LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

October 1996 price £1 / 50p

inside...

- Liz Davies vindicated
- Ronan Bennett on Ireland
- Asylum rights
- Liverpool dockers

trade unions on the front line...

keep our Party



Labour

Labour Left Briefing

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Fight cuts in education

Demonstrate!

19th October

Assemble 12 noon
Embankment
Rally in Hyde Park 3pm.

AGENDA

Trade Union Congress, trade union laws, trade union link 4-5

Leeds North-East, Liz Davies' libel victory, Hackney, Scotland, Birmingham, electoral landscape, Road to the Manifesto, the Alan Simpson column 6-13

Liverpool dockers, CPSA, Hillingdon hospital workers, postal workers, the Geoff Martin column 14-17

France, Asylum Rights, Ireland, Turkey, Kurdistan, the Michael Hindley column 18-23

Kings X 2, Asylum Bill 24-25

Reviews, Periscope, Correspondence, AOB 26-31

Front cover: international picket at Seaforth Container Base, Liverpool. Photo: Dave Sinclair

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Warning: Blair means it!



COCK UP OR conspiracy? Alastair Campbell would have us believe that the attacks by leading Labour figures during the TUC's week in Blackpool - on trade union policies, on the trade unions' link to the Party and on unions taking industrial action - were all an unfortunate coincidence. If that's the case, then he and the rest of the Party's spin doctors should be sacked for gross incompetence.

The public, however, is not as stupid as Campbell, Mandelson and Blair assume. The attacks on the unions were deliberate and co-ordinated. In part, they are merely the latest manifestation of Mandelson's one and only "big idea" - that Labour leaders will win votes by attacking their Party's supporters. But they are also more than that. Blair and his cohorts are deadly serious about their plans to break the link with the unions as soon as possible, not so much because they believe trade unionism is a vote-loser (polls show the opposite) as because they are ideologically hostile to it.

There is a fond belief among many Labour MPs, trade unionists and Party members that Blair's constant movement to the right, his endless attempts to appease *Daily Mail* readers, are merely an electoral ploy. Once the leader gets into Number Ten we'll see his true commitment to the workers. Even if this were the case, it would be an impractical strategy; lying your way into office always stores up trouble. But it is not the case. When Blair attacks the unions he means what he says, and anyone who has followed the thinking of his inner circle - from the Philip Gould memorandum, to Mandelson's book, to the post-modernist, post-democratic, post-political meanderings of sympathetic journalists in the *Independent* and the *Guardian* - will know that Stephen Byers' remarks on breaking the link were the authentic voice of New Labour. These people intend to use the labour movement to get elected, then rush through state funding to enable them to sever their connections with that movement and form a new 'centre' party of political professionals sustained by media exposure but unaccountable in any way to a broader popular constituency.

Blair's mixture of neo-liberal economics with social authoritarianism is familiar, but there is one thing about his approach that is new. Never before has a Labour leader worked so strenuously to suppress all expectations of his Government and to curtail all criticism of a sell-out before he has even been elected.

In the past, Party members and unions have under-estimated the ruthlessness of Blair's clique. He promised he would not touch Clause IV; within a year he had ditched it. He promised to respect the findings of the Social Justice Commission; Gordon Brown has announced that under Labour child benefit will cease to be universal. Meanwhile, without so much as a by your leave from the NEC, the unions, the constituencies or even the Parliamentary Labour Party, he has promised to reduce the basic rate of tax to 15%. Coupled with the requirements of the Maastricht convergence criteria for European monetary union, setting such a low tax rate would decimate public services and benefits.

The Labour leadership has already decided who its enemies will be after the election: not the City fat cats, not the Murdoch media, not lawless and anti-social employers, but trade unionists and welfare recipients. It has opened up its campaign on both fronts well in advance. Party members and unions have no alternative but to fight now. The injunctions not to rock the boat can hardly apply when they are so flagrantly ignored by the leadership.

US lawlessness

IT OUGHT TO be self-evident that we cannot allow individual nation states, even (especially) if they are the most powerful on earth, to launch unilateral military attacks on others.

The US bombing of Iraq did not save one Kurdish life and did not advance by a single jot the welfare of the Kurds or their struggle for self-determination. Nor did it bring peace or democracy any closer for the Middle East.

The justifications offered for the US attack do not stand scrutiny. If concern for the Kurds was the motivation, why has the US allowed Turkey, a NATO member and Washington ally, to pursue its bloody repression against them? And if the object was "to teach Saddam a lesson", one is left wondering why other dictators are not sent to the same school - and how effective this "lesson" is when it seems only to end up strengthening Saddam's grip in Iraq.

The British Government has been virtually alone in giving unequivocal backing to the US's lawless violence. Shamefully, the Labour opposition has endorsed its stand. Robin Cook, our foreign affairs spokesperson, at first claimed that Labour was backing the US action because it was a "proportionate response"; when the White House announced it was going to mount a "disproportionate response", he still backed the action.

Foreign policy will not be an issue in the forthcoming general election - because Labour has adopted the Tory assumptions about big power politics and military might. In a world riddled with conflicts and injustice, and sprinkled with weapons of mass destruction, that is a tragedy. ❑

New Labour damages TUC Conference

Delegates were angry and frustrated at the end of their week at Blackpool after New Labour's attempts to wreck this year's TUC Conference. Martin Mayer of the General Executive Council of the TGWU reports.

