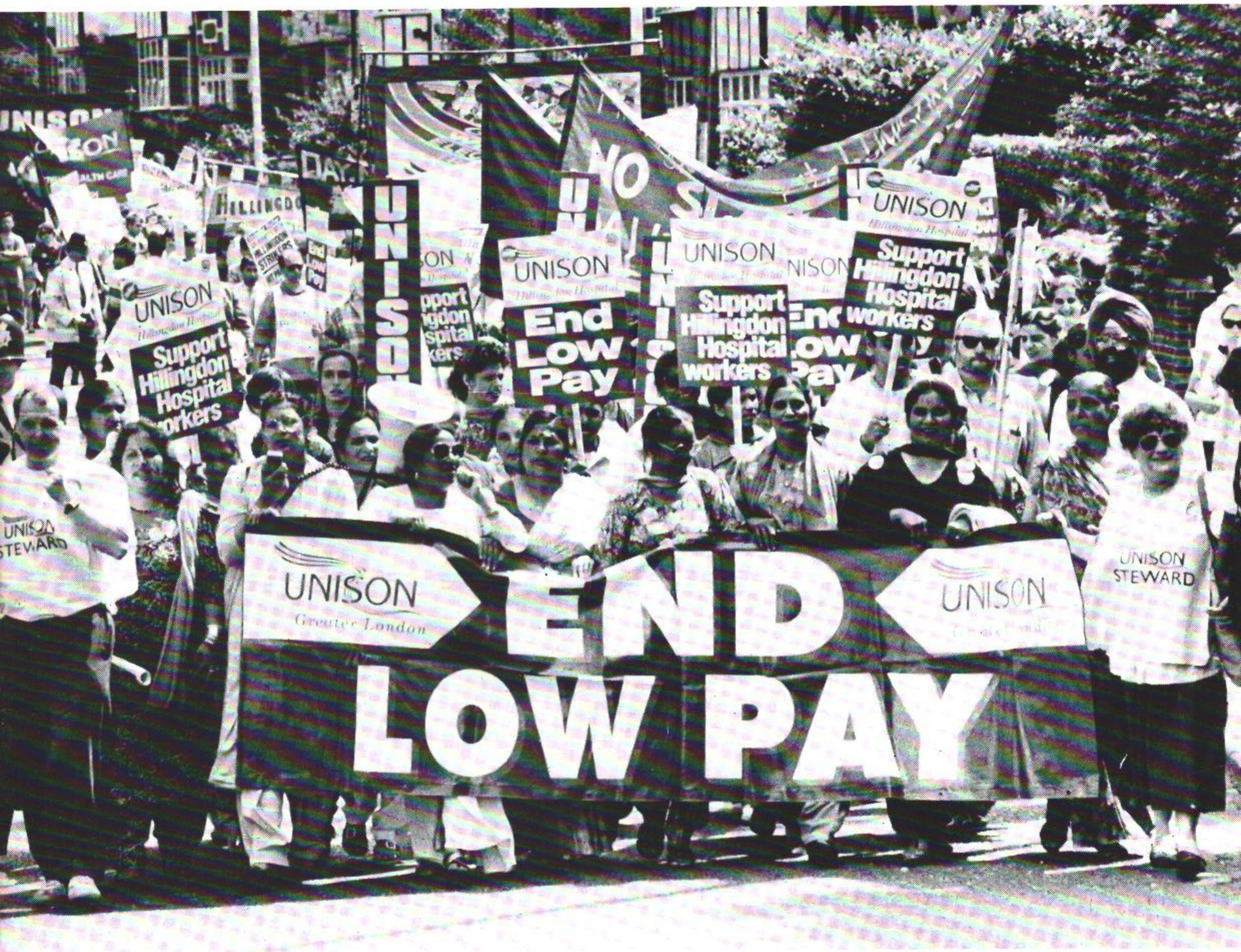
LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

November 1996 price £1 / 50p

inside...

- Save the Labour Party!
- Liverpool dockers
- Hillingdon strikers
- Jim Mortimer
- Nigeria

Blair dreams of One Nation...



"No more bosses vs. workers"?

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." - The Guardian.

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.

To survive and thrive we need the support of our readers. Why not take copies of *LLB* to sell at your Labour Party, trade union or campaign meetings?

The copy deadline for the next issue is Monday 18th November. If you wish to contribute please mail us, fax us or, ideally, send us a PC disk.

● Editorial Board: Graham Bash, Pat Byrne, Dan Carter, Chris Croome, Tony Dale, Steve Faulkner, Paul Field, Bryn Griffiths, Colin Hall, Louise Kawakami, Madeleine Kingston, Chris Knight, Leonora Lloyd, Sue Lukes and Dorothy Macedo (Co-Chairs), Mike Marqusee (Political Correspondent), Dave Palmer, Mike Phipps, David Pope, Mike Rahman, Jon Rogers, Steve Smith, Alistair Ward (Editor).

● Production Team: Graham Bash, Dan Carter, Gary Drostle, Jenny Fisher, Colin Hall, Louise Kawakami, Dave Lewney, Leonora Lloyd, Dorothy Macedo, Mike Phipps, David Pope, Jon Rogers, Paula Smith, Alistair Ward.

● Contact *LLB* at PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU. Telephone: 0181-985 6597; Email: llb@atomism.demon.co.uk; Fax: 0181-985 6785.

● *LLB* is on the world wide web at: http://www.labournet.org.uk/llb. We offer space to strikers (free) and campaigns. Contact the *LLB* office for details.

LLB AGM

10.30

Saturday 26th October

London Welsh Centre
157-163 Gray's Inn Road
Kings Cross, London WC1

AGENDA

Ken Livingstone and Jim Mortimer on defending the trade union link..... 4-7

Delegates' Conference reports, *Road to the Manifesto*, Labour Party Disabled Members' Group, Scotland, the Alan Simpson column..... 8-15

Liverpool dockers, Hillingdon strikers, Magnet strike, the Geoff Martin column..... 16-19

Nigeria, USA, Palestine, European strike wave, the Michael Hindley column 20-25

Deaths in custody, CS spray, France's Sans Papiers..... 26-27

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

Front cover:
Hillingdon marchers, photo: Paul Mattsson.

Advertise in *LLB*

Do you want to reach the most politically active and well informed members of the Labour Party and trade union movement with news about your meetings, conferences, publications or services? Then advertise in *Labour Left Briefing*. £10 per column inch; £30 for 1/8 page; £55 for 1/4 page; £100 for 1/2 page; £175 for a page.

Subscribe to *LLB*

Annual subscription (10 issues): £14 ordinary, £20 supporting sub, £30 overseas.
Cheques payable to *Labour Left Briefing*.

Name .....

Address .....

.....

..... Tel/Fax .....

Donation ..... Total amount enclosed .....

I wish to pay by direct debit and receive three FREE copies ❑
I wish to take copies on a trial basis to sell ❑

Return to *LLB*, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.



One nation, one team — codswallop

JUST WHEN YOU thought things couldn't get worse, Labour Party Conference saw a further shift rightwards by the Party leadership. Blair even conjured up rose-tinted images of Empire. This may win plaudits in the media and reap short-term rewards in so-called "Middle England", but the consequences in the long run could prove more damaging, as the mistakes made by Labour during its previous terms in office are repeated and large numbers of its traditional supporters find themselves every bit as powerless under a Blair administration as they have been under the Tories. Even the election victory which many Party members assume is in the bag could be put at risk if Labour is seen as having nothing to offer to our traditional supporters.

Earlier this year Blair spoke of a stakeholder society, but events since then have revealed that those words were merely vague and ultimately empty rhetoric.

Blair's conference speech revisited his dream of one nation: we're in the same team as the bosses now. Tell that to the Hillingdon strikers and the Liverpool dockers. What kind of social partnership exists between multi-national companies, millionaire directors and low paid workers? What do a manager earning £100,000 a year and a factory cleaner earning less than £100 a week have in common? How does Labour intend to bridge the gap between golden hand-shakes and the Job Seekers' Allowance?

What kind of stake in Blair's Britain is on offer to workers with limited rights to strike, to disabled people demanding the repeal of the Disability Discrimination Act, or to teachers and pupils in schools that are physically crumbling for want of investment?

The accelerating rightward shift may well have electoral dangers for the Party. The most recent opinion polls show Labour's lead down by nine points — the worst showing for three years. Almost unnoticed during Conference, the *Guardian* reported that Tony Blair's rating among women had slumped from plus 22 to merely plus 2. Labour needs women's votes to win. A recent Fawcett Society survey showed there are more women voters and a higher percentage of women vote. Removing the politics from policy debates means people make judgements based on image and floating voters may in the end find John Major's smile more reassuring than Blair's. It is also almost impossible to underestimate the scale of disillusionment among young people. Many become involved in single-issue campaigns (such as Reclaim the Streets); their general aspirations exceed by some distance what a Blair-led Party is willing to deliver and they often regard Labour and the Tories as Tweedledum and Tweedledee. This leads them either towards fringe parties or abstentionism.

There is a clear danger that this pattern could easily be repeated among other generations. Labour's well-publicised retreat on pensions has sparked particular anger and resentment among sections of the community who fear falling into poverty after retirement.

A crucial factor in forthcoming developments will be the attitude of trade union leaders. Although the union delegations were loyal to the leadership at Blackpool, in some cases voting to defy the mandates given by their own members, there are serious doubts as to whether such loyalty can be maintained in future.



Some union leaders, who for various reasons have previously been inclined to back Blair, will face rank-and-file pressure from their own members, especially in view of the prospect of yet further anti-union laws.

There is a wave of strikes in several countries in Europe, caused by governments' attempts to attack workers' standards of living in order to maximise profits and meet the EU convergence criteria for a single currency. If Labour's "Iron Chancellor" forces further welfare cuts and holds back pressure for decent pay awards in the public sector then similar developments can be expected in this country.

The fear of open dissent within the Party will not last beyond the election. The gap created between what Labour voters expect of a Blair Government and what the prospective members of that Government are prepared to deliver creates not only tensions but also opportunities for the left to argue the case for radical change. As the full scale of the Blair project becomes clear, the audience prepared to consider this case may become more receptive. When the likes of James Callaghan and Frank Field start criticising the leadership for promising too little, it is clear that opposition to Blair is gathering strength.

Those in the unions and the Party who can foresee the need to campaign against the reactionary policies of a Blair Government need to organise now to oppose them, not least because these policies may even endanger the Party's election prospects. We have one thing in common with Tony Blair. We too believe that Labour can lose the next election. But while he thinks it could be lost if Labour promises too much, we think it could be lost because it promises too little. Labour's high poll lead is fragile. If the election of a Labour Government will not lead to real changes in people's lives, why vote for it? On the other hand, if we fought the Tories on their record and offered positive socialist alternatives, we could wipe the floor with them — and equally important, lay the basis for a Labour Government which will make a material difference to people's lives. ❑

LLB page 3

Save our Party!

Ken Livingstone MP argues that the constitutional proposals being touted by the Labour Co-ordinating Committee (LCC) threaten the very existence of the Labour Party.

I REMEMBER the electrifying Labour Party Conference in 1980 when we voted through a whole series of constitutional changes and we thought that we were locking the world into a future of progressive change. Things have slipped a bit since then but I still believe that socialism's greatest achievements globally are to come. A titanic struggle between democracy and the free market is being fought out across the planet. There is still a strong socialist current in our Party.

I want to warn about the dangers that we face in the next 12 months. While the vast majority of Party members will devote all their efforts to defeating the Tories a small destructive minority are more concerned with preparing for a divisive internal civil war in the immediate aftermath of our victory. A small cabal is planning a series of constitutional changes which would effectively abolish CLPs and reduce trade union involvement to mere tokenism. We are about to see a campaign to transform the labour movement utterly so it can never again be a platform for ordinary people to combine together to transform society.

These people are small in number. What gives these grouplets influence beyond their numbers is that many of them have gained jobs as researchers to Labour MPs or in Peter Mandelson's Millbank media centre. A few have gained influence in the Fabians and someone has put up £150,000 to fund their magazine *Progress* for two years.

The LCC is publishing its document now to mobilise support from the press and the British establishment. While they call themselves 'modernisers' they are in reality the 'Millbank Tendency'. Whereas Militant tried to take over the Party from the base up the 'Millbank Tendency' have infiltrated the Party from the top. Many of them are former SDP defectors. They have their own programme and policies which they call 'The Project' to break the trade union link and turn our Conference into a mere rally, to water down our historic commitment to change and simply replace the Tories as managers of the system.

The proposals include abolishing GCs with local council leaders and 'key' workers leading local policy forums. Coupled with the elimination of a TU role from CLPs and the widespread use of internal referendum ballots this would destroy the only real mechanism by which the working class can organise for political change. The proposals if carried would remove any remaining function of the Labour Party Conference. They would completely disembody the Party's structures with referenda - guided from Millbank - replacing meetings and discussion.

This is the biggest threat to the trade union movement we have seen in our lifetime. In one sense it is more damaging than the anti-union laws because these proposals seek to prevent the TU movement from having a political wing from which it can organise and help mobilise to defeat those laws.

We can't say we haven't been warned. Nor must we dismiss these LCC proposals simply because they are the product of a handful of people who are often sadly lacking in essential human skills. We underestimated their proposals for one member one vote a decade ago until it was too late. These creatures are planning the neutering of the Party and its transformation into something that even David Owen wouldn't have tried to impose. The proposals make Owen's SDP look like a Marxist front organisation. At least the SDP had a conference. They had debates and local people selected their candidates.

There is also in existence a series of NEC working parties being run by Tom Sawyer under the heading of "The Party into Power" which are looking at many of the same issues and will provide the mechanism by which these proposals can be sprung on the NEC.

Next summer the Millbank Tendency

The LCC's scheme is spelt out in detail in its pamphlet *New Labour a Stakeholders' Party*. To save you buying a copy here are all the relevant passages.

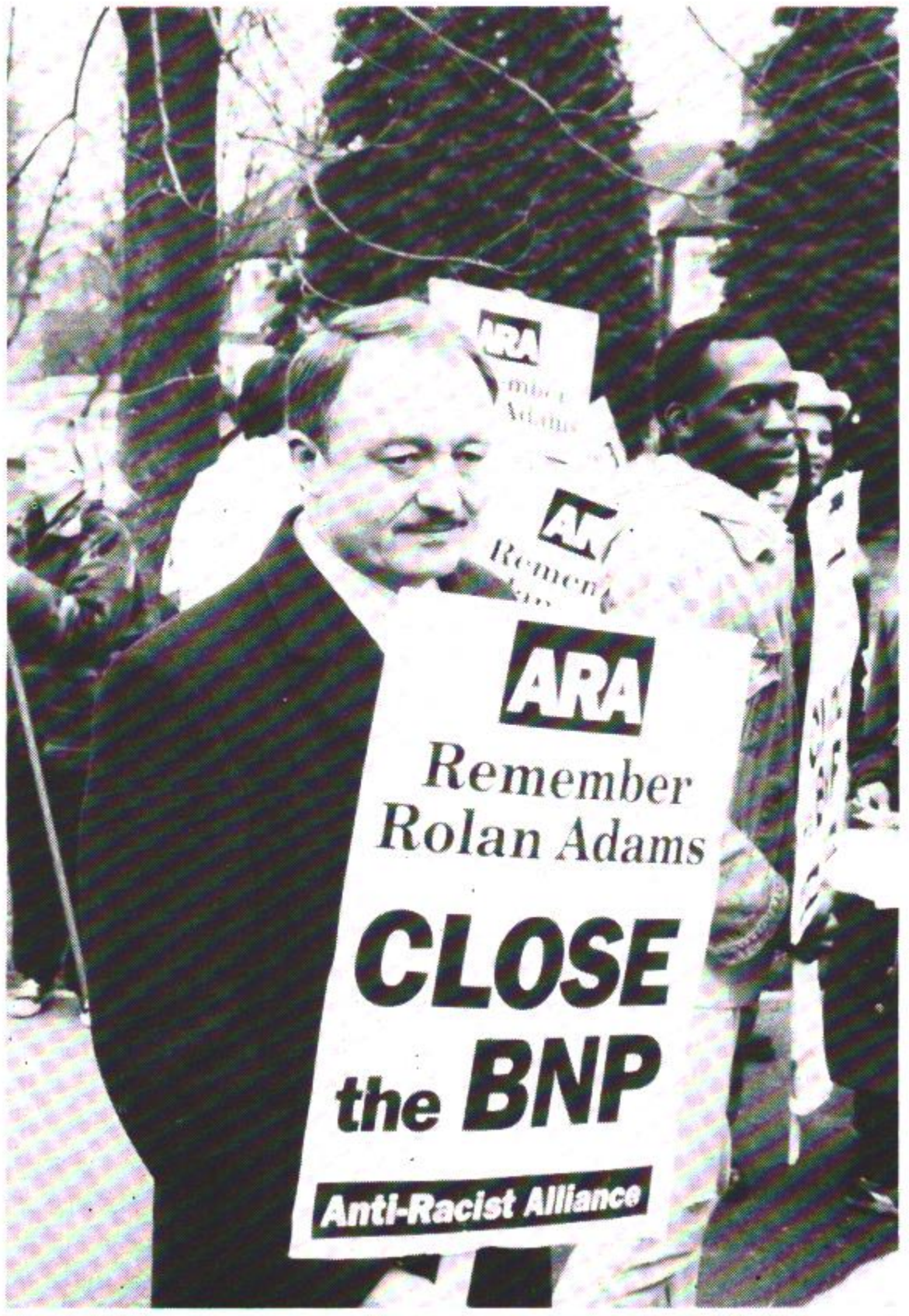
- **The symbolic break with Old Labour has been made in ideological terms through Clause IV, in policy terms through *New Labour, New Life for Britain*, now it needs to be made in organisational terms.**
- **Labour must become a party of individual members and move away from being a party of committees and other obscure representative structures.**
- **The principle of One Member, One Vote by postal ballot should be extended to elections for constituency officers, delegates to conference and local government candidates. Labour should change its local organisational structure from a hierarchical to a flat one.**
- **The traditional GC structure in which ward branches elect delegates to run the constituency party via monthly meetings, should be abandoned. The local branch should become the primary means of organisation.**
- **A small steering group of five or six elected by OMOV would co-ordinate the running of the constituency party, with local ward branches, taskforces and informal networks carrying out the core functions of the party.**
- **The main functions which the local party ought to perform are to organise election campaigns, to fund raise, to provide social activities to recruit new members, to provide members with skills and to give members a say in selecting candidates for branch and public office.**
- **Labour should now go the full course and decide in principle that the party programme should only be voted on by an OMOV ballot of party members and strip out the intermediary policy role of delegates acting on behalf of local branches.**

The logic of the policy forum process is that all policy consultation should be carried out through his route rather than through Party Conference. National and regional policy forums are the obvious

intends to push these proposals through the NEC for rubber stamping at the October 1997 Conference. Coupled with a quick bill to establish the state funding of political parties this would finally see the triumph of the NEC's goal to create a middle of the road, middle class party like the US Democrats. Fortunately 75% of the public are opposed to state funding so we will have huge support in voting to throw out the bill at Second Reading.