IN FACT, most delegates thought it had not been a bad conference at all. True, many of the debates were lacklustre and of course the affiliated unions all voted predictably along preordained policy lines. But progressive policies were adopted, often by broad consensus, of direct relevance to working people and their families in Britain today. After 17 years of an anti-union Conservative Government, the British trade union movement (down from twelve million members in 1979 to seven million members in 1996), its militancy chastened by the twin evils of unemployment and anti-union legislation, remains intact and remarkably sure of its vision for a better society, hopefully, under a Labour Government.

The key debate of the week was on the minimum wage. Would the TUC assert itself and name a figure, or acquiesce to Labour pressure and leave it to a post-election tripartite commission to decide? Rodney Bickerstaffe, arguing the case for setting £4.26 as the target now, made arguably the best speech of the week and received enthusiastic applause, outshining Arthur Scargill for once. GMB's John Edmonds, taking the New Labour line, made ill-mannered snipes and was drearily seconded by USDAW's Garfield Davies. In the event, both composites were passed with large majorities (the TGWU like many unions voted for both). Congress also backed a General Council statement which in effect adopted the New Labour strategy.

There was more consensus on other crucial issues. A comprehensive composite calling for the Tories' anti-union laws to be replaced by new laws guaranteeing union rights in line with ILO Conventions, allowing secondary action, and proper recognition and collective bargaining rights was overwhelmingly accepted. The best speeches were made by Arthur Scargill whose NUM motion demanded non-compliance with the Tory anti-union laws and Alan Johnson of the CWU whose motion called for industrial action policy to be determined by the trade unions' own rule books. Both motions were heavily defeated.

The plight of the Liverpool Dockers was highlighted by speakers throughout the week. The dockers had come to the Conference in force, handing out leaflets and stickers and attending fringe meetings. Resolutions were passed unanimously in favour of the RMT guards' dispute for natural breaks and past productivity payments, and the Magnet Kitchen workers who are members of various unions but were sacked after taking legally balloted strike action on a pay and conditions dispute.

There was condemnation of the greed of privatised utilities, and unanimous support for the re-nationalisation of the railways and an end to the Government's discredited Private Finance Initiative. The NUM's resolution calling for the re-nationalisation of all industries privatised by the Tories, to be achieved within the first term of a Labour Government, was heavily defeated however.

The debate on Europe steered the TUC closer to the EMU albeit with reservations about the Maastricht Criteria and a meek call for social issues like unemployment to be taken into account. The social partnership theme was amplified again with a disappointing video on stakeholding.

Moderate and responsible though some of this posturing was, taken together the collective voice of the TUC expressed at Blackpool this September was generally progressive. It's a shame that the Labour Party is no longer talking the same language. David Blunkett's call for refresher ballots and compulsory arbitration to avoid public sector strikes was seen as outrageous - Labour out-Torying the Tories! The row was compounded by Stephen Byers' kite-flying to journalists of a complete divorce of the link, with the ending of trade union places on the Party's National Executive Committee and the trade union's 50% vote at Conference. The furious reaction of moderate trade union leaders such as John Edmonds of the GMB was especially poignant. This was a real slap in the face for Labour's friends in the unions who have worked so hard over recent years to mould TUC policy to fit into New Labour's ideals. The question is, was this incompetence and confusion in Labour leadership circles, or a deliberately provoked row as a part of a conscious agenda to distance the Party from the unions? Perhaps the answer to this question will become clearer during the Labour Party Conference.

MSF London Regional Council

MSF the union for skilled and professional people

Labour and the unions:

Strengthen the link

President: Sue Michie

Secretary: Hugh MacGrillen

LLB page 4

New Labour attacks union link

Geoff Martin exposes the link busters.

THE NEWS THAT ultra-Blairite Steven Byers let slip to a group of national reporters over the brandy and cigars in a posh Blackpool restaurant that New Labour is planning to ditch the union link was hardly surprising.

The mods' distaste for organised labour and the working class in general is deeply ingrained. The fact is that these people recognise that the biggest threat to any New Labour plans to attack the public services and the welfare state is the trade union rank and file.

The fresh scrubbed advisers around the Blair camp understand that if they're to keep the Tory press and the CBI happy they've got to lay into the unions. Hence the disgraceful intervention by David Blunkett at the TUC floating the prospect of Labour outlawing public sector strikes and tightening up the anti-union laws.



Byers and Blunkett knew exactly what they were doing; the kite flying will soon become policy proposals. But on this occasion there is growing evidence that they've not only wound up the union chiefs but the bulk of Party members as well. This has given us the ideal opportunity to weld together a broad campaign in defence of socialist principles. My own view, and it's one shared by some of my UNISON colleagues, is that the Blairites will actually try to set up an early confrontation with a group of public sector workers in a crazed attempt to be seen to be tough on the unions. This would then give the architects of the "Blair Project" the opportunity to sever the link and introduce state funding of political parties on the basis that they can't be trusted to follow the central monetarist line on pay and spending.

As Lew Adams from ASLEF said, it's a suicidal strategy that would rip the whole movement apart and make the winter of discontent look like a vicar's tea party. When it comes to the crunch the front line in the defence of the welfare state will always be the unions. The link busters have been forced onto the defensive by the reaction to their plans - our job is to keep it that way.

New Labour attacks union rights

Jon Rogers
Deputy Regional Convenor
London UNISON.

DAVID BLUNKETT'S "misunderstood" intervention on trade union law raises the real possibility of the need for a campaign against anti-trade union legislation in the first year of a Blair Government.

The (barely plausible) confusion between binding and compulsory arbitration may simply have persisted because Labour's spin doctors wanted to see union barons raging against the Labour leadership to reassure middle class voters. However, the idea for ballots in the middle of disputes to be held at the behest of employers has the hallmarks of authentic New Labour "thought" - deeply reactionary and patently unworkable.

Anyone who has organised a strike ballot knows the enormous effort involved - and the danger of administrative errors enabling mischievous legal challenges from the employer. Since the merest hint of legal action throws some union leaders into a panic, the prospect that immunity from civil liability could require a re-ballot whenever the employer made a "significant" new offer could make prolonged lawful strikes almost impossible.

If the definition of "significant" is left to the courts, unions wishing to comply with the law will be likely to err on the side of caution and re-ballot. Employers could choose their moment to make an offer, forcing a new ballot in the hope of securing a reduction in the level of support for action. Any further restrictions on unions in dispute will shift the balance further towards employers.

New Labour attacks child benefit

GORDON BROWN's proposal to end Child Benefit for 16 to 18 year olds is part of "finally burying the idea that Labour is a `tax and spend' party".

Brown says the savings would be channelled into new grants to encourage children in poor families to continue education and training after 16.

Child Benefit is crucial in helping to keep these young people in full time education. Its replacement by means tested allowances will mean less money for caring parents. Children of the poorest get the worst education, suffer the highest levels of underachievement and have the worst job opportunities. They are much more likely to be unemployed. Many students are unable to complete courses because they cannot afford to. Equality of opportunity cannot be achieved by cutting Child Benefit.

The proportion of the population living on or below income support levels rose from 14% in 1979 to 24% in 1992. Income differentials in the United Kingdom have returned to Victorian levels. The New Labour leadership is obsessed with reassuring the well-off that none of the massive tax give-aways of the past 17 years will be reversed.

A Labour Government should guarantee child benefit for all up to the age of 18, raise its level to the same for all children, end the student loan system and replace it with an adequate grant for all students.

LLB page 5

A tale of two selections

Cllr Garth Frankland
Leeds City Council

FOR TWO years Leeds North East Labour Party has been trying to select a candidate to win a key marginal.

In 1992 a brilliantly executed strategy based on Euro and local government election results ensured that Labour leapt from being third to within 4,500 votes of the Tory MP. Campaigns using leaflets, stalls and raising resources have laid the foundations for a General Election victory. The constituency, usually on the left on policy issues, built a strong organisation.

The Party voted to have an all-women shortlist, a decision endorsed by the NEC, which excluded the previous candidate Fabian Hamilton. Because of our proven organisational track record, the Regional Party asked the constituency to allow full access by the media, including a television documentary crew, throughout the selection. This was to be the model selection of women candidates by the 'new' Labour Party.

There were a number of strong local women candidates but some of us on the left felt a sharper and clearer political discussion was needed. Liz Davies was invited to the Chapel Allerton ward meeting, where she wiped out the opposition politically. She did not have an easy ride but despite a number of unsubstantiated attacks led by the *Daily Mail*, she won selection against strong candidates.

The attacks continued and the NEC was hounded into rejecting Liz Davies. This is just a brief sketch of a most disturbing series of attacks on the constituency which united the left and centre of the Party.

For the next contest over 50 candidates applied. The selection was run in strictest secrecy and officers were prevented from giving members information regarding the business dealings of one of the candidates.

This was the first use of the new selection procedures - just like a job interview, and conducted under bizarre circumstances. The 'job specification' drawn up by the local Party Executive was amended unilaterally by unelected regional officials. You didn't have to attend the 'interview' to vote, it was forbidden to ask any searching questions and the work backgrounds of the candidates were excluded.

Again Chapel Allerton chose an 'outsider', Pam Tatlow, veteran of two elections, including the Cheltenham by-election. The NEC could hardly reject a candidate with such a visible background. Her radical but experienced politics won her friends across the whole constituency.

Despite attempts to suppress the business backgrounds of one of the candidates, some details did surface in the press - but after over 100 members had cast their postal ballots. Their vote was decisive in ensuring Fabian Hamilton's narrow victory.

Subsequently the Constituency Executive has sent a large dossier of publicly accessible documents detailing the winning candidate's business dealings to the NEC, with a clear implication not to endorse him.

Leeds Central's University branch suspended

Patrick Hall of Leeds Campaign Group reports on yet another witch hunt.

North & Yorkshire regional secretary, Andrew Sharp reported that he had received two serious complaints about University branch, and after consultation with the National Constitutional Officer, had suspended the branch and its delegation. An enquiry would be conducted by the Regional Executive and he would be in touch again shortly. He gave no details of the complaints whatsoever. A copy of the letter had been sent to the Constituency Labour Party (CLP) Secretary but no consultation had been held with the CLP before the decision was made. Early attempts by the CLP officers to obtain further clarification were unsuccessful.

A second letter sent by the Region to all branch members informed them that an investigating panel would sit on 19th July. It described the complaints as concerning the branch meeting on 5th June - allegations of threating behaviour against a branch officer, general intimidation, internal literature inconsistent with Party rules and links with proscribed organisations. The letter invited members to submit evidence.

I appeared before the panel, together with the branch secretary. After discussing the June meeting and a couple of branch mailings, it became apparent that the remaining allegations were directed at me and seemed to have emanated from one particular branch member. They asked if I had any contact with an ex-branch member expelled from the Party in 1993 for membership of Militant. They questioned me about positions I held in my local UNISON branch and about the running of the branch itself, eg. Militant involvement.

They asked me whether I was unemployed, saying that they had received information that I was not. When I assured them that I was, the Chair of the panel, Councillor Kevin Jones (former Chief Whip of Newcastle Labour Group), said he wanted to ask me one more question, but that I didn't have to answer it. He said that he felt that there were two types of unemployed people: those who were looking for work and those who weren't, and he asked me which I was. I found this question most intrusive and refused to answer it. When the Constituency General Committee met it agreed to write to each member of the National Executive Committee to express its concern, and to send a letter of support to every member of the Branch. Further interviews planned for September failed to take place.