We must ensure that the movement is warned of the Millbank Tendency and its plans. We can't allow them to divert us from the task of defeating the Tories, but we must be ready to throw out their constitutional changes and defeat state funding immediately the election is over. It's vital that local parties and trade unions affiliate to the Keep the Party Labour Campaign.

After the election, we will have about three months to mobilise to defeat these proposals. If they go through the Labour Party is dead. This is not just a shift in the balance of power — it is the elimination of the Labour Party. These are the most dangerous proposals I have ever seen in all my time in the Party. We must tell people what is being planned and gear them up to fight it. I think we can defeat them. If we win next October then we can get on with the task of reconstructing our economy and repairing the destruction of the welfare state in the last 18 years. If we lose the Labour Party will be finally dead and buried. ❑



mechanisms for resolving difficult policy issues in government and ensuring that the party is kept on board when Labour is in power.

- The objective is therefore to ensure that the party has a continuing stake in Labour Government. Alongside individual members involvement in local policy taskforces, there must be consultation with key party opinion formers and council leaders. In short, the people who can carry the party outside Westminster. The current structure of representation fails to achieve the right balance, with too many worthies who in difficult times would be hard pressed to rally local branches in defence of a Labour Government.
- The Conference should be used to showcase key selected policy themes in Labour's programme. Instead of discussing everything in not very much detail delegates should have the opportunity to discuss key issues in much more. This would be best done by limiting the programme policy themes under discussion to only a few each year. An OMOV priorities ballot could then determine the two or three additional issues which members most wanted discussed at Conference.

The Conference should be made up of a mixture of Plenary sessions and seminar groups. The Plenary sessions will allow Tony Blair and other front bench colleagues to present their policy themes and policy announcements and so shape the news agenda for that day. The seminar groups could then discuss these in more detail allowing for greater participation and consultation than huge conference sessions can ever.

- The selection process for Parliamentary candidates should be reformed so that Labour is able to attract a wider spread of high quality candidates. Labour should operate a list system for PPCs so that all potential candidates have to be interviewed and approved by the NEC before they can be selected by an individual CLP. This panel of approved candidates should receive training from the Party nationally.

The arcane nomination system should be overhauled to meet the needs of OMOV, with one way forward being to give only ward branches the right to nominate for the shortlist.

- Labour's National Executive Committee should not be a policy making body. Policy should be the preserve of individual members and Labour's Parliamentary Committee (the Shadow Cabinet). The NEC has in practice recognised this in recent years, which is why there have been no policy show downs with Tony Blair. This practice should now be formalised so that there is no potential for the NEC to become a focus for opposition to a Labour Government.
- The NEC should be more representative of the Party as a whole than it is currently. In addition to barring Cabinet members, trade union representation should be scaled down.

The NEC should comprise of five sections: a constituency section elected by OMOV; a PLP/EPLP section elected from within their ranks; a trade union section elected by trade union levy papers; a Councillors section elected by members of the Association of Labour Councillors; and a Young Labour section elected by young members.

Bournemouth blues again

AS THE blue-rinsed ladies of Middle England gathered for the Conservative Party Conference in Bournemouth, the world's media hovered vulture-like in anticipation of civil war over Europe.

But it wasn't to be; at least not in front of the TV cameras. Stephen Dorrell led the way with his cosy fireside chat, followed by the Rael Brook Two, Major and Mawhinney, who exposed their bad taste in shirts to the nation. Ken Clarke succeeded in squaring the circle on the economy and Europe, but his six minutes standing ovation was more the result of a sense of relief by Conference that riots hadn't broken out in the back stalls between pro and anti-Europeans.

Good behaviour was tossed to the winds on the fringe. The *Guardian* debate on Europe saw two old heavyweights size up in front of a 600-strong audience that reminded one of a Roman amphitheatre looking for blood. They got it! Leon Britton and Norman Lamont spat insults at each other while being alternately cheered and jeered from partisan sections of the audience.

To some surprise this not-so-neutral

by the Mole beside the seaside

observer witnessed a typical exchange of verbal blows between an elderly couple and a City whizzkid which ended with the lady screaming "you are a traitor to the Party I was born into". Which side she was on will forever remain a mystery. Another fringe event saw the Eurosceptics up to dirty tricks. When pro-Europeans rose to speak, the sceptics began singing "Land of Hope and Glory" at the top of their voices.

Some speakers seemed to look back to the glory days of the Labour left with a certain nostalgia. In the defence debate, a young Portillo acolyte accused the Labour Party of being "full of CND pacifists and Bolsheviks". If only, some might say! However, the constant jibes at Harriet Harman and Tony Blair over their decisions to send their children to selective and grant maintained schools hit home. Tony's passions may be education, education and education but hypocrisy is unforgivable no matter who is saying it.

For all the stage-managed gloss, some of it shamelessly stolen from Labour organisers, the Tories are split from top to bottom with real hatred oozing from both camps. John Major thought that there were four or five "bastards" in his Cabinet; there are thousands more of them in his Party. It still looks like a Labour victory in the General Election but Ken Clarke's bravura performance on the economy should warn Tony Blair against complacency.

Young Labour Left

Conference

sponsored by
Tribune* and *Campaign Group News
Kent University Students' Union
Canterbury University

26/27th October

Contact: 5 Gullford Road, Wincheap, Canterbury, Kent.
Tel. 01227-765224.

Socialism on an autumn afternoon!

Europe and the world - a socialist analysis

Sunday 10th November 3-5 pm,
Latton Bush Centre (Hugh Kerr's office),
Southern Way, Harlow



Group of the Party of European Socialists

Europe and the Green-Left Alliance

with Freider Wolf MEP, a leading speaker for the Greens in the European Parliament
All welcome - refreshments will be provided. Some interesting speakers and discussions are promised. Make your Sundays more simulating and come to the meeting!
Organised by Hugh Kerr, Labour Euro MP for Essex West & Hertfordshire East.

Details from Mike Hobday 01279-414 464

Labour needs the unions

Jim Mortimer, former General Secretary of the Labour Party, provides a historic perspective to rebut the linkbreakers in defence of a Party of labour.

POLITICAL PARTIES have their roots within particular groups in society. In most modern industrial societies - the USA being the main exception - these groups are based predominantly on class interests. In some other countries political parties reflect the relevance of the struggle for national independence from colonial rule or the impact of religion on the consciousness of the people.

In the USA the two principal parties have their roots in the historical distinction between the economic interests of the manufacturers in the north and the owners of the cotton plantations in the south. This has evolved in a special fashion into two modern parties, both associated with the dominant class in society, but drawing their main support from different groups. The Republicans attract support from big business, the middle class and, nowadays, many of the reactionary ruling circles in the south. The Democrats have support in various minority ethnic groups, organised labour and from citizens, some of them very wealthy, with liberal inclinations.

In Britain, the two main political parties, Labour and Conservative, have strong class identities, not only in their history but in the source of their funds and in their voting strength. The Liberal Democrats have roots in the free traders of the manufacturing north and in the radical tradition of nonconformity. Much of their former strength, derived from their identify with capitalism, passed to the Conservative Party when industrialists were faced with growing international competition. Free trade ceased to be as attractive as it once was.

These associations have never prevented politicians from claiming that they were above class interests and that they truly represented the whole nation. Benjamin Disraeli claimed to be a 'one nation' Tory. With the extension of the franchise, brought about in response to working-class and radical agitation, means had to be found to extend to sections of the enlarged electorate some of the benefits of imperialist expansion. It in no way altered the role of the Tories as a party of the dominant class.

At the height of the slump in 1931 the Labour leadership of MacDonald, Snowden and Thomas joined with the Tories and some Liberals to form a 'National' government. It implemented policies favourable to big business and instituted cuts in unemployment benefit and public welfare.

One of the characteristics of fascism, both in Mussolini's Italy and in Hitler's Germany, was that it claimed to be above class conflict and to represent solely the national interests. It was also the propaganda line adopted by the British fascist leader and former MP, Oswald Mosley. Wherever the fascists took power, however, they sought to destroy the labour movement by suppression and violence. Big business remained dominant. Indeed, its grip was consolidated.

The importance of the link between the Labour Party and the unions is that it provides the Party with a lifeline to workers' interests. This is not to suggest that unions are infallible. But in the long run their *raison d'etre* is the bread and butter concerns of working people. They provide an essential injection of realism derived from experience. The suggestions made from various quarters, both inside and outside the Labour Party, that the link should be reduced or even severed, need to be resisted. There was a case for reducing the voting strength of the unions at Conference. This reform had union support, notably from the TGWU. It should go no further.

Some in Labour's leadership speak of 'fairness but not favours' to the unions. It is a vacuous expression. When were unions given favours? The so-called statutory immunities against liability were essential for their legal existence and collective activity. Without the few circumscribed immunities which remain unions would be outlawed as 'conspiracies' in 'restraint of trade'. What are regarded as immunities in Britain are a pale shadow of legally protected rights in many other countries.

Take, for example, the basic human right of collective representation in the workplace. Such a right is necessary to redress the imbalance of power - and even then only partially - between an employer and an individual worker. It should not be within the prerogative of an employer to withhold such a right. Nor should it be possible for people who do not support trade unionism to veto the right of others to participate in collective representation. Labour's proclaimed policy of majority voting for union recognition is borrowed from US legislation. It finds no place in the practice of other European countries.

With the election of a Labour Government the influence of the unions within the Labour Party, both for supportive and for critical purposes, will be more than ever necessary. It is an issue around which the left can unite and reach out to the tens of thousands of active trade unionists who constitute such an important part of the bedrock of the movement.

Those who want to reduce the influence of the unions within the Party are playing with self-destructive fire. The occupational, economic and political interests of working people cannot be separated into water-tight compartments. The Labour Party and the unions each have their formal independence but together they form one broad movement. It is a movement based upon the interests of working people.

Keep the link

The following statement has been supported by: John Edmonds (GMB), Alan Johnson & Tony Young (NCU), Roger Lyons (MSF), Jimmy Knapp & Vernon Hince (RMT), Lew Adams (ASLEF). We suggest that *LLB* readers move it as a resolution in their branches.

The Labour Party was set up as a collective voice for organised labour in Parliament. Since that purpose is now under threat, we give notice that we intend to defend it.

To break the organisational links between the Party and the affiliated trade unions would destroy any prospects of the Party acting as a force to realise the labour movement's values of equality and solidarity.

It would dash the hopes of all those who look to a Labour Government to change society in the interests of the great majority and to act against poverty, insecurity and injustice.

We will oppose any moves to drive the unions out of the Party they created.

LABOUR PARTY

Public ownership still popular

By Christine Shawcroft

REPORTS OF the death of socialism have been greatly exaggerated. At a pre-election Conference which put more importance on looking presentable than on the policies which could win us the election, a vote of 45% was cast for Composite Five, which called for a return of the utilities to public ownership under democratic control. In marked contrast to the pressure put on the mover and seconder of Composite Eleven, which called for the earnings link to pensions to be restored, no one approached either myself or the mover of the Composite, TGWU-EPIU's Steve Stevenson, to remit. This suggested to me that the leadership had completely missed the strong feeling of support in the Party for a return to public ownership.

It is clear from talking to many delegates that majority support for public ownership exists in the Party. Many supporters voted against in order not to embarrass the leadership who had set their faces against it. This rather begs the question as to why the leadership should set such store by forcing the Party to do what it doesn't want to do, but I'm afraid I have no answer to that.

It still amazes me that support for the policies of Clem Atlee, a right winger who wanted to stay in the wartime coalition Government after the defeat of the Nazis, is now considered treasonable and an attack on the leadership. Support for public ownership isn't a litmus test of extreme left-wing views. It's practically a consensus in the Party. Tony Banks has characterised the Co-operative Party as the place where "right-wing bastards go to die", which I think is rather unfair of him. Yet even though the Co-op is but a shadow of its former self as a mass, radical working class organisation, at its Conference this year it passed a motion calling for the utilities to be taken back into public ownership and placed under local democratic control according to the principles of the Co-operative Movement. This position is supported by the CRS London Political Committee, and by trade unions and CLPs throughout the country. In the first couple of years of a Blair Government, members will no longer be browbeaten by threats of losing the election. Maybe then they'll feel able to vote for socialism, not "the unity of the graveyard."



Christine Shawcroft

Pensioning off democracy

Dave Lawrence, Conference delegate, Poplar & Canning Town CLP reports:
This year's Labour Party Conference was a very professionally managed event. Let no-one underestimate the skills and co-ordination that go into projecting a Party that speaks with one voice.

But do not confuse loyalty with unity. Not a single delegate in the hall was going to attack the leadership a few months before a general election.

Delegates were not trusted. Speakers were carefully hand-picked to back the executive line. Invariably they were Prospective Parliamentary Candidates.

I moved the pensions composite, the contentious issue of the week. Contentious? When a resolution to index pensions to earnings was passed at our General Committee, no-one was against. And I suspect this was the same throughout the country. Yet at Conference this was somehow portrayed as a challenge to the leadership.

There were two virtually identical composites on the agenda. Some of us in the compositing meeting suspected that there might be attempts to remit this issue (rightly as it turned out). So at the Conference there were two motions: one remitted and one pressed to a card vote. This did at least force some concessions on a review.

But either the NEC is going to accept indexation to earnings, in which case why not vote in principle, or it's a sham.

As well as calling for re-indexing of pensions to earnings, the composite called for restoration of income support to young people, retention of child benefit for 16 to 18-year-olds and abolition of the JSA and similar workfare programmes.

Voting and Party democracy should be important components of real unity. Party members must be reassured that issues will not be dropped, and delegates should explain their voting to their Constituency Party and union members.

That the NEC pressed so hard for the defeat of a motion seeking universal state provision of welfare is worrying enough. Far more worrying is that they chose to do so through appeals to loyalty, unity and trust rather than arguing politically.

Intimidation and

Graham Bash, Conference delegate, Hackney North and Stoke Newington CLP reports.

The absence of almost any serious debate at this year's Conference was only partly due to the desire for unity felt by all sections of the Party. There was also an unprecedented pressure on delegates not to voice any opposition to the platform. I was sent to Conference with an amendment specifying that the minimum wage commitment should be fixed at half male median earnings (then £4.26 per hour). USDAW General Secretary, Garfield Davies, took charge of the compositing meeting and immediately demanded that I withdraw.

When I refused, I was faced with nearly ninety minutes of abuse. I explained that the

LLB page 8

CONFERENCE

Media circus spins on round

THIS WAS my third annual conference as a delegate. The first difference was the regional briefing before we even got to Blackpool. We received useful information about compositing and conference procedures, but the main thrust was that Conference is a media event and that all the media wanted were negative stories. If approached for our reactions, we should say nothing unless we could be positive.

I am afraid I disobeyed this instruction even before Conference began by doing a *Times* interview which appeared on Monday, calling for positive commitments rather than vague promises, particularly on vote-winning issues like pensions.

At an eve-of-Conference briefing, Party officials advised us of the NEC's attitude to each composite motion. Tony Blair gave a brief pep talk, then MPs Barbara Roche and Harriet Harman explained the importance of supporting the leadership. One delegate wanted to do so, but had been mandated to vote against; Harriet suggested that her mandate need not be a problem.

The mood of Conference was very self-disciplined. The majority of constituency

By Dorothy Macedo, Conference delegate, Finchley & Golders Green CLP

delegates were first-timers and no-one wants to be accused of rocking the boat in the run-up to the election. Debates started and ended with an NEC speaker: no time limits for them. Numerous video clips padded the agenda, leaving little time for speakers from the floor.

On the last day, the *Glasgow Herald* journalist who gave the vote of thanks on behalf of the press joked that his was the only speech all week not to have been vetted in advance. Not even the elderly chap receiving the merit award was exempt!

As a result of the stage-management, Conference was generally dull. When it did come to life, as in the pensions debate, there was a glimpse of what a dynamic event it might have been.

The most bizarre moment was the vote on the *Road To The Manifesto* document; no NEC speaker, no video, no debate - just a vote. Many delegates were bemused. But what's the point of a debate if only one response is permissible?



Dorothy Macedo

The Socialist Campaign Group Network produced a daily delegates' bulletin with analysis of the key issues. The final day's edition included a trenchant critique of the *Road To The Manifesto* document and explained why people should not vote for it. The left needs to rally its forces and present a clear alternative - the increased votes for the Socialist Campaign Group's NEC candidates and in particular Abbott and Skinner retaining their places shows the potential amongst ordinary Party members.

manipulation

debate that we were having at the compositing meeting of about 18 delegates should be had on the Conference floor. Davies accused me of putting my "selfish demand for a debate above the objective of re-electing a Labour Government". He said that it was obvious that I did not care about a Labour election victory, he could see it in my face! Eventually after endless browbeating, another younger and first time delegate-gave in under the pressure and the alternative composite fell.

There was Party unity on the surface but underneath it was clear that many delegates, though prepared to toe the line, were far from convinced. The votes in the constituency section of the NEC and on public ownership of privatised utilities, student loans, Trident and repeal of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 showed a significant level of opposition to the leader's agenda.

Not another party political broadcast...

Councillor Mel Packer, Conference delegate, Chipping Barnet CLP reports:
One wag said to me, "I know this Conference is intended to be a week long party political broadcast, but I didn't know we'd have to sit through so many of them." By the end of the week, the 'short films', which sounded like trailers for *Trainspotting*, were greeted with derision even by Blair's own supporters.

"Preaching to the converted" springs to mind when thinking of Blair's speech. Many journalists could be heard on the Tuesday afternoon saying how much of the leader's speech could only have been given by a devout Christian.

I am not by any means denigrating the history of this Party (not in the way the LCC is doing at the moment), and I do acknowledge the role Christian Socialism has played in the movement. But this is supposedly a multi-faith, mass membership party (if not a 'broad church'). However, many women had difficulty remembering the last time it was necessary to stage a picket outside a Labour Life (anti-abortion) meeting.

The Americanisation of our everyday way of life is extending to politics. The flag waving, the synchronised standing ovations makes one ask if Conference is still a decision-making body or merely a platform for favoured speakers to appear on TV. Even Prospective Parliamentary Candidates had to have their speeches vetted, despite the fact that there was no guarantee they would be called to speak.

But what I fear most is the influence of the New Right, seen in the union bashing and the intended suppression of the General Committee and democratic processes of the Party in favour of Napoleonic plebiscites. Shortly the family Blair will no longer be likened to the Clintons, because the leader will be too tied up discussing workfare with Bob Dole. ❑

LLB page 9

The cosmetic surgeon and his spin doctors

Cosmetic surgery to capitalism is the limit of Blair's ambition argues Bob Spooner, Leeds North East CLP. It is not enough.

TONY BLAIR'S Conference speech was deeply distasteful. It could have been given by David Owen in his heyday. Even its revivalist rhetoric was stale and populist. It was not just the Christian veneer of Tony Blair's Conference speech that sickened me; it was its barren content.

I joined the Party in 1946 because I had read *Let Us Face the Future*. I had realised that any system in which money breeds money is flawed. Why should some be born with silver spoons in their mouths and others inherit malnutrition?

I resented the rich for the power their wealth gave them. Then it was the monarchy and the House of Lords. Now my anger has been overtaken by the golden handshake and the fat cat entrepreneur.

The Labour Government of 1945 introduced a swingeing inheritance tax, a steeply graded income tax and a capital gains tax. It improved trade union legislation to enable workers to strike for a better share of the money they earned and for better working conditions. As I see it, the right to withdraw one's labour, and support others who do so, is a basic human right.

In 1945 the belief in competition rather than co-operation distinguished the Liberals and Tories from us. They worshipped at the shrine of profit. Like Harriet Harman, they saw state payments as handouts, not entitlements.

My beliefs were not based on Marx or Morris but on ordinary human values. In any decent society all its members should enjoy as of right a reasonable standard of living, decent housing, food, clothing, basic utilities, transport facilities and a surplus of income for pleasure and relaxation. They should have free educational opportunities at any age and medical and dental provision. The community should provide all of these.

In 1945 we came nearer than we have ever been since to realising these objectives. We never got it wholly right, but the Health Service, the nationalisation programme, the 1944 Education Act (which would lead inexorably on to comprehensive education) and the establishment of the welfare state, were massive contributions towards creating a civilised society.



Our welfare state was never satisfactory. But, given our economic situation, we did remarkably well.

There were other dimensions. We saw how the colonies were based on exploitation and wanted to get rid of them.

We also needed to banish the spectre of war. It seemed obvious that it is wrong to trade in weapons of destruction. Over this we did less well, leaving the defence industry in private hands and trying to maintain a world role as a great power, instead of trusting to the United Nations. We spent too much on defence. For fifty years we protected ourselves at great expense against imaginary threats.

Under Blair's influence New Labour has rejected everything that distinguished the Attlee Government from radical administrations like Campbell-Bannerman's. It has rejected a steeply graded income tax and profits tax; it has rejected reinstating a stringent inheritance tax; it will keep schemes that allow investors to avoid paying tax on interest. It will not take back into common ownership the utilities, or water, or the railways. Yet if we could afford nationalisation in 1945, we can afford it now.

It is not a question of money, it is a question of belief. Comprehensive education has been destroyed by social selection and now our education service reflects rather than heals the divisions in society.

The welfare state is under threat. It is a preference for means-tested benefits that has stopped us promising to link pensions with average earnings once again.

On top of all this, we are not attacking our own murky arms trade; we even intend to keep Trident. We are taking more out of the third world than we are putting back and our Manifesto is vague about this disgrace.

Over law and order we sound like the Tories. There is a glimmer of hope in what we say about the NHS, but all parties make much the same promises.

As a smoke-screen to conceal our failure to give the unions back their basic rights, we are promising to join the Social Chapter and establish a minimum wage.

We are told we need near-Tory policies to win over disenchanted Conservatives, yet we could now win on a valid socialist programme, if we campaigned on these issues. We have an unworthy manifesto, not out of necessity, but because cosmetic surgery to the unacceptable face of capitalism marks the limit of the leadership's ambition.

Blair is a Christian, not a socialist. He has the effrontery to call his half-baked, charitable, liberal emotions, socialism. Christianity like other religions, has always bolstered the status quo, reconciling the poor to their miseries. It is his personal belief in this trivial manifesto that gives his callow speeches their apparent resonance. But the manifesto is more than a lost opportunity, it is a mandate for betrayal, and that is why we should all vote no in this loaded ballot.

LLB page 10

Vote "no" or abstain on Blair's manifesto?



Mike Phipps's article in October's *LLB* argued for a "no" vote in the *New Labour, New Life for Britain* referendum. Tony Dale, Manchester Central CLP, offers an alternative tactic.

MIKE PHIPPS in October's *LLB* argues for the left to campaign for a "no" vote in this ballot. He advocates the creation of "a genuinely broad coalition of forces involving *Tribune*, MEPs and the trade union leaders". Would a campaign for a "no" vote be the best way to build this "broad coalition of forces"?

We all want to see a Labour Government. We also want it to start undoing the damage inflicted by the Tories over the last 17 years. Inside the labour movement in this crucial period we need to be attempting to construct the broadest possible alliance around advocating a number of key policies and defending Labour's basic structures from the unwelcome attention of the Blairites.

So how does this relate to the ballot on the Manifesto? Thank goodness getting Labour elected does not hinge on its manifesto. Labour may well have its most pro-capitalist manifesto ever but it remains a mass workers party linked to the unions and open to the pressures and demands of the mass labour movement.

Many Labour Party members are not happy with the Manifesto but they will not vote "no" for the fear of damaging Labour's electoral chances. They will see voting "no" as the irresponsible actions of an isolated embittered minority. In the circumstances abstention is the best option. If we seek to build a broad alliance to win a majority in the labour movement we should seek an alliance with this section of the Party.

Being in a small minority is often unavoidable on issues of principle. However in this situation a bloc of the hard left around a tactic which throws up barriers between the left and the mass of the labour movement is not a good idea.

Also, we are not in favour of the Manifesto being decided by plebiscite. The process does not allow for amendments and does not allow us to vote for section by section. This referendum is one of the rare occasions when the method of consultation is so bad it deserves to be boycotted. Widespread abstention will be a protest against the fundamentally undemocratic nature of a referendum on a detailed manifesto.

When you read this the ballot on the Manifesto will nearly be over. However this discussion is not just about the Manifesto, it is also about how we construct the broad alliances necessary to defend Labour from the Blair project.

Stan Newens MEP and London Central European Constituency Labour Party invite you to a

Conference on the European Left and enlargement of the European Union

Saturday 30th November 1996 at the University of North London

The projected enlargement of the European Union to include the countries of central and eastern Europe raises central policy issues for the European left in both halves of the continent. The aim of this conference is to explore some of these issues and to try and map our response.

Sessions include:

- The Party of European Socialists and issues raised by enlargement
- The European trade unions and east central Europe
- The Home Affairs and justice pillar and the European left
- The politics of the budgetary issues

Workshops on the debate on the left on EU enlargement in Germany, Italy, Spain, Poland and Hungary.
Closing panel session on the Labour Party and EU enlargement.

Group of the Party of European Socialists

- Labour Party registration inquiries to Stan Newens' Office on 0171 221 0092; academic and other registration inquiries to Peter Gowan, University of North London on 0171 607 2789 Extension 2759.

Civil rights for

The Tories' Disability Discrimination Act of 1995 continues and institutionalises the oppression of disabled people. The legislation makes it legal for firms employing under 20 people to treat a disabled person less favourably because of his or her impairment. It includes the concept of justifiable discrimination. Ian Malcolm-Walker, the Assistant Secretary of the Labour Party Disabled Members' Group and Secretary of the Trade Union Disability Alliance looks into the all-important definition of disability, the importance of the issue to the labour movement and the battle so far in the Labour Party.

WHEN disabled people and their organisation talk of a social model of disability what do they mean? An example: a disabled person turns up for a meeting but cannot attend because it is upstairs and he or she has a mobility impairment. According to the medical model he or she cannot get in because they cannot climb stairs. It says the disabled are disabled by their impairment. According to the social model, he or she cannot get into the meeting because it is held in an inaccessible venue. It is the physical barrier (the stairs) and society that disables.

Disability is a socially constructed experience resulting from environmental, economic and social barriers faced by people because of their impairments. Disabled people face both discrimination in environmental, economic and social barriers; and marginalising prejudice in society. Put another way, a disabled person is an individual in his/her own right, placed in a disabling situation brought about by these barriers that the person cannot overcome in the same way as other citizens because of their impairment. When these barriers are removed by the granting of the rights and access that is needed there will be no disabled people. There will still, of course, be people with impairments, but they will be playing a full role in society. Disabled people seek to secure rights that will give them the ability to overcome economic and social barriers as well as environmental barriers.

Will Labour deliver?

When the Party first carried a resolution on Civil Rights for Disabled People in 1994, some of the disabled delegates got together and started a journey that would lead eventually to the vote on the floor of this year's conference. When Harry Barnes' bill went down to a defeat at the hands of the Tories, a larger group met and set up the Steering Committee for the formation of a Labour Party Disabled Members' Group.

A very successful fringe meeting at Brighton in 1995 was followed by nine months' hard work leading to an inaugural Annual General Meeting in June this year.

In March 1996 they wrote to all CLPs with a model resolution arguing that the next Labour Government should pass civil rights legislation to replace the inadequate Disability Discrimination Act. The response was magnificent: twenty-two resolutions, the majority with our wording. All but one called for replacing the DDA with a Civil Rights Act.

At Conference there were two composite resolutions on Civil Rights for Disabled People. The NEC supported one and unsuccessfully asked for remission of the other one. 47% of Conference voted against the platform. This was nearest the NEC came to losing a conference vote in two years. What had happened to the unanimity shown on this issue in 1994 and 1995? No one at Conference supported the DDA. Conference has come and gone. The composite was narrowly defeated. But the issue will not go away.

The debate was between those who believe the DDA can be amended and those who want a new Civil Rights Act that will, among other things, repeal the present act. Supporting amendment were the NEC and Shadow Cabinet including Tom Clarke, Shadow Minister for Disabled Peoples Rights. This is also the position of the National League of the Blind and Disabled. The GMB & TGWU were in this camp when it came to the vote. In the repeal and replace corner are the British Council of Disabled People (BCODP),

Organising and fighting

DISABLED PEOPLE are organising. Over the last twelve years, disabled people have set up access groups, coalitions, resource centres and so on; organising in unions and across unions through the Trades Union Disability Alliance. These organisations have come together in the British Council of Disabled People (BCODP).

Join the Labour Party Disabled Members' Group or the Trades Union Disability Alliance and get your trade union branches and CLPs to affiliate. Ask how your union/CLP voted on composite 38. Work for the election of a Labour Government as the Tories will not give disabled people the laws they want. Fight to commit Labour to repeal the Disability Discrimination Act and replace it with fully comprehensive and enforceable civil rights legislation appropriate to the rights, needs and aspirations of disabled people drafted in full consultation with disabled people and our organisations.

- Contacts: TUDA, Dave Cooke, 36 Foxes Way, Warwick, CV34 6AY, 01926 402195. Labour Party Disabled Members' Group, Ian Malcolm-Walker, 8 Castle House, Derby, DE1 2QG, 01332 370223, e-mail 100616.2302@compuserve.com

Lobby of Parliament

Rights now!

St Steven's Gate 2.30 pm, Monday 2nd December,

Details from Rights Now, 12 City Forum, 250 City Road, London, EC1V 8AF, Tel: 0171-250 3222, Minicom: 0171-250 4119.

LLB page 12

disabled people

the Trade Union Disability Alliance (TUDA), UNISON, MSF and the Labour Party Disabled Members' Group. The NEC is mistaken when it argues that tinkering with the DDA will take less Parliamentary time than clearcut new legislation. The draft manifesto contains the commitment to support comprehensive and enforceable civil rights for disabled people against discrimination at work and in society.

So what would a Labour Government do if a private member's bill for civil rights were introduced? They spent years arguing that a Tory Government ought to make time for such a bill.

How can a party declare a commitment to equal opportunities and then deny an oppressed group the right to choose the method of their own liberation?



PHOTO: AGNES FLETCHER.

Attenders registering for the first AGM of the Labour Party Disabled members group, June 1996.

Making the rules as they go along

People winning appeals and having their benefit reinstated is not what the Tories intended. So the rules are changing. Eddie Barns of Incapacity Action looks at the unforseen problems the Incapacity For Work Act is causing the Government.

DESPITE ATTEMPTS TO deprive sick and disabled people of their benefit the Government is not saving the amounts of money it hoped. It has therefore decided to change the appeals procedure to ensure that more claimants fail. At present claimants are entitled to an oral hearing where all aspects are discussed. The tribunal chairman must explain why benefit has been refused.

Thousands of claimants will not be aware of their right to an oral hearing because agencies to give help and provide advice have been severely reduced. Paper hearings for appeals have a far higher failure rate and the Government saves even more money. The process becomes a rubber stamping exercise. In practice appeals are rejected automatically.

Incapacity Action has received numerous horror stories of abuse by DSS doctors (Benefit Agency Medical Services). These doctors employed by the DSS to carry out the "All Work Test" have, in well-documented cases, asked claimants to carry out physical tasks they clearly felt unhappy with. In one instance, Sarah Chapman, a woman with a severe spinal condition, was asked to kneel down. She said she was unable to. Her disability score sheet which claimants are obliged to complete made this clear. The doctors insisted. Consequently, she fractured her right arm.

Initially her benefit was withdrawn, only to be reinstated when she went to the press. She is now considering legal action against the DSS if she can obtain legal aid. We have been given many instances of similar abuse.

In November, Incapacity Action is hoping to give evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Social Security. It has been set up to examine the effectiveness of the Incapacity for Work Act.

We have met with committee member Jeremy Corbyn to ensure that claimants get a voice and a chance to explain the fear and damage the act is causing to ill and disabled people. Labour Conference made no commitment to repeal the Incapacity for Work Act.

An incoming Labour Government must as one of its first priorities take this act from the statute book and replace it with a fair and properly assessed benefit based on need. Nothing less is acceptable. ❑

LLB page 13

From the belly of the beast

Plans to restructure the Scottish Labour Executive might be the first front in the modernisers' campaign to cut the union link. Cathy Jamieson of the Scottish Executive Committee argues mischievous leaks to the press are not the way to kick off a debate.

ACCORDING to the papers,"The great beasts of the executive committee continue to roam untouched". Apparently the Scottish Executive of the Party is to be overhauled after the summer's referendum debate.

Members of the Executive were described as being "unaccountable" and "anonymous". A restructuring to allow wider geographical representation and one member one vote for some sections of the Executive is to be introduced.

The consultation should have gone through the democratic structures. The anonymous leaks did the Party as a whole no favours.

The articles in the Scottish press of course failed to point out that members of the Executive are already democratically elected to represent the Party's various sections.

Which of these are "unaccountable"? If you were to believe the media reports anyone who voiced an opinion contrary to the leadership over the referendum is guilty.

I have no problem with accountability. As a Constituency member, I represent an area which covers two Euro Constituencies - 18 CLPs in all.

I see my role as representing the views of the ordinary Party members. I try to ensure that issues they raise get on to the agenda, and report back in a newsletter and at Constituency meetings. I make this a priority.

It is important that the full range of opinion within the Party on major issues is discussed and debated in an honest and open way. This is after all, what democracy is about - I disagree with many of my colleagues on the Executive on some policy matters, as they will disagree with me, but I will defend their right to argue their point of view.

The future will bring changes to the way the Party in Scotland is run.

The Scottish Parliament will mean that we will need to look at the relationship between the Executive and its members, as well as that between Scottish representatives and the National Executive on policy. This had already been recognised well before the referendum debate even started.

I trust that when CLPs and branches make their views known they will continue to argue for a Scottish Executive which will truly represent the views of ordinary Party members and all sections of the Party.

We need an Executive that pushes forward the policies agreed at Conference, rather than a structure which fears debate and differences of opinion.

Far from "facing extinction", as the press suggest, I suspect ordinary Party members will want an animal which roars loudly on their behalf, rather than a tame pet, which only makes an occasional squeak.

Ruled out of order

By Simon Letts, Southampton Socialist Campaign Group

FOLLOWING THE recent victory for the Labour Party in the Southampton Unitary Authority elections, the new Labour Group met to vote for its leadership for the forthcoming municipal year. I was present at the AGM of the Group as a GC delegate and privy to the dreadful shenanigans that occurred.

The meeting was split into two parts. At first the well-organised centre-left slate won a majority of the contested elections. The highlight of the night was undoubtedly the 16:11 victory of the Campaign Group's Alan Lloyd over Blairite John Arnold for the chair of the powerful Strategy and Resources Committee, leaving Arnold as leader.

This committee had been designed to ensure that the personal empires of key right-wing councillors were maintained. With this defeat Arnold's supporters lost all but one of the elections that followed.

Rather than accept the decision of the Group, Arnold, aided by John Denham MP, Alan Whitehead (PPC) and others, spent the weekend ringing around and applying the most awful pressure on councillors. One Lloyd supporter was phoned seven times and others were threatened with loss of their democratically elected positions.

This intolerable pressure bore fruit because when the meeting continued on the Tuesday, Arnold proposed and won a motion that "the position of chair of Strategy and Resources and leader should be held by one person". This in effect changed the rules of an AGM in the middle of the meeting and applied those rules retrospectively. This goes against all the rules of the labour movement.