We do not know what the report will recommend, and will have to wait and see what action the NEC decides to take.

LLB page 6

Liz Davies vindicated

Mike Marqusee reports from the High Court.



Liz Davies

THREE Blairite Islington councillors who smeared Liz Davies last year have got their comeuppance.

On Monday, 16th September, solicitors for Cllr Tal Michael, Cllr Phil Kelly and former Cllr James Purnell accepted on their behalf that Liz Davies "did not heckle nor did she incite violence" at an Islington Council Education Committee meeting held in November 1994.

They also accepted that Liz Davies "has a legitimate and useful role to play within the Labour Party" and "apologise if any misleading impression was given to the NEC or any other party."

In lieu of damages, each of the defendants has agreed to make a contribution to the general election campaign fund for Jeremy Corbyn, Labour MP for Islington North.

The letters sent to the NEC by the three had led to press reports that Davies had "incited violence" at the Education Committee. Phil Kelly had said that Davies "barracked and shouted throughout and encouraged members of the public to do the same." Michael had said she "joined in the barracking" and Purnell said she "incited a crowd" and connected her with "mob rule". The three have claimed that their letters were solicited by Labour Party General Secretary Tom Sawyer. They have now withdrawn these false allegations in open court.

As a gesture of reconciliation, Liz Davies has agreed to accept that the three made their original statements in "good faith". Others are unlikely to view their action so charitably.

Unable to accept their humiliation in court, the three have circulated misleading press releases in a feeble attempt to minimise their embarrassment. The *Guardian* refused to print a letter from Kelly and Michael which amounted to an attempt to renege on the statement in open court, to which all parties to the settlement are legally bound.

Earlier this year, Liz Davies accepted a payment into court from the *Financial Times* in settlement of her libel action against that newspaper. That payment has covered her costs and therefore Liz will be returning all the funds donated to her libel campaign.

"I wish to thank all those who contributed so generously," she said. "The statement in open court is a vindication for me and my supporters. I have cleared my name of a damaging and offensive slur. The lesson is that the Labour Party must conduct its internal affairs with probity and with respect for the rights of individual members."

"I have cleared my name"

At the time they sent their letters to the NEC, Purnell was chair of Islington's Housing Committee, Michael was chair of the Labour Group and Kelly was chair of Education. Purnell has since resigned from the Council to take a highly paid job at the BBC, forcing a by-election which Labour nearly lost.

Michael failed to secure election to any posts at the Labour Group's annual general meeting held this spring (where Liz Davies was elected vice-chair of the Group and re-elected chair of the Women's Committee). In the last two years he has made himself one of the most distrusted and disliked figures in Islington politics (which is saying something). Tal works for his father, Labour MP and Blair confidante Alun Michael.

After the court hearing, it was revealed that Mishcon de Reya, solicitors for the three defendants, intended to waive their legal fees. Anthony Julius, who acted for the three (and who has also represented Princess Diana), is apparently happy for his firm to absorb a reported £20,000 loss. Why?

It is known that Mishcon de Reya undertook the case at the request of Labour leaders. Initial reports that Labour was funding the three were denied when protests from Party members and affiliated unions - and threats of legal action - flooded Walworth Road.

It is hard to see why Mishcon de Reya should waive its normally substantial fees unless something was promised in return. Step forward, Lord Julius?

Lambeth Legal Fund

IN 1991, thirteen Lambeth councillors were suspended by the Labour Party for opposing the poll tax, cuts and the Gulf War. Some of the suspended councillors had initiated investigations into possible corrupt Council practices. But when the "Lambeth corruption" story hit the headlines Jack Straw MP linked the thirteen with "corruption" and claimed falsely that this was why the Party had disciplined them.

"I'm damned if we're going to be tarred with the brush of Lambeth, especially as we cleared out the 13 semi-Trotskyist councillors," he said in *Tribune* in January 1993, "We'll be using Lambeth to remind people of the error of ultra-left politics... corruption and Trotskyism went hand in hand."

Some of the thirteen began a libel action against Straw in order to get the damaging statements withdrawn and prevent their repetition. Unfortunately, this action proved protracted and prohibitively expensive and was terminated, leaving the plaintiffs owing £2,000 in legal fees plus a possible £5,000 for Straw's costs. New Labour now blames everything which is wrong in Lambeth on previous Labour councillors. The libel action at least prevented Straw from escalating his attacks. Please help defray the costs these comrades incurred standing up for all our rights.

- Make cheques / standing orders payable to Lambeth Legal Fund (on behalf of Steve French, Alison Higgs, Ann Hollifield, George Huish, Greg Tucker and Joan Twelves), c/o 3 Blades House, London SE11 5TW.

Hackney on the rack

In May 1994 Labour won 44 out of 60 seats on Hackney Council with 55% of the vote. In September 1996 Labour lost control of the Council for the first time since 1968. It is now likely that a non-Labour administration will be formed. Graham Bash, Hackney North & Stoke Newington CLP, explains this disaster.

WHEN LABOUR secured its excellent 1994 election victory, John McCafferty was the leader and he continued in that post until he was ousted in 1995. In his early council days he had played a positive role in the fight against rate-capping. But he broke decisively with the left when he closed libraries in the face of resistance from the local community and unions. He crushed library occupations which involved numerous members of his own Labour Group. The occupations ended with council workers boarding up the libraries as police evicted the occupants.