Alan Lloyd took this appalling decision remarkably well and his conduct throughout was honourable. It is essential that colleagues on the left support Alan and the other nine councillors who stayed loyal to the democratic decision of the Group.

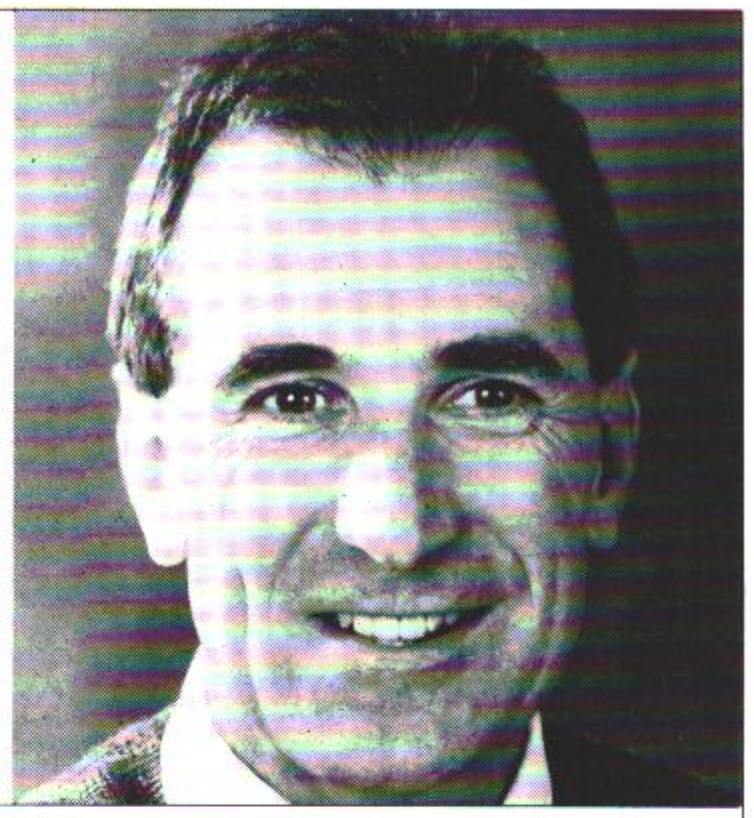
In New Labour it seems if the rules don't suit you throw them out.

Amuse your allies - infuriate your Blairite relatives with a *Labour Left Briefing* Drosmas card.



Two designs, four colours. Blank inside for your personal message. *LLB* New Years' resolution on the back.
Pack of 8 assorted (£3 including postage).
Pack of 20 assorted (£5.50p including postage).
Cheques to *Labour Left Briefing*, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU .

the Alan Simpson column



The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

Fighting over words

AS A MANTRA there was something reassuring about socialists being able to say that we believed in the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange. It wasn't that we'd ever got that close to doing so, but the old Clause IV did at least have a memorable ring to it. When the replacement came out, towering principles were as hard to find as memorable phrases.

No one should underestimate the importance of 'the language of the obscure' in the 'modernising' project. The first stage is to develop a language which could mean anything or nothing. The second is to become specific only by promising even less. It is no wonder that the left has stood at a sceptical distance from all of the language and sound bites and renewal. We are now at the edges of one of the most important periods of debate in the Party for more than a decade. It is essential that we ask ourselves whether there are some aspects of 'leadership speak' which are worth fighting over.

The one word which both offers and invites the greatest challenge to the left must surely be 'stakeholder'. The stakeholder society was rolled out as something more substantive and laudable than Thatcher's 'shareholding democracy'. But it has been left as a political peg with nothing hung on it. How can pensioners without a decent pension really consider themselves to be stakeholders in anything? Or young people living in a cardboard box rather than a home of their own? Or workers caught on the treadmill of short-term contracts to avoid the humiliation of the Job Seekers Allowance?

I know that there are good comrades who will not use this word, or pursue ar explora-tion of the genuinely socialist context in which it could be used. Their fears are that it is no more than another slick phrase in the game of political trivia which promises great changes, but without any challenge to the distribution of wealth and power. Though I understand this, I have to say that nothing opens up a more lively debate, in the meetings I do, than to ask people to tell you whether they are stakeholders, and what it would take to make them genuinely so.

Within minutes you find yourself knee-deep into conversations which sweep across from a welfare state (based on the principles of universality) to the case for industrial common accountability. All weave their way through the exchanges (and link them together) until you find yourself getting close to the discussions of twenty years ago. Then the left were running with a plan (the Alternative Economic Strategy) which may have had all sorts of holes in it, but it also had its virtues. Principal amongst these was that large sections of society seemed to have had a toehold in it.

It surfaced in trade union conferences as much as in local authority economic development plans. Tenant and community organisations pinched parts of it as corner-stones for their own urban renewal campaigns. Black, anti-racist, women's and disabled organisations demanded an equalities dimension to it as a precondition of support. The influence or involvement of the left turned up everywhere.

Two decades later the Party has lost the habit of talking politics to anyone apart from the press. Muting the structures of critical debate within the Party and the labour movement has played a big part in this. But so too has been the self disconnection of the Party from campaigns outside its own control. Many of the best campaigns today have given up on waiting for the Labour Party to give a lead (and immediately doubt our motives when we do). Many also draw on a language which is heavy on 'values' but thin on politics.

But from animal rights protests, to Fight Against Cuts in Education and the National Pensioners Convention, it is hard to use the word stakeholding without it rapidly being given a depth of meaning which is genuinely exciting, not least because it becomes a common and obvious bridge which connects one campaign to another. I suggest it is why the leadership doesn't use the word that much anymore.

Rather than turn our backs on all the outpourings from the sound bite machines and the sultans of spin, taking up some of the words and giving them a genuine meaning, which socialists would not be embarrassed by, could ease the Party back into political discussions it has lost the habit of having.

However we do it, the left has to pick up the challenge of the times we are moving into. If the years of opposition give way to Labour in office, we too must shift from being oppositionist to propositionist. Fighting off Tory cuts must be superseded by fighting for socialist changes, and putting meaning to phrases which are in circulation but without substance.

Is it an embarrassment or a sell out to run with words and phrases lifted from New Labour in this way? Not at all. More often than not, the embarrassment will be all the other way round.

TRADE UNION NEWS

Liverpool dockers:

A new political alignment was born in Liverpool on the weekend of September 28th-30th, when the Reclaim the Future alliance of musicians, anarchists and environmentalists threw its weight behind the port's 500 sacked dockers. Chris Knight and Liz Knight report.

AN ANNIVERSARY carnival and celebration on Saturday 28th September triggered a 24-hour strike by tugboat crews from midnight on Monday, with road blockades and the occupation of three gantries and the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company headquarters at Seaforth Container Terminal throughout the day.

While the dockers welcomed the colourful coalition of Kurdish and Turkish workers from North London, roads' activists, greens, ravers, fire-eaters, unemployed youth, anarchists and others, Transport and General Workers Union General Secretary Bill Morris called on the dockers to disown their new support. Arthur Scargill welcomed the dockers' new allies, telling Saturday's rally that Bill Morris should initiate nationwide industrial action to bring the dockers to victory. Andrea Needham, one of four women recently acquitted by a Liverpool jury of disabling a British Aerospace Hawk fighter aircraft, was cheered as she reported that the Maritime Union of Australia, staunch supporters of Liverpool's dockers, was now boycotting all trade with Indonesia.

Following the tugboat stoppage came a week of unprecedented worldwide industrial sympathy action. No vessels entered or left Liverpool on Monday and Mersey Docks shares fell a further 14 pence, with continuing falls since.

The state took the march and rally on Saturday seriously. Operational Support Division officers, wearing black bullet-proof vests, helmets and without identification numbers, sealed off the city centre as the march went past. All afternoon, a helicopter trailed a surveillance camera over the crowd. Later that evening, the same officers were wearing black balaclavas, only their eyes showing, as they attempted to keep 300 Reclaim the Future activists from entering the disused Customs Building they had previously squatted. In the end, threatened with break-ins to find accommodation across the port area, the police received instructions from on high to give way and let everyone in.

While the mass action had been advertised to begin at 10.00 a.m., in fact the occupation had already begun at 5.00 a.m., taking the police completely by surprise. A busload of activists succeeded in tricking the police at the port entrance by pretending to be scabs arriving for work. They were cheerfully waved through the gates. Soon, three gantries were climbed and ladders and ropes used to scale the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company Headquarters. By 8.00 a.m., around 600 dockers and supporters had arrived. Everyone was penned in by the OSD which began making arrests to which the demonstrators responded with road blockades. Meanwhile motorways leading into Liverpool were blocked by the police as several coachloads of supporters were prevented from reaching the port. The police also got their vengeance later in the evening, when they attacked returning isolated young activists in cells and police vans, boasting "now it's our turn".

The Merseyside Port Shop Stewards are calling for a public enquiry into police violence and intimidation against the dockers and their supporters. The Police Operational Support Group, port police and scabs were given free rein to attack demonstrators. Allegations include: beatings in police vans and in the cells, threats of torture, and the actual use of cigarette lighters to terrorise - burning hair off the backs of people's hands while handcuffed. Evidence is being collated to be forwarded to the dockers' local MPs.

While Bill Morris condemned the young people who came to support the dockers, Jimmy Davies, Secretary of the Stewards Committee, declared at a mass meeting on 4th October: "We did see the banners of Reclaim the Future fluttering over the occupied docks. We didn't see the T&G, whose officers should have been there. We ask our officials: 'Where were you'? Now we know who are friends are; we welcome these young people's support and idealism."

- All witness statements, video and photographic evidence should be forwarded to Kevin Robinson, MPSS, TGWU, Transport House, Islington, Liverpool, L3 8EQ.



PHOTO: NICK CRASKE.

Police prepare to smash up the dockers' carnival, 28th September.

Mass picket of Liverpool docks

Seaforth container terminal, near Crosby Road

10am
Monday 25th November
Contact: 0151-207 3388

London planning meeting

11 am - 5 pm
Saturday 23rd November
Conway Hall, Red Lion Square
London WC1

LLB page 16

Liverpool occupation: what the papers said

By Jacky Vance, London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers.

ON THE evening of September 30th, reports of the successful occupation of the port of Liverpool were flashed on TV news bulletins across the country. The unofficial media embargo on the year-long dockers' dispute had at last been broken.

The *Observer* was the first to break the news blockade. Under the heading "Ravers Join the Mersey Docks March", it carried a photo of a demonstrating wolf with a drum, followed by an accurate history of the dispute, concentrating on the success of the international blockade.

It ended with a quote from Jimmy Donovan, President of the Maritime Union of Australia, announcing a week-long blockade of all Liverpool ships in Australian ports. "Any person who is interested in the preservation of trade unionism and the preservation of the planet can count on our support."

The *Guardian* ran a gossipy, slightly cynical article by its environmental editor detailing the atmosphere in a squatted dockside building as 300 environmentalists held workshops, argued over graffiti, practised Samba drumming and prepared for action the following morning. The same paper later published a piece by John Vidal, who wrote, "The advantage for the dockers was that their guests lent their cause an immediate vitality, volubility and youthful energy sorely missing in a dazed and confused union movement.

For their part, the activists who bussed and hitched in from a dozen cities said that they learnt from the dockers' discipline, humanity and tenacity." Port Shop Steward Kevin Robinson told the *Liverpool Daily Post*: "The rooftop protest was to raise the profile of the dispute. I was in radio contact acting as a go-between between those on the roof and the authorities. We are pleased with the excellent help we have received today."

Most of the national papers covered the "violence" on the picket line on Monday morning, omitting to mention Reclaim the Streets' commitment to peaceful methods or the fact that only the police resorted to violence. The *Financial Times* focused on Transport and General Workers' Union General Secretary Bill Morris's demand that the dockers dissociate themselves from outsiders involved in the dispute. The Merseyside Port Shop Stewards' Committee replied by praising "the principled, courageous and peaceful support given over many weeks by the Advance Party, Reclaim the Streets and other grassroots environmental groups" and added: "This unique unity between trade unionists and environmental groups will continue".



PHOTO: PAULINE BRADLEY.

Marching for the dockers, 28th September.

Dockers' International begins to bite

Dot Gibson, editor *Dockers' Charter* writes:
The mass picket in Liverpool on September 30th was part of an impressive day of international solidarity action in which dockers took action in 20 countries. At the dockers' mass meeting in Liverpool on October 11th, International Co-ordinator Terry Teague announced the following successes ignited by the weekend of action of September 28th-30th:

- on 30th September in the port of Sydney, go-slow actions against Australian National Line vessels; further actions planned against ZIM line ships.
- on the same day, Danish dockworkers in the ports of Copenhagen, Aarhus, Horsens and Odense took solidarity industrial action, ranging from 3-hour to 24-hour stoppages.
- in the Port of Montreal, extended work-to-rule action on the freight liner system, seriously disrupting 80 per cent of all container traffic.
- at Le Havre, one-hour strike against the OOCL vessel, September 30th.
- at a special delegates' meeting on 3rd October, representing all ports in Spain, dockers in the Co-ordinadora, UGT and CCOO agreed to strike for one hour on October 28th.
- in the ports of Gotenburg, Helsingborg and Stockholm, a 24-hour blockade was successfully carried out against all Atlantic Container Ltd. containers transported by road, rail or sea.

These actions, added to previous boycotts over the past 12 months, and the growing international awareness of the significance of the dispute in Liverpool, are taking their toll on the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. Shares, which were £4.85 in September 1995, are now down to £3.65.

Trustees of the Canadian unions' pension funds, which have millions of dollars to invest internationally, have decided that the MDHC is a bad investment. The latest news is that the Canadian Labour Congress, equivalent to the TUC, is looking for ways to involve workers across Canada in solidarity action.

Finally, the German transport union, the OTV agreed to make monthly donations and proposed widespread publicity and industrial pressure in all German ports on shipping companies trading with Liverpool. ❑

LLB page 17

Blair's message to the picket line

Jon Rogers, London UNISON Deputy Convenor, missed Blair's speech to Conference because he was on the picket line at Hillingdon Hospital.

TONY BLAIR began with the question: "How do we create, in Britain, a new age of achievement in which all the people, not just a few, can share?"

As Blair was offering Conference his vision of "the Decent Society", the sacked strikers at Hillingdon Hospital were marking the anniversary of their strike against the imposition of a 20% pay cut - looking for an answer to a similar question.

The strike expresses the spirit of Major's Britain. It is about privatisation. Some strikers began working for the NHS 20-30 years ago and thanks to competitive tendering have passed through several private companies before falling into the clutches of Pall Mall, a Davis Service Group subsidiary.

The strike is about corporate greed. The Davis Group boasted about a 13% increase in profits due, the Group claimed, to its staff's hard work, two of whom were rewarded when the Directors of the Group received pay increases of £600 and £800 a week! The strike is about low pay. Pall Mall justify their proposals as they can recruit scab labour to work at the rate the strikers rejected. The strike is about the anti-union laws, which prevent UNISON from transforming widespread passive sympathy into effective action to hit the companies concerned.

Finally, the strike is about racism. Racist abuse, including acts of violence, is a daily reality on the picket line where the strikers - virtually all Asian women - are isolated from other groups of workers (predominantly white) who were offered - and accepted - different pay and conditions.

So what does Blair's speech offer? The strikers have already written to Tony Blair for his support. Malkiat Bilku, the shop steward, still has the standard reply thanking her for the letter! Blair's opening question appears at first to offer hope to the strikers, as does his echo of the question: "For all the people. Or for a few. That is the choice. That is the challenge of the 21st century." This apparently means a Blair-led Britain would want to include the Hillingdon strikers, who'd share in the profits they have created.

Unfortunately, when Blair turns to industrial relations, his underpinning ideology is made clear. It fails to correspond to the experience of the Hillingdon picket line. Evoking an image of Britain plc, social harmony and industrial peace, Blair advises that, "We're on the same side. We're in the same team...No more bosses versus workers...The Labour Government is not the political arm of anyone today other than the British people." An approach from Labour which assumes that, "We're on the same side" will be, at best, irrelevant to those on the picket line.

This isn't new from a Labour Government. However, an underlying (and mistaken) belief in the unity of interest of capital and labour has not prevented past Labour Governments from enacting measures which have been in the interests of the working class. So what, if any, benefits might the Hillingdon strikers expect? The origins of the strike lie in the cost cutting of competitive tendering. Blair commits Labour to ending the NHS internal market - "No more hospitals fighting hospitals. No more doctor competing with doctor," but no suggestion

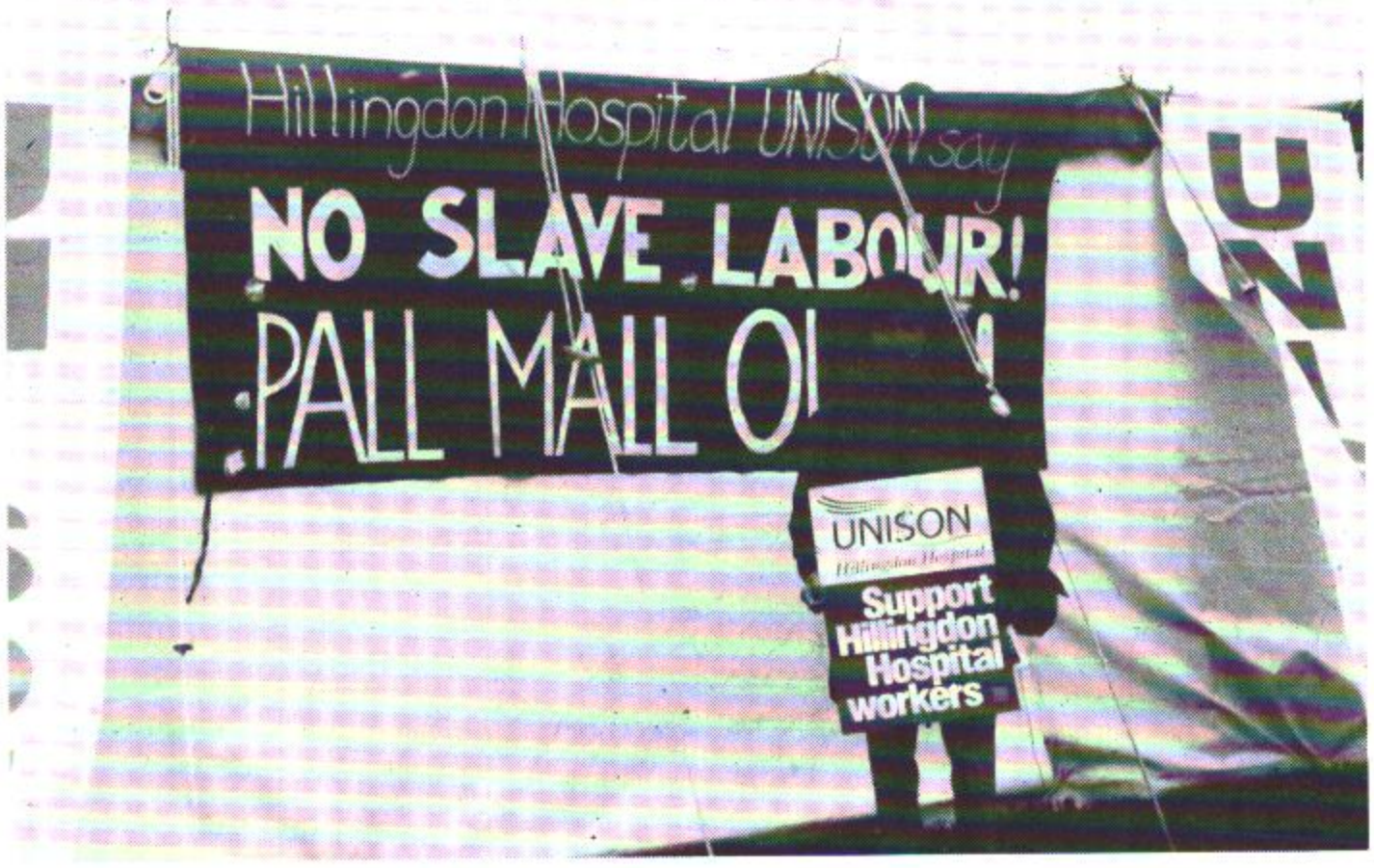


PHOTO: DAN CARTER

Malkiat Bilku.

Magnet workers attract support

Steve Smith spoke to women's support group organiser Lynne Fawcett.

FITTED-KITCHEN makers Magnet have sacked 320 workers at their Darlington joinery in a brutal example of union busting that has shocked even Tory councillors.

The company provoked a strike in August by offering less than half its workforce a 3% rise while offering the rest nothing at all. The four unions at the joinery led by UCATT and the GMB held strike ballots. Management sent letters to every striker giving them the choice of a no strike deal or the sack. Merely a handful trickled back and the mass sackings took place on 3rd September, including those on sick leave!

An over-priced bacon sandwich became the trigger to launch a womens' support group. Lynne explained: "a van came to the picket-line selling sandwiches. Soon he doubled his prices. We borrowed a caravan, got £30 from the strike fund and wiped him out. It would have cost £30,000 to settle the dispute. Instead Magnet set aside £3.5 million to break the strike.

"Strikers and their families have been denied benefits and free school meals, and now have to survive on £30 per week strike pay. The other day at our meeting one of the ladies just sat and cried. She didn't have the £16.50p she needed for three prescriptions. The council are offering 100% support. Even Tory and independent councillors signed our petition".

- Donations and messages of support can be sent to Magnet Strike Committee, Labour rooms, 123 Victoria Road, Darlington, Durham.

LLB page 18

of an end to competitive tendering for cleaning services. UNISON will have to fight to apply the logic of Labour's opposition to the internal market to the terrible consequences of the market for cleaners, porters and other workers. The strike reveals the corporate greed of the "fat cats" of privatisation. Blair gave a clear message to "self-made millionaires" in his speech, saying, "best of luck to them." This hardly impressed those on the picket line.

More impressive, from the point of view of a strike against a pay cut, is Blair's promise of "a statutory national minimum wage. Like every other industrial country the world over." This comparison could imply the minimum will be set at a very low level, and it was omitted from the list of ten "vows" comprising the "performance contract" for five years of Government. Still, a minimum wage which prevented cowboy contractors profiteering on the back of their workers would be useful to millions.

Nothing in Blair's speech suggests that the legislative shackles which restrain unions will be significantly relaxed. This is what Blair means when he says that, "There will be no return to the 70s". The fight for free trade unions will need to continue.

Combatting racism was also absent. A vague call for "a society based not on outdated prejudices but on the common duty of humanity" is hardly crystal clear.

More worryingly, Blair boasted of the past "empire, the largest the world has ever known." If New Labour is inclined to look back at colonialism and imperialism through rose-tinted spectacles it is unlikely to struggle seriously against racism.

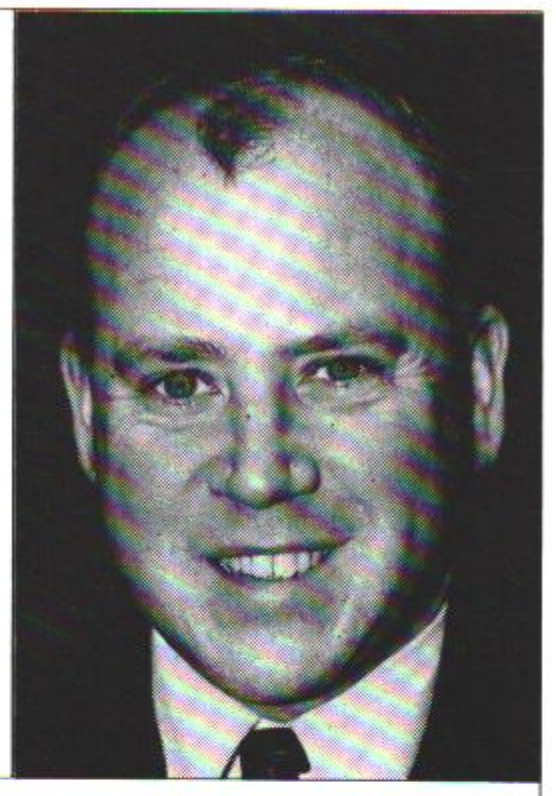
The only reasonable conclusion that can be drawn from Blair's speech is that the "Prime Minister in Waiting" has almost nothing to say to those such as the hospital strikers who are fighting for justice. However, that doesn't mean that the prospect of a Blair Government is irrelevant to them.

Trade unionists will expect a minimum wage and decent pay from a Labour Government and will be prepared to fight for them. Already, UNISON members in the NHS have begun a campaign of strike action over pay. With the action this summer by rail and postal workers, as well as the continuing examples of the Liverpool dockers and the Hillingdon strikers themselves, it is clear that the class struggle is far from over.

Tony asked,"How do we create, in Britain, a new age of achievement in which all the people not just a few can share?"

The strikers on the picket line in Hillingdon gave a better answer to this question the same day than the public school boy on the platform in Blackpool. Their answer? To keep fighting for justice.

the Geoff Martin column



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

● I was lucky to be up at Blackpool at the Party Conference for only 36 hours. It was more than enough.

I jumped on the 9am Sunday train from Euston which was a total bloody nightmare. It was jammed out like a cattle truck but for once in my life I'd got myself well enough organised to book a seat. Even worse, it was the slow train via Manchester which meant a five and half hour journey.

Just when I thought things couldn't sink any lower I realised that Manchester United were at home to Spurs that afternoon and the train was full of cockney reds, White Hart Laners, a smattering of Blairites and me. Get me to that buffet car!

● Most confusing Conference experience had to be at one of the public meetings I spoke at on the single currency.

As I was launching into a tirade about the need for mass trade union action to defend the welfare state against Maastricht - imposed cuts along the lines of our French and German comrades - who did I spot clapping wildly in the crowd?

Only Gwyneth Dunwoody, wasn't it.

I report this purely for the purposes of fuelling speculation within the Hampshire Popular Front (Fighting, Democratic) about unholy alliances with the hard right.

● Relief all round after we got back to within the boundary of the M25 after the trip to Leicester to see Chelsea.

Could somebody out there please explain to me why the Leicester City firm are called the "Baby Squad"? A trip to their ground is always high up on the list of dodgy practices and it doesn't help when:

a) you've parked your car nearly a mile away in the middle of a demolition site

b) the "mate" who got the tickets managed to obtain seats in the middle of the home fans

c) the idea of crowd segregation in that part of the east Midlands is a length of rusty chicken wire.

I'm starting to come to the conclusion that I'm getting too old for away trips and perhaps I need to find another hobby.

● It's interesting that the Tories have picked up on this line of attack against Blair as being a privileged posh kid who's never had a proper job and doesn't understand ordinary working people. I hope that the Millbank Tendency don't ignore the potential pull of this campaign as it clearly strikes a chord with a lot of people I've spoken to.

If Blair wants to hit back he should adopt a couple of policies which would take the wind out of the Tory sails.

A minimum wage at £4.41, workers rights from day one and increased taxes on earnings over £50,000 would do as a start.

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

Conference of trade union left organisations

Build the fightback! Organise the left!

Saturday February 1st 1997 11 - 4pm

University of London Union, Malet Street, London WC1

Called by the following trade union left organisations: Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON, Communications Broad Left (CWU), CPSA Broad Left, CPSA Socialist Caucus, Equity Left Alliance, Finance Workers' Broad Left (BIFU), MSF Campaign for a Democratic Union, NATFHE Rank and File, NUJ Left, Print and Media Broad Left (GPMU), PTC Broad Left, Socialist Teachers' Alliance (NUT).
Details: Will Reese, 116 Rosslyn Avenue, Coundon, Coventry, CV6 1GN.

Nigeria: leading socialist released

The struggle continues

Chima Ubani, a well known Nigerian socialist and human rights activist, has been released from detention after over a year in prison, courtesy of the Abacha regime. *LLB* spoke to Chima's comrades about events leading up to his release and the current situation.

Q: Can you tell us about Chima and the significance of his release?

A: Comrade Chima was a student leader during incredible upsurges of student and worker militancy in the eighties. Then, the student movement was fifteen million strong and the unions had over five million members. The mass of students were from working class or peasant backgrounds. Student leaders automatically became national figures. Chima graduated from student politics, but not from active mass politics. He has been identified with the radical left for many years, and helped the left to realise that it must align itself with the organised working class and all those struggling for change. He was also an early advocate of the need for the left to campaign for human and civil rights, and not leave this to professionals and liberals. He recognised that under military rule, the demand for basic human rights is too important to be left to those who are not interested in mobilising the masses. The regime had been trying to incarcerate Chima for years, but they feared a backlash. When he became a leader of the Democratic Alternative (a socialist campaigning organisation) he often joked about being on leave from prison. The regime became more secure, the opposition splintered and Chima was interned. It is not clear why they released Chima now, other than to say that the campaign for his release was growing.

Q: What is the state of the internal opposition ? How does it relate to the opposition abroad?

A: We are very weak, inside and outside Nigeria. This is of course partly due to the repression, and the regime's ability to bribe the "official opposition". A huge layer of ex-politicians have lined their pockets. They seek to become a civilian government to guarantee them fabulous wealth. Recently the regime announced that political parties were to be legalised, but with strict conditions before they could contest any election. Each party has to have over 100,000 members in each of the states, offices and full time staff in place in every state, and each member had to be photographed and issued a membership card. Each prospective party had to submit a non-returnable deposit of half a million naira, and this was before they could even be registered! Only the fat cats, the political class who had pillaged the national coffers, have access to that level of resources and they went along with the conditions lending credibility to the whole fiasco. Internationally this gave the regime a desperately needed breathing space. After the murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and others, and the continuing detention of oppositionists, the regime was starting to feel the pressure. Calls for action against the regime were building in Nigeria and internationally. But the collusion of the political class with the regime gave the impression to the leaders of the Organisation of African Unity, the UN and the Commonwealth that Abacha's transitional programme was the only prospect. They did not ask the people on the ground!

Q: Tell us about the opposition organised by people like Chima?

A: This too is quite small given the size of the population (110 million) but that's no reason to despair. Increasingly people are recognising that we have to rely on our own struggles to remove this regime. We have to link all those who are prepared to struggle against the regime and build an opposition that is incorruptible, democratic and accountable.

Q: How does the opposition inside Nigeria relate to those outside?

A: Many Nigerians have had to leave for their own safety. Those who continue to campaign are our friends. But there is a danger that the external opposition loses touch with what we are trying to do inside the country. There are three sectors who could really make a difference. Firstly, the trade union movement and organised workers. The unions are still potentially the most powerful force in the country. Some old leaders are hopelessly corrupt, but that is just not true of a new emergent leadership, and thousands of middle cadre activists with day to day contact with workers. Secondly there are mass organisations like the students and women's movement. The women's movement in particular remains vibrant and combative and has shown a remarkable capacity to mobilise. Thirdly, those non-governmental organisations who have campaigned tirelessly for those detained and who have spoken out against repression. These organisations have been a focus for sustained activity for thousands of radical volunteers and professionals. Unfortunately, the opposition outside the country has no regular contact with them. Sometimes we contradict one another which does not help to build a unified international solidarity campaign.

Q: What do you think about the external opposition's demand for sanctions?

A: The sanctions question seems to have emerged largely from outside of the country. This is hardly surprising. To call for sanctions inside the country is to invite immediate arrest and detention. But that does not mean that many of us are not sympathetic to the demand. Many of us are, but the reality on the ground is that there is a lot of work to be done before this can be popularised. The trade unions for example, even the oil workers who heroically led the general strike which paralysed the country for weeks, and whose leaders are still detained, do not call for sanctions. The demand would split the movement at this stage. Many workers lack the confidence to believe that sanctions could lead to the overthrow of this regime. They visualise worse deprivation resulting. There is a lot to be done to rebuild confidence, to forge unity in struggle, and to make sure that the mass organisations are democratic. Our friends outside the country are perhaps not as sensitive to these rhythms of the struggle as we are.

Q: Are there lessons from the South African struggle?

A: Very much so! Unfortunately we do not have a unified political opposition which enjoys mass support like the ANC did. We do not have a world-wide solidarity campaign that is attempting to isolate the regime.

Q: Are people like Chima still at risk?

A: Yes, but comrades like Chima have shown that it is possible to stand up for principles. Chima knows that there are many others prepared to take his place, and still many more who will in the future. That must be one of the reasons why the regime released him. We are immensely proud of Chima.

LLB page 20

Hard labour in Detroit

Jeremy Dear, National President of the NUJ, reports on a 16 month long newspaper strike in the USA.

ON 13TH July 1995 more than 2,500 workers at the *Detroit Free Press*, *Detroit News* and Detroit Newspaper Agency were forced out on strike after their employers unilaterally - and illegally under US labour law - tried to impose worse working conditions, implement drastic job cuts, introduce arbitrary pay awards and tear up long-standing union agreements.

Sixteen months on, despite constant harassment, intimidation and violence against the pickets, the bitter struggle for union rights goes on.

For three years leading up to the strike, the six unions making up the Metropolitan Council of Newspaper Unions which represents all employees - from drivers to journalists - had accepted pay freezes and job cuts in a bid to help the papers return to profitability. As a result, the papers earned $56 million profit in 1994. But back again came the employers to demand even more savage cuts, including more job cuts, cuts in health care provision, and the removal of job security protections. In addition, the company sought to transfer work from family-wage union jobs into non-union positions with lower pay, less benefits and no security.

The employers did not seriously believe they would get away with such swingeing cuts. They wanted to provoke a dispute in a bid to break the unions. As at Wapping, they had trained a scab workforce (in the same building!) while continuing the sham of negotiations with union reps. Even the National Labor Relations Board stated the strike was 'caused and prolonged' by management.

But what the company did not bargain for was the determination and courage of the strikers. Since the dispute began, the company has sacrificed $250m in lost profits fighting the unions. As a result of a boycott of the titles launched by the strikers circulation has dropped by around 55 percent and more than 1,200 advertisers have pulled out.

So far the Detroit company's parent companies, Gannet and Knight Rider, have been able to ride out the dispute by cross-financing their losses from profits made at their other companies, which include over 110 newspapers, radio and TV stations and on-line systems. How ironic that employers are allowed to use the profits from one company to try and break a dispute in another, while workers are outlawed from calling on employees at other companies from taking action in solidarity with them!

The unions, with the backing of the AFL-CIO, have recently stepped up their civil disobedience campaign, even sending flying pickets to other titles and blockading print works, which has seriously affected distribution of the company's morning titles. The company has responded with increasing harassment of strikers. Private paramilitaries guard the property and clashes with police and the goons have left strikers hospitalised and one permanently paralysed and hundreds have been arrested.

Management and workers in other media companies are keeping a keen eye on the dispute which is seen as a test case for US workers. If the bosses can successfully break the unions in a labour town like Detroit, the home of the United Auto Workers, then they will believe they can take them on anywhere. That is why it is vitally important the strikers are victorious and why international solidarity is urgently needed.

In September, the NUJ invited one of the strikers, Scott Martelle, over to address the union's annual conference and organised a two-week tour of meetings and rallies around the country, including joint platforms with the Liverpool dockers, the Hillingdon hospital workers and others in dispute. The tour helped raise awareness of the dispute and several thousand pounds for the strike fund.