McCafferty's approach to leadership is primarily managerial. He has had some success winning bids for central Government money. His weakness is his inability to build alliances both with the Party and in the Labour Group itself. When he lost control of the leadership in 1995 there was little that bound his opponents together besides the questionable principle of 'my enemy's enemy is my friend'.

There was little political coherence among his opponents, who had become known as the Manifesto Group. Some wanted to resist cuts against their community but had no strategy to do this, having accepted the principle of compliance with Tory laws. Some on the left felt an instinctive sympathy for the two new leaders Nicholas Tallentire and Meral Ece. Yet the new leadership was to have few left credentials remaining when they joined McCafferty's rotten tradition and closed some libraries themselves.

Inexplicably the new leadership then promptly split - with Tallentire defecting back to the McCafferty camp. Tallentire ran to Labour head office and denounced his former allies in the Manifesto Group as 'a party within a party' and called for disciplinary action. Predictably both national and regional Party officials obliged and bitter personal antagonisms were further inflamed.

Things came to a head at the Group AGM. Party officials had suspended the Local Government Committee - effectively gagging the voice of the parties. In addition five councillors including leading figures in the Manifesto Group were suspended from the Labour Group. This effectively secured a majority for McCafferty. These events culminated in the defeat of the Manifesto Group's nominee for leader, veteran right-wing Councillor Gerry Ross, by McCafferty.

The losers were incensed - and with some justification. But any attempt to prettify the Ece faction as a left-wing opposition to McCafferty was finally extinguished when sixteen of them walked out of the Party and declared themselves to be the Hackney New Labour Group. They were promptly expelled from the Party by London General Secretary Terry Ashton.

They justified their split with calls for an inquiry into the activities of a paedophile - Mark Trotter. Trotter had been a worker in one of Hackney's children's homes. He died of AIDS just before the police could prosecute him for offences in Liverpool. It has been suggested in the media that Trotter was given protection in Hackney because he was a Labour Party activist with close links to the Labour Group. Of course, this must be investigated. The suspicion is that the national Labour Party wanted a low profile investigation to minimise adverse publicity in the run up to the general election.

But New Labour councillors' allegations of a cover up were never raised by them in the local parties. And the factional heat generated in this dispute has been in inverse proportion to the political differences involved.

Much of the blame for Labour losing control of the Council must be shared by John McCafferty and Party officials for their factional and bureaucratic behaviour, but this does not justify New Labour's defection. Diane Abbott MP has refused to defend either faction. She called on the Group to stop personal in-fighting and urged caution on the Party officials.

Even at this late stage our aim should be to mend the split and regain control of Hackney Council for Labour. New Labour Councillors should ask to rejoin both the Party and the Labour Group. John McCafferty, in the interests of unity, should urge the national Party to let them back in. But if the New Labour group persists with its antics - and forms an administration with Liberal support and Tory abstention - it will get little support or sympathy from the labour movement in Hackney.

NEC to rig Birmingham

While glossy New Labour publications hit Party members' doormats, 1,130 Birmingham members have received correspondence of a more threatening nature. A member of Ladywood CLP reports on how the NEC intend to get the MPs they want in Birmingham.

MEMBERS in Sparkbrook, Sparkhill, Soho and Ladywood received letters in July telling them to show proof of their eligibility for membership. Failure to do so would mean loss of membership.

In February 1995 the NEC suspended Sparkbrook, Small Heath, Ladywood and Perry Barr CLPs. The declared reason for the action was that members seeking to stand in Parliamentary selections were allegedly corruptly obtaining House Renovation Grants in return for votes. Enquiries by the Local Government Ombudsman, District Auditor and City Council subsequently found no evidence of wrongdoing. The NEC in September 1995 shifted the grounds for the suspensions to alleged "membership abuse". Members feared that this was a pretext to impose the sitting MPs: Jeff Rooker, Clare Short and Roger Godsiff. Many were keen that Asian and Afro-Caribbean candidates should stand for selection.

A high profile campaign was launched against the suspensions. Members formally complained to the CRE and the situation started to attract national media coverage.

LLB page 8

New Labour, New Culloden?

Cathy Jamieson, Scottish Labour Party Executive, reports on Labour's Scottish fiasco.

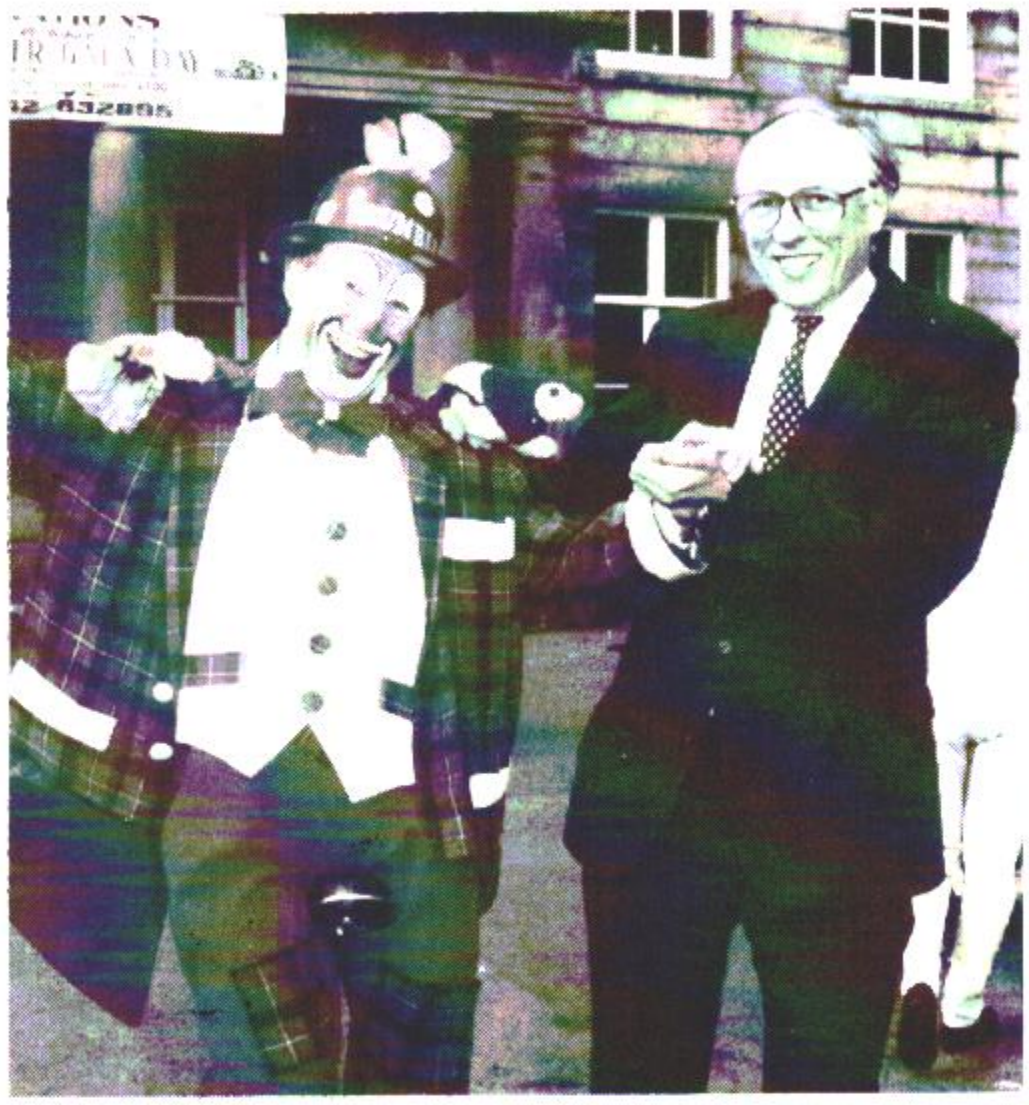


PHOTO: *Labour Club News.*

Who helped draft Labour's Scottish 'policy?'

IF ANYONE had suggested in March when I was elected to the Scottish Executive that by the summer we would be involved in heated debate over the plans for a Scottish Parliament, I would have laughed. Our plans for a Parliament were clear. Unfortunately, like many others who have been out campaigning, I haven't had much to laugh about since the announcement of the two-question referendum.

Outrage would not be too strong a word to describe the views of the CLP Secretary who first broke the news to me, having picked it up from the newspapers. Pressure from CLPs I represent ensured that by the Special Executive Meeting two days later, I was clear that I would vote to uphold existing policy. When this was defeated, a motion composed during the meeting was passed. It was critical of the manner of the announcement but supported the leadership. Many felt strongly that the matter could not rest there, partly because of the U-turn, but also because of the apparent disregard for the principle of Scottish matters being decided in Scotland. Many CLPs were unhappy with the plan. Motions were sent to the Scottish Executive supporting a single-question referendum, giving a Scottish Parliament revenue varying powers.

The matter was further debated at a Special 'Road to the Manifesto' Executive Meeting. The debate was polarised between leadership supporters, and those who wished to see a single-question referendum. The latter rallied round TGWU/UNISON resolutions, supported by the Campaign for Socialism and Scottish Labour Action. Intense lobbying led to some Executive members receiving lots of "advice" about their future political careers.

Those supporting the single-question option were branded rebels and accused of gifting points to the Tories.

I don't take well to being accused of being "out of touch" either with reality, or with the members I represent. I understand very well the need for a Labour Government, living in an area with one of the highest unemployment rates in the U.K. I have remained in touch with members in the 18 constituencies I represent, by attending meetings to hear their views, and providing regular feedback via a newsletter.

It was clear the meeting was going to be yet another example of the leadership having to be seen to win. The move from a two-question referendum to holding two referendums, and virtually asking the same question twice, must surely go down as one of the most bizarre compromises in political history. Even more bizarrely, having announced the two-referendum plan and urged unity to campaign for it, George Robertson (Shadow Scottish Secretary) then dropped it like the proverbial hot potato.

Questions are now being raised as to what extent the Scottish Labour Party could carry out its democratically decided policy if it is different from the rest of the U.K. within a Scottish Parliament? It has, for instance, maintained its opposition to Trident and the 1996 Scottish Conference called for "a fair and just redistribution of wealth through the tax and benefits system".

It is important we remember these points when we are arguing the case for a Scottish Parliament, because the Scottish Parliament must be a way of delivering real change to the living standards of ordinary people. It is not simply an end in itself. ❑

selections

In April 1996 the NEC despatched a full-timer to "look after" the four CLPs until after the General Election.

While predominantly white wards were reinstated in May 1996, wards with black memberships have been treated very differently. The "turn up or else letters" (which Party officials refused to translate into the relevant languages) were sent to 1,130 members. 510 did not respond. They are now lapsed as members. The figure looks set to rise with similar letters due to be sent out in four further wards.

After all the hot air about "membership abuse" only 103 members (10%) were found not to be on the electoral roll - not so exceptional in a multi-racial inner city area. Only three members were found to be at non-existent addresses. Only one was actively expelled (for standing against Labour).

Having been forced to contemplate holding Parliamentary selections, the NEC are determined that these should take place entirely on their terms. The mid-November deadline for the Perry Bar selection means that the CLP will remain suspended. Shortlisting will be done by the NEC. A similar process is likely to occur in the three other CLPs. This, together with a slashed Asian membership, will guarantee survival for the sitting MPs.