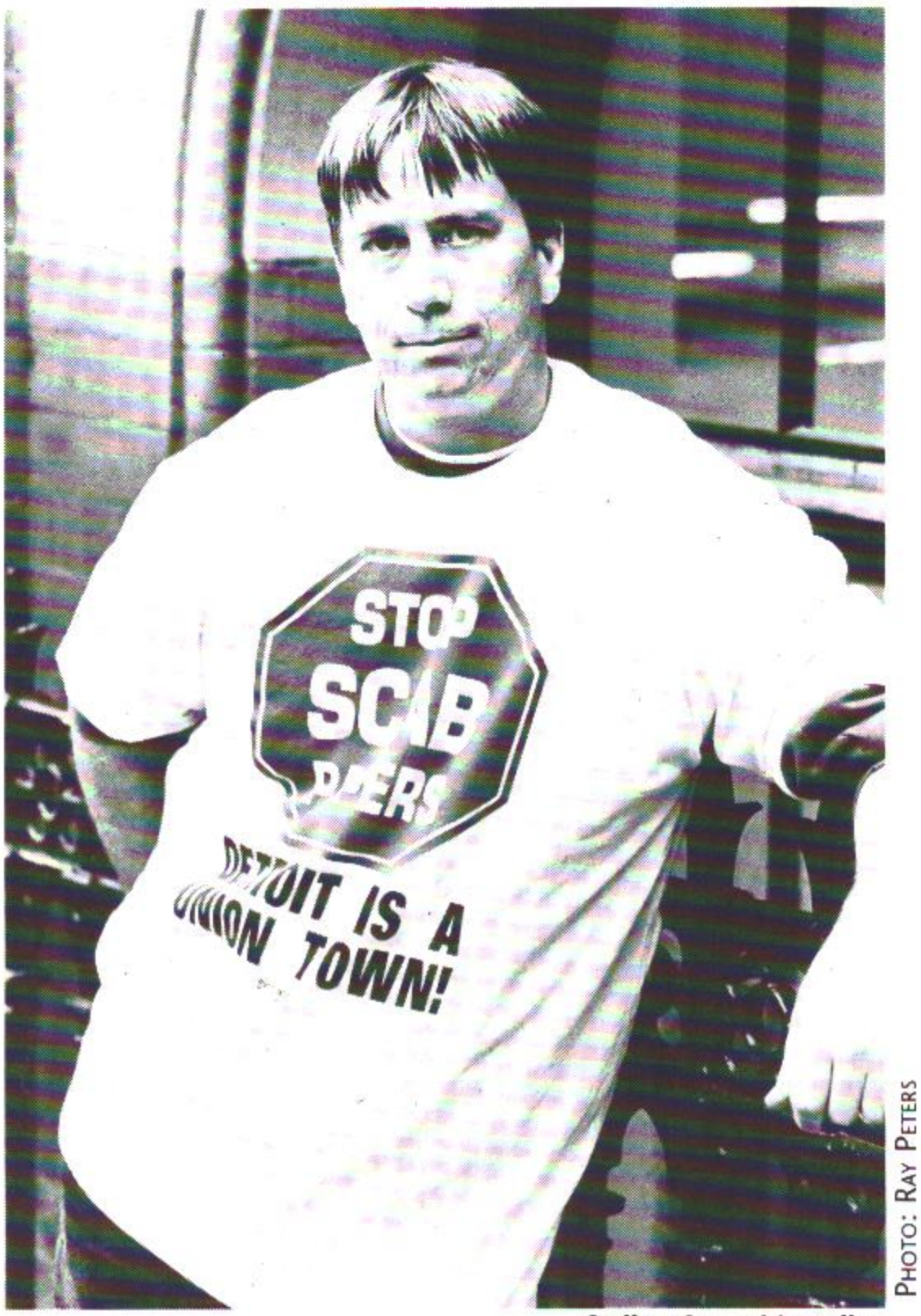


PHOTO: RAY PETERS

Striker Scott Martelle.

NUJ activists are now committed to building practical support in terms of the boycott of *USA Today*, which is owned by the same firm, targeting newsagents which stock the paper and organising lobbies of the company's print plants in Britain and Europe.

As the strikers' adverts say - Make Gannet and Knight Rider pay for union busting. Victory to the Detroit strikers!

* Footnote: *LLB* was delighted to welcome Scott Martelle onto its fringe meeting platform at Blackpool. ❑

LLB page 21

A new Intifada?

The opening of the Hasmonean tunnel was the trigger: a provocative assertion of Israeli claims of exclusive sovereignty over east Jerusalem. It touched a raw nerve. Bob Deed of the Palestinine Solidarity Campaign considers the aftermath of the rising.

The recent unrest in the Occupied Palestinian Territories has drawn attention to a faltering peace process. The Palestinian demonstrations were a response to abuse, humiliation, frustration, desperation and poverty.

In contrast to other recent calls for demonstrations, Palestinians responded to Arafat's appeal for protests at the tunnel opening. And they did so with an unexpected determination.

If Peres had won the Israeli elections in May 1996, he would no doubt have negotiated with Arafat and postponed the opening of the tunnel until he could give something in return. It has been reported that before Peres lost power a deal had already been drafted whereby Arafat would give up the claim to Jerusalem in exchange for a village called Abu Dis. This village would be renamed El Kuds - "The Holy," the Arabic name for Jerusalem - and transformed into a capital for Arafat's Palestine National Authority (PNA).

But Netanyahu pursued Israeli ambitions with less care. In recent weeks he got Arafat to shut down three official Palestinian offices in Jerusalem. Then adding insult to injury he further delayed the redeployment in Hebron, destroyed Palestinian homes in Jerusalem, and promised colonisation of the West Bank.

The opening of the tunnel was the last humiliation for Arafat. If he had failed to respond, he would have lost his remaining credibility. His call for demonstrations was heeded as it reflected Palestinian anger. Netanyahu's claims of "incitement" ignore this fact.

Many compare the recent unrest with the Intifada which started in December 1987. Insofar as being a largely unexpected and spontaneous eruption of popular resistance, it is comparable.

However, it lacks the leadership which the clandestine United National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) gave to the Intifada. The UNLU unites the majority of Palestinian factions in a body which was able to issue guidance on demonstrations, strikes, boycotts and other actions. No body currently possesses such legitimacy.

Palestinians do not automatically respond to the urgings of Arafat or his Hamas rivals.



FROM *EYEWITNESS LEBANON*

The price of war. Massacre of Palestinians at Chatila camp, September 1982 - with Israeli collusion.

And, of course, the Palestinian left remains marginalised - a marginalisation reinforced by the abstention of sections of the left in the January 1996 elections for the PNA.

As Israeli policies involve the continued seizure of land and the expansion of settlements, future protests are inevitable in spite of this situation. However, the lack of leadership means that it will be sporadic and unco-ordinated.

The recent unrest has marked a new development as the guns of the PNA were turned on Israeli soldiers. Even though only a couple of hundred Palestinian police actually used their arms during the clashes, this development had symbolic significance. In particular, the over-powering of Israeli troops in Nablus shocked Israelis.

The sight of PNA police returning fire when Israeli troops attacked protesters gave Palestinians new faith in their police. It drew attention away from evidence of widespread police incompetence and brutality reflecting the malaise deep-rooted in the PNA.

Might the unrest result in putting the peace process back on track? The negotiating "partners" know their limits: Arafat cannot eliminate the Israeli occupation through negotiations with Netanyahu, and Israel will not try to get rid of Arafat as his "police" do act as a buffer between the Palestinian people and the Israeli army.

Netanyahu may have opposed the redeployment of Israeli troops out of the Palestinian cities, but Israelis do not want to return to Gaza or Nablus. Not least because they would have to fight their way back in against not only stone-throwing youths but also over 40,000 PNA police. The peace process then becomes no more than a political stalemate.

The current equilibrium is profoundly unstable. Netanyahu will not move forward and he cannot move backwards. Arafat cannot retain credibility unless his stream of concessions since the Gulf War is converted into more than a pathetic patchwork of self-rule enclaves.

The issues of the final status negotiations - notably refugees and Jerusalem - cannot be avoided for much longer. They will eventually show the distance between what Israel will offer and what the PNA will be allowed to accept by Palestinian public opinion. Then the contradictions in the peace process are likely to explode again.

● Lobby Parliament in support of Palestinian rights, 13th November. Contact: the Palestine Solidarity Campaign on 0171-700 6192.

LLB page 22

Abortion in Europe

WHILE THE National Abortion Campaign braces itself for another possible attack on the Abortion Act this autumn, in Switzerland a parliamentary committee is drafting a law which would give women the right to choose during the first months of pregnancy.

By Leonora Lloyd

The current law, requiring two doctors' permission, is in practice usually disregarded. A broad coalition of women's organisations is building support for the proposed change - it will take at least to the end of 1997 to be passed, and anti-abortionists have until three months before the final decision to collect 50,000 signatures needed for a referendum against it.

Abortion practice and public opinion has liberalised, abortion figures are falling, fewer women are going abroad for abortions, there are no more back-street abortions and nobody has been convicted of illegal abortion for seven years. The struggle for legalisation has already taken 25 years - pro-choice forces are feeling confident of success at last.

They are also campaigning for use of the abortion pill, RU486 - so far they have succeeded in getting it registered and now they are seeking a non-profit body to make and distribute it.



Leonora Lloyd

Norway illustrates that having a liberal law should not mean increased abortion rates, if coupled with good sex education and contraception. There, the abortion rate has been falling, but a recent scare over the Pill led to what is believed to be a blip in the figures. Abortion is available on demand to twelve weeks, up to 18 weeks for social reasons, and thereafter on serious medical grounds. Recently there was a debate on whether to follow Sweden's example of having choice up to 18 weeks.

Meanwhile, Parliamentary anti-abortionists unsuccessfully attempted to reduce the current limit to ten weeks, make counselling obligatory and change the constitution to give embryos the same protection given in Ireland. Instead, Parliament legalised research on embryos, but only for research benefiting humans, and when the woman concerned gives her written permission. Parliament also agreed to allow RU486 to be used, though only in hospitals and not for out-patients as in France and Britain. They also allowed the morning-after pill to be sold without prescription - a unique move, opposed by the company producing the pills, which is worried about being sued if anyone claims injury from using it.

Anti-abortion groups in Norway seldom demonstrate as they are usually outnumbered by pro-choice campaigners, and demonstrations outside hospitals have brought fines of up to £6,000 and six months' imprisonment. However, they continue to get state funding for their counselling services!

Despite progress in Switzerland and Norway, and some liberalisation of Poland's very extreme law, conditions throughout Europe are still patchy, with Ireland, parts of Germany and Turkey amongst the worst. Eastern European women are still denied access to decent contraception and conditions for abortions are often deplorable. For this reason, a European-wide group of organisations has recently got together to reform the European Network for Women's Right to Abortion and Contraception.

●For details of ENWRAC, contact Leonora Lloyd on 0181 723 8345.

Socialist Campaign Group

[Supporters' Network]

AGM

Making Labour deliver

London Welsh Centre
157-163 Gray's Inn Road,
King's Cross
10am
Saturday 9th November

Speakers:

Ken Livingstone MP
Mildred Gordon MP
Lynne Jones MP
Geoff Martin

The new anti-capitalism and the end of New Labour

Andrew Coates, Ipswich CLP, argues that a fight across Europe against welfare cuts and unemployment is finding expression in the 'modernised' Social Democratic parties.

ON 8TH October the streets of France were filled with tens of thousands of public sector workers opposing cuts in state services. Parisian marchers booed modernising leader of the CFDT unions Nicole Notat, who has reached an understanding with the right-wing Government. French commentators promise a hot autumn of social unrest. Already 100,000 teachers and their supporters took to the streets of Paris in September in defence of their pay and conditions. In Germany, after massive protests against Kohl's cuts in welfare, workers are calling for a general strike. Spanish unions are in ferment as they resist the right-wing Anzar Cabinet's privatisation plans. Candido Mendez, General Secretary of the socialist-inclined UGT, has launched a forceful appeal in defence of the welfare state. In Italy, the archetypical new Labour Party, the Olive Alliance, is facing strong challenges from the unions. Now we are seeing a glimmer of similar conflicts in Britain.

We near the end of more than a decade of post-social democratic leadership of the left. Under membership pressure the German SPD has come out for workers' demonstrations. Supporters of the left, from the Greens, the ex-Communist PDS and the SPD, came together recently in an unprecedented meeting to organise. The French socialist leader, Lionel Jospin, has found himself confronted by a new left, the Gauche Socialiste, which won 40% of the party vote at its last conference for its anti-Maastricht stance. This body, which includes former supporters of the Fourth International, has become a major influence in the Party. In Spain, the formerly monolithic socialists now have a powerful left opposition, and there is a significant neo-Communist party, the Izuirada Unida. All over Europe the most radical elements of the workers' movement are, after a decade of life in the shadows, coming to the forefront.

Mass unemployment and attacks on welfare provision are the major issues facing the European labour movement. Like a self-replicating virus a model of minimal social protection is being urged by governments. Privatisation, contracting-out, lowering taxes for the rich: these are universal policies pioneered by our own Tory Government. Identical arguments from free-marketeers are employed in each country. The Maastricht convergence criteria are interpreted to cut back on state debt and payments for the poor, the unemployed, and the



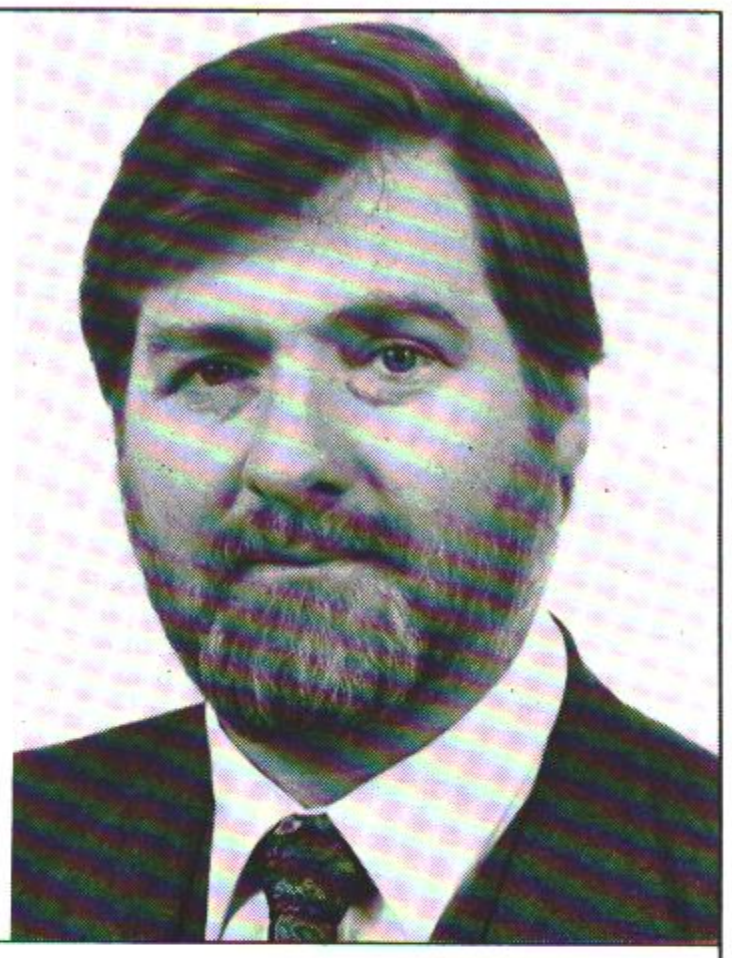
sick. But this is not happening without resistance. *Full Employment: A European Appeal*, initiated by Ken Coates MEP and the German Green MEP, Frieder Otto-Wolf (who participated in the Chesterfield Socialist conferences), calls the dole-queue a "disaster which is destroying people's lives". Unemployment of up to 10% is feeding the rise of xenophobic and racist movements. The French Front National now has 100,000 full members and has hundreds of councillors all over the country. In the face of this Coates and Wolf demand full employment. This call for decent public services has gained the backing of one of the biggest range of progressive and labour movement leaders and activists in recent years.

In the new European political landscape the Blair project looks increasingly threadbare. Tony Blair claims that the left has to accept the market and co-operate with employers. Mandelson and Liddle go further and assert that in the "new global economy" there "is no alternative" to capitalism. But they are building on sand. Social partnership is falling apart in Europe. Communitarian capitalism, in which we are all stakeholders, sounds a hollow joke when hundreds of thousands of European workers are protesting at state cut-backs and vengeful employers. Nor is free-market ideology unchallenged. The European press is full of the most vibrant anti-capitalism printed since '68. An editorial in *Le Monde Diplomatique*, stated that last year's French protests were the start of an international revolt against neo-liberalism. *The Wall Street Journal* accused the paper of resembling a 'Trotskyist rag'. *L'Evenement du Jeudi* (mildly left-of-centre) has launched a campaign against the 'new masters of the world' - multinationals, neo-liberals, and domestic capitalists. Elsewhere, in Germany and Spain, the progressive media has turned steadily left as the economic crisis has bitten hard. (Trendies from DEMOS please note!)

This is a new mass politics. The left that is emerging in the new conditions is radically different to the vanguard minorities of the past. The links between international domestic issues, personal action and individual experience, are tied up: from the process of European integration, the erosion of the welfare state, to the tyranny of managerial systems and private bureaucracies. Across the continent our allies are organising. We are, in fact, because of the union link with our Party, in a better position than many in making this a real political bond. There is no doubt that we will see the effects in our own land.

LLB page 24

the Michael Hindley column



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

WHEN Clinton won the Presidential election in November 1992 there was a rush of Labour modernisers eager to learn from Bill. An added fascination for the Blairites is that Clinton seems likely to win again, and we can expect another splurge of 'learning from Bill' seminars soon.

The major reasons why the Party did not go the whole hog in favour of Clintonisation first time around was that we had at the helm blessedly Old Right Labour, John Smith, whose sad and untimely death was the watershed in Labour Party history when the old coalition of Social Democrats, Socialists and careerists started finally and irretrievably to fall apart. Bill Clinton, the world's most successful Yuppie politician, managed to win against an unpopular incumbent when the economy - in conventional wisdom - was picking up. Clinton inherited the 'feelgood' factor and used it to provide a platform for ditching the aspirations of the natural Democrat supporters to whom he had promised a new start with the same vacuous exhortations as Blair now does. The day after Clinton's victory the *Wall Street Journal* published a very prescient leader saying Clinton offered no new start at all and rather than the beginning of a revival of the Democratic spirit of the New Deal, which Clinton had unashamedly appealed to, the success of such a manipulative and empty person showed that the grand tradition of radicalism in the Democratic Party was truly finished.

The British establishment's view of Blair is precisely the same in our context. If after seventeen years of being booted around by the most right-wing Tory administration since the 1930s, the Labour Party can only come up with a Tory like Blair then they really have nothing to worry about. The dream of having two Tory parties to choose from has come about.

With all that in mind, I left the muscular Christian atmosphere of the Party Conference and went to the USA - to see the future and to see if it works. Four years on from the Clinton mould-breaking victory, the rich are richer and the poor definitely poorer. The beggars in the streets are still there, though cowed a little more as a result of hard rhetoric against 'aggressive begging'.