The last 18 months have helped unite members who stand for race equality and Party democracy but Birmingham will have a long wait for a real chance to select Black or Asian MPs.

- Conference delegates are urged to support the resolutions from Birmingham Selly Oak and Birmingham Hall Green calling for the reinstatement of the suspended CLPs.

Who's out of touch?

Mike Marqusee surveys the electoral and social landscape facing Labour in the run-up to the general election.

WHY DID Labour lose in 1992? The country was in the midst of recession. Unemployment was higher than now, and inflation a more recent memory. At the outset of the election campaign 57% disapproved of the Government's record. Yet when the dust had settled the Tories beat Labour in the popular vote by 43% to 35%. Taxation was cited as the decisive issue. Exit polls showed 62% of voters believed Labour would tax them more despite the Party's insistence that it would not do so. Why didn't they believe us? The same exit polls showed that 60% favoured the use of taxation to redistribute wealth from rich to poor. Labour fought its campaign on the question of the general level of taxation rather than the share-out of the burden of taxation. In the absence of a coherent economic alternative to the Tories, Labour appeared to be robbing Peter to pay Paul. Despite John Smith's "prawn cocktail" offensive on the City, opinion polls continued to show that Labour was regarded as even less economically competent than the Tories. Labour's campaign strategy had been to emphasise the strong leadership of Neil Kinnock, but Kinnock was held in low esteem by the bulk of the electorate. The official report to the NEC following the election defeat confirmed that the refusal of "undecideds" to vote Labour "relates to the general perceptions of the Party and its leadership, rather than specifically to fears of tax increases". The report highlighted Labour's "under-performance" among three crucial groups: older women, young men, and the Party's "core voters" - trade unionists, the unemployed, council tenants and families on low incomes.

Labour's current big lead over the Tories was first established (under John Smith) in September 1992, in the wake of the ERM fiasco and the Tory rupture over Maastricht. Underlying it has been the cumulative impact of Thatcherite policies on education, health, housing, public transport and utilities in conjunction with the long term consequences of persistent mass unemployment. There has been a growing awareness, based on personal experience, that changes in the labour market have not worked to the advantage of most people.

Labour's trump card remains the continuing incompetence and division of the Tories. 71% currently disapprove of the Government's record. Yet, as Tony Blair never tires of reminding us, we must not be complacent.

Even within the leader's inner sanctum it is received wisdom that the Labour lead is "soft". According to a *Daily Telegraph* poll, only 29% of those who voted Labour in 1992 now describe their support for "New Labour" as "enthusiastic". Only 7% of those who have come over to Labour since 1992 are "enthusiastic".

The same poll revealed that 36.1% of voters believe Blair will make the best Prime Minster of the three candidates on offer. At the time of the 1992 election, 27.7% chose Kinnock. In the same period, Major's ratings have fallen by 20% to a mere 19.4%. Blair's ratings are an improvement on Kinnock's, but in the context of Tory collapse they are not impressive, and they have slipped slightly over recent months. Although most members of the public have a favourable impression of the Labour leader, they do not trust him on details. It has to be remembered that Blair has enjoyed a relatively sympathetic press (certainly compared to the treatment meted out to Kinnock and Foot). It remains to be seen what will happen when the media turns on the heat during a general election campaign.

The leadership is perhaps more aware than the Party as a whole that the election is not entirely in the bag. In their desperation not be branded a high tax party, Blair and Brown pulled a rabbit out of the hat - the pledge to cut the basic rate to 15%. They are now engaged in a war of statistical manipulation with the Tories over which party is the high taxer. Watching this gladiatorial combat the public is likely to give a thumbs down to both sides.

Visiting Washington in the spring, Blair told the press that Labour wanted to ease the tax burden on people on "middle incomes". His spin doctors then explained that by middle incomes he meant £30-40,000 a year. Yet, as the *Financial Times* reported, only 7% of tax payers have gross incomes of £30,000 or more - and only 1.8% more than £50,000. Just what is the electoral arithmetic behind Labour's fear of increasing taxes on top earners?

And how is Labour shaping up among women, youth and its "core voters"? In the past, women have been more likely than men to vote Tory. Polls show that this "gender gap" has not narrowed since 1992. Indeed, in one respect it is worse now for Labour. In 1992 young women favoured Labour by 7%; recent polls show the lead reduced to 3%. One in four women has not yet decided how to vote; yet women are more likely to vote than men.

There are 11.3 million women in work,

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Briefing

LLB page 10

but for 44.5% of them their main job is part time. Women's average hourly earnings are 79% of men's. Labour's reneging on part-timers' rights and equivocation about the minimum wage, its virtual silence on childcare and apparent mean-mindedness on pensions will not make it any easier for the Party to close the gender gap.

Labour's prospects of improving its youth vote also look dim. There are now 1,125,000 16-24 year olds out of work and full-time higher education. Labour claims its windfall tax proposals would provide relief - though not necessarily a permanent job - for 250,000 of them. It is hard to imagine that many young people are impressed with Jack Straw's offensive against youth crime or with the threat to child benefit. A recent MORI poll showed only two out of five planning to vote in the next general election, compared to one in two at the last.

Labour's performance at the TUC illustrated the growing gap between social reality and the assumptions about it which guide the leadership. John Monks had worked hard to stage a Labour-friendly conference only to find himself ambushed by Blair, Blunkett and Byers.