Clinton failed utterly to deliver on his promised reform of welfare in favour of ordinary people. The poor don't vote, so why do anything for them; by the same token the middle classes do vote, and helping the poor would be at their expense, so why offend them?

Republicans find it hard to make headway when Clinton has stolen their clothes.

In the great debate with Dole, Clinton confidently rebutted the accusation that he was a 'liberal'. As a veteran liberal Democrat told me, the Yuppies who have taken over the Democratic Party are now so cocky and arrogant that they actually make a point of honour of ditching its standards.

The reasons why Clinton can get away with all this is that for many progressives there still seems to be no alternative. "Vote for me, the others are even worse," says Clinton to the disheartened class of 1994 Democrats; and now we can already imagine Blair rehearsing the line for his second term election against Portillo. The result of such cynicism in the USA is a dangerous decline in popular confidence in the political process. The actual consequences in real-life terms is a continuation of the catastrophic collapse of the social fabric.

More and more average Americans live paranoid lives in "safe" areas of their towns and cities. It is not just the large metropolitan cities which have 'no go' areas where some denizens are so hostile and alienated that they make it dangerous to enter their territory.

It is hard to see a breakthrough immediately for the progressives in the USA - the country has a strong tradition of wanting 'winners' which militates against the emergence of proportional representation - the necessary ingredient for giving people a real choice and the left a real chance of influence.

New parties are emerging though. The excellent populariser of radical ideas in the Tony Benn mould, Noam Chomsky, is a co-founder of the New Party. The veteran consumers' campaigner, Ralph Nader, is standing as the Green candidate for President. Perhaps most encouraging of all, progressive trade unionists came together to set up the Labor Party to promote unambiguously and openly the cause of organised labour in politics last autumn. Treating political parties as glee clubs - blowing up balloons, the pop anthems, the soundbites, the video presentations, all of which assume the electorate are morons - certainly wins elections for the moment. But the message from the streets of Washington is: I've seen the future - it's certainly hurting and it certainly isn't working.

Will Blair escape Clinton's failure?

British police: above the law?

During the summer, legal spin doctors worked hard to defend the police in four cases of black people who were killed or injured in police custody - Brian Douglas, Shiji Lapite, Wayne Douglas and Amer Rafiq. Helen Shaw from INQUEST reports.

Brian Douglas died in May 1995 after being forcefully struck over the head by a police baton. In what INQUEST believes was a clear case of unlawful killing, the inquest jury returned an unjust verdict of misadventure.

Shiji Lapite died at the hands of Stoke Newington police in December 1994. The inquest jury unanimously decided he had been unlawfully killed, yet the CPS declared there was insufficient evidence to convict.

There have been five unlawful killing verdicts (Oliver Pryce, Omasse Lumumba, Leon Patterson, Richard O'Brien, Shiji Lapite) in the last four years, yet no prosecutions have followed. The CPS has announced that it will not prosecute officers involved in the death of Wayne Douglas in December 1995.

The decision not to prosecute officers responsible for the severe injuries resulting in Amer Rafiq losing an eye further underlines the failure to take legal action against officers whose conduct has resulted in death or serious injury.

Where there is no adequate public forum for calling an institution to account, abusive practices run rampant. An inquest is not, and can never be, a full inquiry of the wider implications of any controversial death. A public inquiry has the potential to examine in detail any issues surrounding the immediate cause of death and can make recommendations to avoid future recurrences.

At INQUEST's Labour Conference fringe meeting, Paul Boateng MP, Labour's legal affairs spokesperson, committed Labour to a thorough review of the inquest system. Party members should move this model resolution (left) and send it to regional conferences.

●Contact INQUEST for information on 0181-802 7430.

MODEL RESOLUTION

"We note the disturbing number of deaths in police custody and in prison and the increasing public concern about the inadequacies of the investigatory process and the problems faced by bereaved friends and families in uncovering the truth about the circumstances of a death.

"We further note that there is a fundamental injustice when evidence gathered is not disclosed to bereaved families and their lawyers and when inquest juries return verdicts of unlawful killing there is no prosecution of those responsible.

"We call on the Labour Party to support calls for a public inquiry into deaths in custody and into the current investigatory and legal process.

"We further call on an incoming Labour Government to reform the current inquest system and implement the changes proposed by INQUEST, the organisation which advises and supports bereaved families facing inquests and campaigns to prevent deaths in custody, to give the bereaved the right to:

- advance disclosure of witness statements;
- call their own witness;
- argue a case as well as ask questions;
- legal aid for representation at inquests into deaths in detention.

and to restore the right of inquest juries to make recommendations designed to avert future deaths."

Spray-on protection

Alex Taylor writes: Hailed by Michael Howard as "a further dramatic improvement in police protection", police forces around the country have been given the go-ahead to issue CS spray. Tony Burden, chair of the Association of Chief Police Officers' Self-Defence and Restraint Sub-Committee, claims that trials resulted in a 90% success rate. During the recent six month trial figures indicate that spray was used 582 times. Canisters were drawn but not used on a further 350 occasions.

Taking a well-earned break from asset-stripping and privatisation, consultants Deloitte Touche were asked to evaluate the trials. However Howard has arrogantly decided to authorise the general use of CS sprays without seeing their report. He has also chosen to ignore the well-documented evidence of their dangers. Ibrahima Sey died in Ilford Police Station in east London after CS spray was used against him. Exactly how he died, and whether CS spray had anything to do with it, will not become clear until an inquest is held some time next year. His family and friends have already protested to the Home Office about the decision to clear the spray for national use.

Police in Cleveland seem to have been particularly indiscriminate in their use of the new equipment. The Chair of Middlesbrough's Social Services Committee has condemned Cleveland officers for using CS spray to separate a mother and her ten-month-old baby, and against two teenagers who had barricaded themselves into a room at a children's home.

More embarrassing still is the continuing split in police ranks over the safety of the French Alsetex spray chosen for use in Britain. Surrey and Hertfordshire police forces refused to take part in the trials because of safety fears.

The concentration of CS solution in the Alsetex product is five times that of similar American "incapacitants". Three police officers are suing for injuries they say they suffered in training exercises with the spray.Fears remain about the possibly mutagenic effects of the solvent in the Alsetex device. Surrey police researchers are particularly worried about possible birth defects. Their reservations are shared by Safeguard Technology, one of the leading manufacturers of policing equipment. Michael Howard is exposing the public to an inadequately tested and potentially dangerous product, and offering the police the false security of spray-on protection.

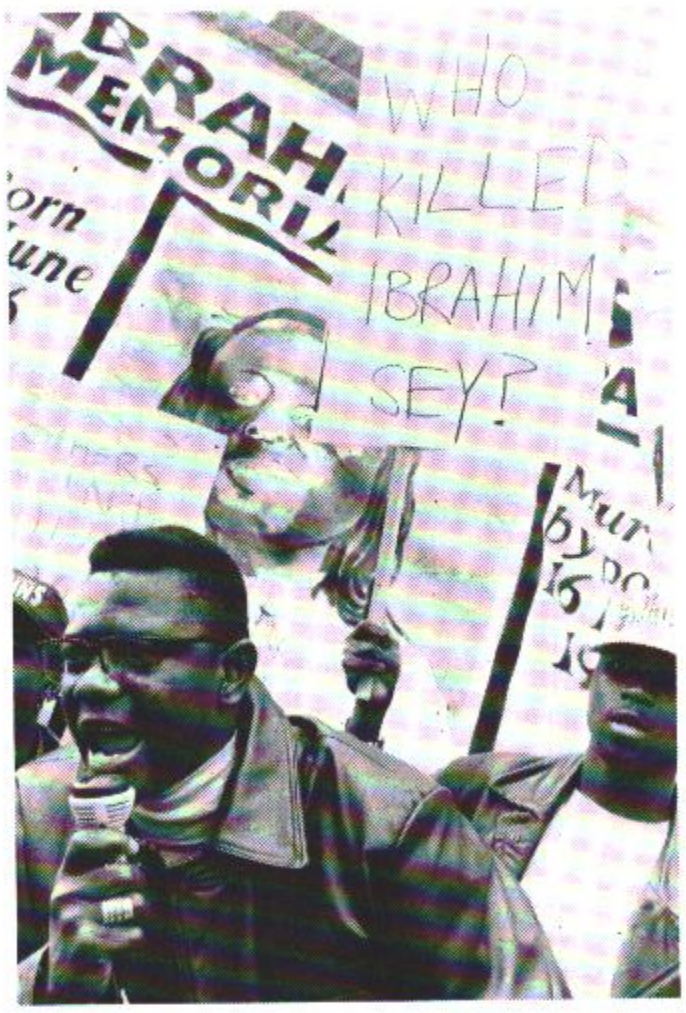


PHOTO: PAUL MATTSON

Demonstration for Ibrahima Sey, 24th March 1996.

LLB page 26

The Sans Papiers of France

Last month *LLB* reported on the French refugee rights struggle Sans Papiers. Sarah Callaway and Benoit Martin from Black Women For Wages For Housework, who have helped build solidarity with the Sans Papiers, provide an update of the campaign.

THE MOVEMENT of Sans Papiers (immigrant and refugee people "without papers") surfaced in March 1996 when 300 African people facing deportation, including about 100 women and children, occupied churches. At the end of August they were violently evicted by police with truncheons and tear gas from St Bernard Church in Paris. They had been there for two months. Ten people had been on hunger strike for 50 days. An African spokeswoman for the occupation was strip-searched in front of her children and six people were deported. Despite this setback, the movement has continued to grow.

On 28th September, a demonstration was held outside the French Embassy in London to support the Day of Action in France. Over 20,000 marched in Paris, and there were marches in other cities, including Marseille and Metz. There are now 23 Sans Papiers collectives across France demanding legal status, the return to France of the St Bernard deportees, the release of the imprisoned Sans Papiers and the repeal of all laws against immigrant people.

A contingent of Chinese Sans Papiers went public on 28th September. Zhong Aily, their spokesperson said: "People from St Bernard showed the way and we no longer accept living as we used to. Bosses know that we have no papers and pay less or sometimes not at all".



Picket outside French Embassy, 28th September.

Many of the Sans Papiers had the legal right to stay in France until the 1993 Pasqua laws which ended the automatic right to citizenship for all those born in France. Families can only apply to join their parents or spouse from outside France, and sponsors are means-tested. Asylum is rarely granted, and the police raid immigrant areas to arrest people without papers. Over a quarter of a million people have been affected. According to spokeswoman Madjiguene Cisse, confronting the problems of women and men organising together has been a key to their success.

The Sans Papiers have won wide support from community and anti-racist organisations, churches, unions and VIPs. A recent French poll found that 50% of Paris supported the Sans Papiers. Air France trade unions are refusing to handle flights involving deportations, and a rail union proposed that all transport unions oppose the use of railways for deportations.

The movement of Sans Papiers helps to strengthen opposition to the Immigration and Asylum Act which has cut benefits and increased deportations here.

●Messages of support and donations to Sans Papiers of Saint Bernard, 32 rue Faubourg-Poissonniere, Paris 10e, France, or to Black Women for Wages for Housework, PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU (0171 482 2496).

AMNESTY challenges death in custody

Tbis spring Ibrahima Sey died in police custody at Forest Gate Station, after having been taken to Ilford Police Station where he was sprayed with CS gas while handcuffed.

Amnesty International has now reported that it is "concerned about the circumstances in which Ibrahima Sey died".

It will be sending its report to its members across the globe who will campaign for the British Government to act.

Piara Powar of the Newham Monitoring Project said, "deaths of black people in police custody in Britain have now reached epidemic proportions with a death in custody every two months. There must be reform in the way our communities are policed to ensure that these deaths do not continue."

● Contact Piara Powar on 0181-555 8151 or 0973-149596.

Asylum Act

Last month we printed a list of Labour MPs who had not voted against the Asylum and Immigration Act. There was a glitch, and half the list was not printed. Here are the ones that we did not print: James Marshall (Leicester), Alan Milburn (Darlington), Andrew Miller (Ellesmere Port), Elliot Morley (Scunthorpe), Eddie O'Hara (Knowsley), Tim Pendry (Stalybridge), Stuart Randall (Kingston upon Hull), Martin Redmond (Don Valley), John Spellar (Warley W), Roger Stott (Wigan), Gavin Strang (Edinburgh), Don Touhig (Islwyn), and Gareth Wardell (Gower).

And do not forget the ones we printed last month: Richard Burden (Birmingham), Dennis Canavan (Falkirk W), Michael Connarty (Falkirk E), John Cummings (Easington), Lawrence Cunfiffe (Leigh), Bryan Davies (Oldham), James Dunnachie (Pollok), George Foulkes (Carrick), Alan Howarth (Stratford on Avon), Greville Janner (Leicester), Robert Litherland (Manchester), Sir Geoffrey Lofthouse (Pontefract), and David Marshall (Shettleston).

Chomsky strikes again

Mike Phipps reviews Powers and Prospects *and* Class Warfare, *two new books by Noam Chomsky, published by Pluto Press at £32.99 and £10.99.*

ONCE MORE, Chomsky is in scintillating form, savaging the dishonesty and doubletalk of western governments and championing their victims.

Dishonest usage of language is something Chomsky, as a Professor of Linguistics, is particularly concerned about. Clinton's 'Cuban Democracy Act' for example, in violation of international law, banned trade to Cuba conducted by US subsidiaries abroad, 90% comprising food and medicine. Despite the 1994 UN General Assembly's 101 to 2 vote to lift the embargo (just USA and Israel opposed), the Act remains in force. Presumably the consequent decline in Cuba's health will make it easier for the US to bring democracy to the survivors.

All US policy today is presented as promotion of the free market and democracy. While many recognise the cynical self-interest which supplants these ideals, it is less often realised how much the US is - and always has been - a bastion of protectionism at home. Newt Gingrich, for example, America's self-proclaimed leader of free market conservatism and enemy of welfare, represents one of the country's most subsidised constituencies, Cobb County, Georgia. Here military aircraft producer Lockheed is a major employer and benefits from massive government handouts. But this is welfare for the rich and the defence interests and therefore not reported.

In both books Chomsky looks at the Middle East peace process - "a tremendous victory for the rule of force in international affairs" - conceded by Arafat in order to cling to power in the PLO. Despite the talk of reconciliation, in the year following the 1993 Declaration of Principles, Israeli Government funding for occupied territories settlements increased by 70%, as grants of US$20,000 were offered to families moving to the West Bank. Meanwhile curfews against Palestinians are routinely imposed, even if the trigger for tension is Israeli extremism - after Baruch Goldstein massacred 29 Palestinians in a Hebron mosque, new security measures against Palestinians were imposed to protect settlers from 'revenge'. Rather than compare the Peace Process with the end of apartheid, Chomsky likens it to the imposition of that system, with its phoney 'home rule' for 'independent states'.

Now the pro-Israeli Clinton administration has cut $17 million from the UN refugee relief agency, the largest employer in the Gaza Strip. Yet current US aid to Israel stands at $3 billion - over 25% of US foreign aid. This figure is not just big - it's illegal, given Israel's human rights abuses.

Chomsky also focuses on the brutal and illegal Indonesian occupation of East Timor, examining current attempts to rewrite the history of the invasion. Despite the half million people killed, "one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century", the west is keen to rehabilitate Indonesian dictator Suharto and exploit the country's markets. Speaking in Australia recently, Chomsky said: "This horror story can be brought to an end, if westerners can exhibit a fraction of the integrity and courage shown by Indonesians who are protesting what their Government is doing, under conditions vastly more onerous than any of us dream of - I do not even speak of the incredible courage of the Timorese, which shames all of us."

'Speak truth to power' is an old slogan, but it's probably a waste of time trying to convince Henry Kissinger or the head of General Motors. Rather, "one should seek out an audience that matters - and furthermore it should not be seen as an audience but as a community of common concern in which one hopes to participate constructively." These thought-provoking collections are an indispensable aid to that process.

Arguments for feminism

Sue Lukes reviews Feminism after post-feminism *by Liz Davies, published by European Labour Forum, price £2:00*

"Feminism has achieved a widespread acceptance of the value of equal treatment," writes Liz Davies. "That value conflicts sharply with the reality of many women's lives today, and the resulting gap between expectations and reality inevitably sparks campaigns for social change. Despite the concerted attempt to persuade us that we live in a post-feminist world, I am confident that the basic demands and perspectives of feminism are as valid today as they were twenty-five or thirty years ago, and that women will not cease to organise as women until they have achieved equality."



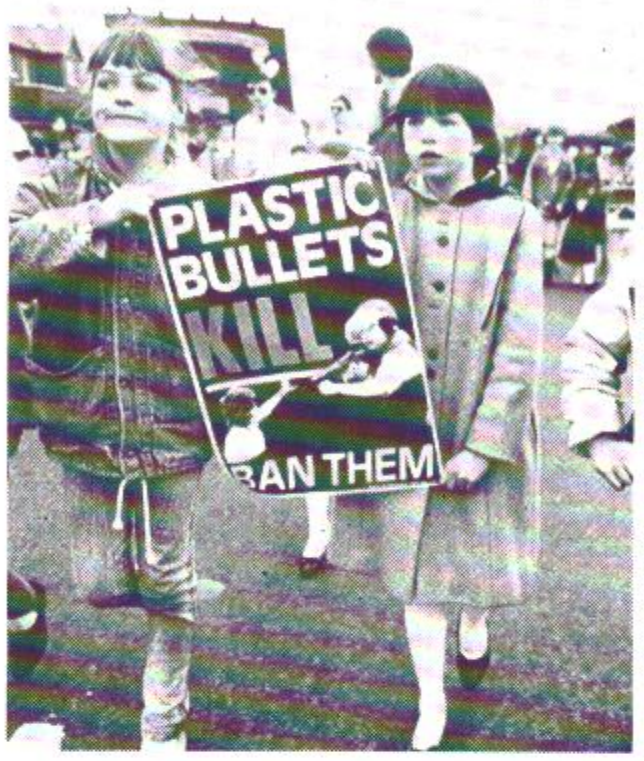
Liz Davies

How many women in the UK do most of the work at home? What percentage of managers are women? Have the 'celebrity feminists' like Wolf and Paglia made a real contributions to the cause of women? What will the Labour Party do for and about women when it gets into office? If you do not know, get this pamphlet. It puts the case for feminism at the centre of the left's concerns, summarising current debates, presenting an astonishing range of facts, and prospects for change under Labour with insight. Every page of this short pamphlet contains a useful set of arguments for the next ward meeting, the doorstep canvass, or the workplace discussion. The emphasis on young women's ideas and needs is especially welcome. One of the psychological self-help manuals rather disparaged by Liz writes of a "girl-poisoning culture that limits girls' development, truncates their wholeness and leaves many of them traumatised" (Mary Pipher, *Reviving Ophelia*). We have a long way to go: this pamphlet is a useful guide.

LLB page 28

A truth commission for Ireland?

Mike Phipps reviews Turning the page without closing the book *by Bill Rolston, published by Irish Reporter, price £3.95.*



OVER the last 20 years, 17 truth commissions have been set up following the experience of civil wars or military dictatorships in countries as far afield as Chile and Rwanda to examine and rectify abuses.

Is there scope for one as part of the northern Irish peace process? Bill Rolston believes there is.

The British Government has never satisfactorily investigated - let alone apologised for - a host of its atrocities during the conflict. The most serious include the shooting dead of 14 unarmed civil rights demonstrators on Bloody Sunday in 1972; its shoot-to-kill policy in the 1980s; its miscarriages of justice and its murderous use of rubber and plastic bullets - responsible for the deaths of 17 people, eight of whom were children.

To this one might add the most recent killing by police of an unarmed IRA suspect in Hammersmith last month. This book looks at the strengths and weaknesses of truth commissions elsewhere and how one could work in Ireland.

Rolston concludes that unless hard questions about truth and justice are asked before political settlements are reached, they will certainly not be answered afterwards.

Nowt as Queer as folk

Marina Cronin reviews It's a queer world *by Mark Simpson (Vintage, £8.99).*

Straights watch out! Your days are numbered. This is the message beaming out from planet Mark Simpson.

It's a Queer World tries to "decode what did not at first appear coded" - to find queer elements in even the most taken-for-granted heterosexual institutions.

When teenage girls lust after boy-bands like Take That, with their homoerotic imagery of nipple-rings and shaved legs, Simpson clearly has a point.

The book takes us on a hilarious journey through the straight male psyche, with its worship of "large breasts, football, beer, vindaloo and vomit", poking fun at the perverse mysteries of hetero culture. The itinerary include stop-offs at Brent Cross Shopping Centre, a football match, bingo hall, Soho strip joint and the Royal Tournament. Nothing is safe from Mark Simpson's mischievous dissection.

The tone is sardonic, camp, often bitchy. It is difficult not to agree with Simpson that the world really is as queer as he makes out.

Soundbites and sneers

Don Rocinante gags on The Blair Agenda *ed. Mark Perryman, published by Lawrence and Wishart, £12.99.*

I HAD hoped in this 250-page book to find some philosophical basis to the politics of New Labour. Unfortunately most of the authors are more concerned with adding their own soundbites to those of the leader, or settling scores with socialists who have dared to criticise him. Mark Perryman's introduction does both. The first ten pages alone have ritual sneers at Mike Marqusee and Richard Heffernan's critique of Kinnock's leadership *Defeat from the Jaws of Victory* and at Paul Foot and John Pilger. The whole tone berates the left for holding Labour back and not allowing successive leaders to 'modernise' the Party fast enough. This is interspersed with shallow hype about the "potential that Blair has undoubtedly unleashed for radical and momentous social change." This breathless optimism pops up throughout.

Anne Showstack Sassoon, promoting the Borrie Report on Social Justice, is at pains to claim its historical place alongside the Beveridge Report despite the lack of comparable public interest. It 'goes well beyond Beveridge'; elsewhere it 'goes well beyond Labour's traditional, and simple, commitment to a redistribution of financial resources'. Later, it 'goes well beyond Labourism'. Sadly she does not bother with the details of its attack on the principle of universal benefits.

Not all the articles here are quite so worthless. Kevin Davey's piece, *The Impermanence of New Labour*, strikes a more realistic note. He quotes the truest words in the book, *Tribune* editor Mark Seddon's observation in the Clause Four debate that "the biggest irony for the Labour Party is that, just as the majority of people recoil from the exigencies of the market economy, the Party seems prepared to write it into its constitution." Perryman's own concerns are clear, however. "The Blair agenda remains divorced from the message of pluralism," he declares, which he explains means coalition-building with the Liberal Democrats. Less politics and more lifestyle would be welcome; Young Labour's magazine *Regeneration* is upbraided for not taking sides in the Blur-Oasis debate (I kid you not).

Where have we seen this defeatist, coalitionist, postmodernist vacuity before? It comes as no surprise to find the book grew out of seminars organised by Signs of the Times (held in "London's premier Swedish restaurant"). The group, founded in 1992, believes "we are living through new times. Our identities, our sense of self, our subjectivities are being transformed.

Signs of the Times is a project committed to exploring the new times analysis pioneered by *Marxism Today*." Contributors include arch-postmodernist Ernesto Laclau, erstwhile Guardian columnist Suzanne Moore and ex-CP, ex-SDP member Sue Slipman. ❑

LLB page 29

science

Ourselves alone?

Is there anyone out there? Our science correspondent Dr. Chris Knight refuses to go extraterrestrial.

HEADLINES across the world during August reported the shattering news: *there was once life on Mars!* The evidence consisted of strange microscopic ovoid structures in a meteorite discovered in Antarctica. The American journal *Science* had hardly appeared when President Clinton hailed the scientific discovery as perhaps the greatest in all human history.

Never mind that most experts instantly dismissed the paper's evidence as preliminary and speculative. Never mind that the story was hardly even new - the journal *Nature* had published a paper as long ago as 1989 describing organic molecules in a similar meteorite of Martian origin. And never mind that just the month before, *Nature* had published a paper on the same meteorite saying that the carbonate rock had formed at a temperature that was too high for life to have possibly formed.

America's National Space Agency (NASA) was still smarting from having had its budget savagely cut by Congress, and the hype served its purpose. Suddenly, everyone from Clinton down was clamouring for NASA to do more planetary exploration.

Believers in the possibility of extraterrestrial intelligence could hardly contain their excitement: if there had once been life on Mars, that meant life could originate more easily than science had previously supposed. There are numberless galaxies out there, each perhaps with numberless planets. Perhaps, after all, we are not alone.

Until recently, however, such enthusiasts had faced a rather severe problem. Outside our own solar system, there seemed to be no evidence that planets of any kind orbited any star. If planets themselves were extremely rare, how much more improbable a living planet! Then in October 1995, astronomers in Geneva announced the detection of a massive planet circling the sun-like star 51 Pegasi. Astronomers in California swiftly confirmed this finding and, just three months later, turned up two more bodies orbiting other, similar, stars. Nobody could actually see these alien worlds: instead, astronomers measured what is termed the Doppler shift, a periodic displacement in the spectrum of a star as seen from the earth, indicating that the star is "wobbling". The only thing which could cause such a wobble is some kind of planet.

So, what are the chances of life on planets such as these? The newly discovered planets are utterly peculiar by the standards of our own solar system. The one around 51 Pegasi has a huge mass — at least half that of



Jupiter — yet orbits extraordinarily close to its sun, at less than one eighth Mercury's distance from our sun. Its surface has been estimated to be baked to a theoretical temperature of 1,300 degrees Celsius. The "planet" around the star 70 Virginis is even more strange. Based on its great mass and elliptical orbit, many scientists now think it is not a planet at all but a "brown dwarf" - a gaseous object that forms somewhat like a star but lacks enough mass to shine like one. Little chance of finding life there.

There are good reasons why astronomers are finding only massive bodies in fairly short-period orbits: using the Doppler technique, these are the kind that are easiest to discern. Doubtless, planetary systems more like the solar system will eventually be discovered as techniques improve. But even then, the odds against finding any indications of a living planet would be immense.

There is very little theoretical possibility of "life" based on an element other than carbon. No other known element can form the myriad of complex but stable molecules necessary for life as we know it.

Carbon is admittedly abundant in the universe, and so is organic chemistry. Life, though, depends on water, and this will not be present in liquid form except on a planet exactly the right distance from its sun, and of exactly the right mass.

For tides to pull on oceans, there would also have to be a big orbiting moon. Maybe there are such planets, but the improbabilities mount as further factors crucial to life's success on this planet are taken into account. Even if life of some kind did begin to evolve elsewhere, the odds against the emergence of technological civilisation are truly astronomical.

While signs of rudimentary life would be difficult for astronomers to pick up from earth, it should be quite easy to pick up signals deliberately beamed across the universe by intelligent aliens - if such beings existed. The astronomers have been listening out for little green men now for some decades. They have heard nothing. I believe the explanation is simple: there is no-one out there.

It is of course difficult to live without faith. As belief in political creeds and in established religions collapses, so with increasing desperation people seek to make contact with other-worldly beings who might give new meaning to their lives.

I agree that theoretically aliens may be out there. But there is not the slightest possibility that even if they did exist in some corner of the universe, they could be of any help to us over here. If we are to reclaim our planet from the vast alien forces now threatening all life on earth, the first condition is to recognise that it is up to us. We are on our own.

LLB page 30

CORRESPONDENCE

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

Write to:

Labour Left Briefing
PO Box 2378
London E5 9QU



There is too much in *LLB* of Blair having betrayed the socialist aspirations of the Labour Party. Blair et al have betrayed nothing; they are incorrigible career politicians whose sole purpose is to win electoral office by the quickest and most comfortable route. This means that in today's circumstances Blair's politics are more akin to that of the present Conservative Government than to Labour's socialist left. Our support for Blair in the forthcoming general election rests on two assumptions. First, that a Blair-led government is marginally better in its policies than a Tory one. Second, that because our beliefs represent a substantial minority opinion in the Labour Party, we in the future hope to influence or even defeat 'New Labourism'.

Let it be said that *LLB*'s prime loyalty is to the advancement of socialist politics, so our support, however strong, for the Labour Party organisation in whole or in part is therefore contingent. What is most important is that the identity, aspirations and politics of the socialist left be kept alive in the coming period through the continuance of *LLB*. In this way if the two above mentioned assumptions prove to be incorrect, then the socialist left in Britain can survive.

Peter Bowing,
Hungary

Your editorial (October), argues that the left underestimated just how ruthless the Blair clique was prepared to be. On the other hand perhaps what we really failed to get right was the degree with which peoples' desire to get the Tories out would allow Blair a comparatively easy ride.

The support for Blair in the Labour Party and the trade unions is tiny. All his grand managerialism and moralism will come to nought if the left organises and mobilises now to defend the Labour-trade union links, argue for a minimum wage of £4.26 an hour and strike back against Labour councils who want to try out Blair's worker bashing agenda before he gets to No.10. In short we can, if we work at it, wipe the smiles from the faces of the Tories and the Blairites as well.

Keith Flett,
London N17

For those who have been following the conference trail around Britain's seaside towns and think that it's all over for another year - think again. *LLB* readers should be interested in the Green Left Conference which is being held on Saturday 9th November, at Conway Hall London. It is an initiative launched by a coalition of organisations: the Red-Green Network, The Way Ahead, the Green Socialist Network, the Socialist Movement and the Red-Green Study Group.

Speakers include Jeremy Corbyn MP, Frieder Otto Wolf from the German Greens and Cath Bann (Third Battle of Newbury). They will focus on the connections that can be made between socialists and greens..

A varied programme of workshops will be on offer, from building links between the unions and social movements to stopping the arms trade. If readers need more information please phone 0171-247 1702.

Penny Clarke,
London



Plebiscite panic

LLB production was interrupted by a phone call from the **Greater London Labour Party**. No they weren't phoning to tell us Tony's article was late or that we should hold back from making jokes about **Clare Short**. In fact they wanted to remind *LLB*'s Dan Carter that he should vote in the *Road to the Manifesto* ballot. They must be desperate!

Short memory

The Labour leadership's outrage at **Jeremy Corbyn** MP's invite to **Gerry Adams** to the House of Commons reminds us of more lenient times. For who shared a platform with Jeremy and Gerry at a Conference fringe meeting in Brighton in the early 1980s, but **Clare Short**?

One rule for one

Whilst the Party apparatus pulled out all the stops in an attempt to discredit **Liz Davies**' candidature in **Leeds North East**, letters have now been sent to members in the CLP telling them that a line has to be drawn under the selection now. Whilst Liz proved in court that allegations that she incited violence were false it seems that activists' fears about business dealings of the new candidate Fabian Hamilton are to be swept under the carpet.

Hornets' nest

We thought we had fully documented New Labour's move to the right, but news from a **Rochdale Labour Party** member at Conference in Blackpool that they had been out leafleting for the Tories in order to stop the Liberals gaining ground stunned even us.

Snouts in the trough

As Labour MPs supported the Party's attacks on **earnings related pensions**, a report published by Union Pensions Services showed that the most generous pensions scheme in the country was the one that MPs had voted for themselves.

Scientifically manufacturing votes

In **MSF**, the forthcoming General Secretary elections have already shown the depths which the leadership is prepared to plumb. Even before the election started General Secretary **Roger Lyons** wrote to many full-time officers seeking their support and this has been followed by a - totally illegal under union rules - newsletter supporting his candidature being sent to all branches. How this has been paid for and how his supporters obtained the addresses of branch secretaries are questions to be answered, but surely these tactics mean that he has ruled himself out of the contest.

The Information Society

London correspondent of the ***New York Times***, US's self-declared newspaper of record, treated its readers to an in-depth account of **Tony Blair**'s speech to this year's TUC.

Insofar as the article summarised the Labour leader's hostility to trade unionism, it was a model of fair and unbiased journalism. However this Pulitzer Prize worthy effort was marred by a minor inaccuracy — Tony Blair gave no speech to the TUC this year!

AOB

"Voting Labour is like wiping your bottom - you may not particularly like doing it but you've got to because you're in a worse mess if you don't." - *Jeremy Hardy.*

"A big bill must be paid if Britain's children are to have the high level of training that will be needed in the 21st century... hope should not be so long deferred that disillusion sets in." - Former Labour Prime Minister *Lord Callaghan*, demanding that a Blair government spend "billions more" on education.

"There's no ducking it. If we want to do things we have to spend more". - *Frank Field MP.*

"It does make me smile when some youngster rings me up from Walworth Road and says have you ever thought about getting more involved in the Labour Party ". - *Lord Callaghan.*

Irish peace: time for Labour to act

Frank O Neill, Sinn Fein, reports on his week in Blackpool.

WITH THE Labour leadership anxious that Conference would leave no hostages to fortune it was clear that there would be no bold new strategies for moving the peace process in Ireland forward. Instead Tony Blair announced he would continue in John Major's footsteps.

Our Blackpool strategy was to put forward to as many delegates as possible the Sinn Fein analysis of how peace could be developed in Ireland. Sinn Fein's Francie Molloy and Joan O'Connor attended a lively question and answer session on the Monday night. This was followed by a meeting hosted by the Parliamentary backbench committee which was addressed by representatives of Sinn Fein, the Irish Labour Party, the SDLP and the Labour Party Irish Society.

Francie Molloy outlined the lack of movement by the British Government which had led to the present crisis. He was speaking not just as a Sinn Fein representative but as one who had been elected to represent his constituents at peace talks. Despite the Government's assurance that any party which secured a mandate on May 30th would have a direct and automatic route into all party talks, Sinn Fein was excluded. Sinn Fein's vote was five times more than the sum total of five of the other parties who are attending the talks. Where, Francie Molloy asked, was the democracy in this?

Sinn Fein endorsed the Mitchell principles. During the summer, the Government capitulated to the violence and threats of further violence by David Trimble and the UUP which flouted those principles. Trimble was not even admonished by Major. Loyalist paramilitaries killed a taxi driver, Michael McGoldrick, during the Drumcree standoff and later issued death threats. They are still acceptable to the Government.

The present dangerous vacuum has been created by the British Government's refusal to engage actively in a peace process. The news which broke during Conference of threats by loyalist groups to resume sectarian killings was an example of this.

Sinn Fein has always played an active and progressive role in attempting to build a peace process. It played a crucial role in creating the conditions which encouraged the IRA to call a ceasefire in August 1994. Since then it has worked extremely hard to build up a momentum for a peace process.



The British Government under John Major has shown that it has different priorities. Fearful of the hope generated by the IRA ceasefire it sought to reduce the momentum for change and control the dynamic created by it. The peace process was stretched and stretched until eventually it collapsed and the IRA ended its 18 month old cessation.

Francie Molloy stated that he certainly does not believe that we should sit back and wait for the next election before any progress is made in building a new peace process. Sinn Fein wants to see progress now.

While Sinn Fein understood the principle behind a genuine bipartisan approach to peace in Ireland, Labour had for too long given uncritical support to the Government at the expense of not putting any positive suggestions forward. If a Labour Government is to play an active role in building a peace process in Ireland it must accept the principle of inclusiveness. No section of the Irish people or their representatives can be excluded from talks about building a peaceful future. No section of the Irish people or their representatives can have a veto on whether these talks go ahead or not. There must be parity of esteem.

Labour is in a unique position where it can actively promote the conditions which would lead to a new peace process. It should actively engage now. If Labour is to form the next Government it would be in a far stronger position to move that process forward if there was already a serious momentum by the time of the election.

Outside these fringe meetings Sinn Fein engaged in a large number of private meetings with delegates, interest groups and MPs. We were encouraged by both the amount of interest and the amount of support for our analysis. There was widespread agreement that the collapse of the peace process was due to the procrastination and unwillingness of the British Government to engage in it.

This feeling of support was further strengthened by the hostile reception given to David Trimble of the UUP at a fringe meeting later in the week. Mr Trimble was criticised by almost every speaker from the floor as well as the platform. Mr Trimble showed arrogance and bigotry in his answers - the Drumcree standoff was caused by a Jesuit conspiracy etc. Many of the audience who had come with an open mind were appalled at what they heard. This is the party to which the British Government has, for its own narrow electoral reasons, handed a veto.

Printed by Wernham Printers Ltd (T.U.), 4 Forster Road, London N17.