In the run-up to the conference, Labour had backed away from John Smith's pledge to ensure that parttime workers enjoyed full legal rights, watered down its promise to compel employers to provide training opportunities, wrapped the minimum wage in a confusing mist of ifs and buts and tempered its commitment to the Social Chapter by insisting that it would consult with business before ending Britain's opt-out. Then, with delegates gathered in Blackpool, the leadership let it be known that it intended to set up even more restrictions on trade union action. On top of that there were attacks on the postal workers and other strikers and Blunkett's silly fulmination against "armchair revolutionaries".

The calculation is that a hard line with the unions, coupled with business-friendly rhetoric, will win the election. According to the TUC survey, only 17% of trade union members strongly support "New Labour", yet Labour needs to poll a massive majority among the seven million trade union members. Nor is the damage done by Labour's union-bashing confined to "core voters". Fewer than half of Tory voters believe current Government restrictions on unions are correct. 86% of the general public support equal rights for part timers. 87% support a national minimum wage (as do 66% of Tory voters). 83% are in favour of compelling employers to provide training. 92% believe an employee should always have the right to trade union representation (a policy not endorsed by Labour).

Nor is there any evidence that the public is hostile to the postal, rail and underground strikers. People do not like the inconvenience, but many understand the reality of the grievances behind the workers' actions.

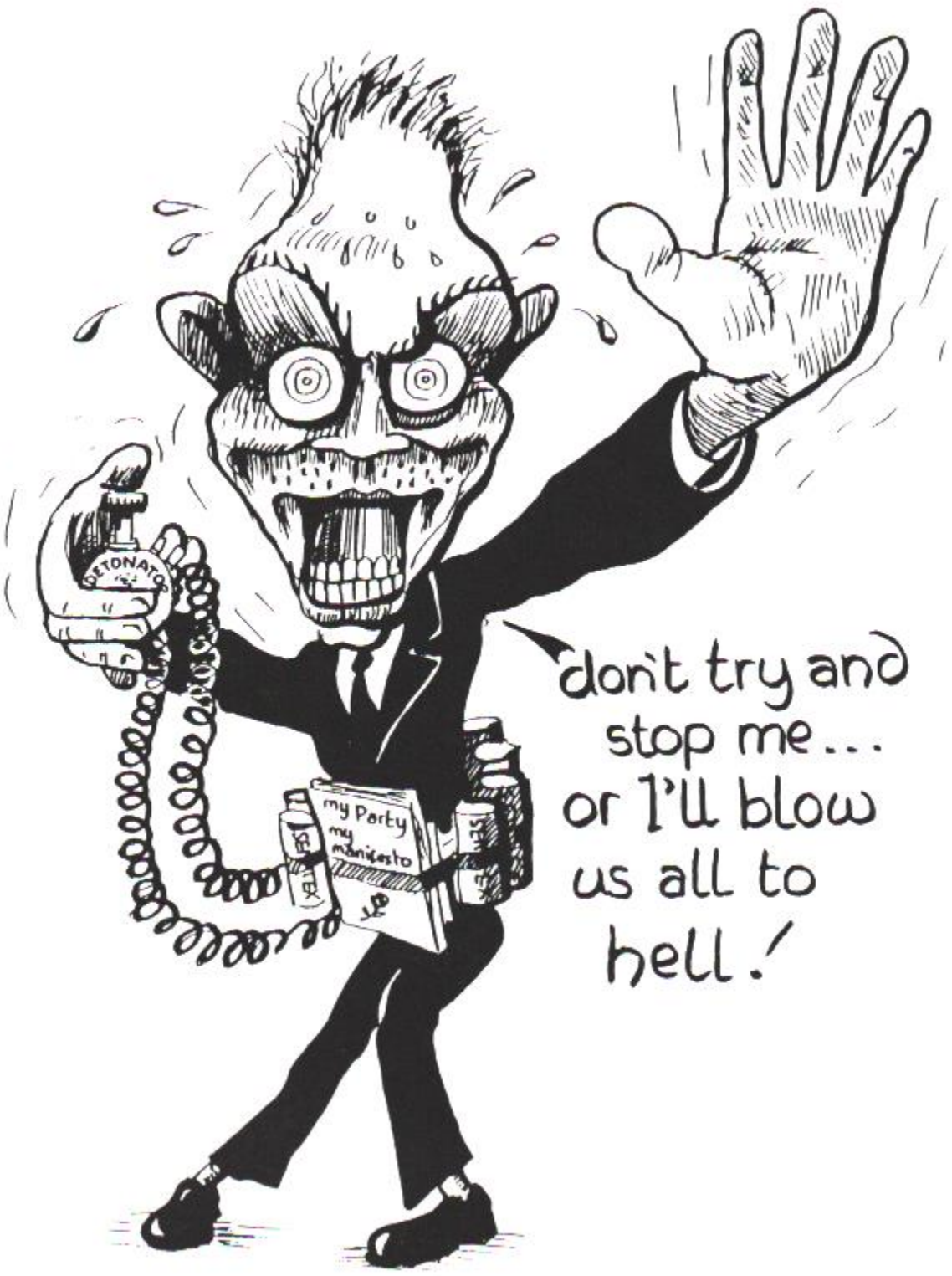
Between 1990 and 1995, more than ten million people, about a third of the workforce, experienced at least one spell of unemployment. If you lose a full time job these days you are unlikely to find another as only one in ten of all new jobs are full time. Half of all employees enjoy no statutory protection from unfair dismissal; twenty years ago only 10% were unprotected. One in four earn less than £4 an hour. Half of all entry jobs are now paid less than £4 an hour. By the year 2000, one third of employees will be on fixed term contracts. Britain now has the longest working week in Europe. 57% of workers say they are doing the work two people did ten years ago. 57% feel more insecure in their job than they did two years ago.

For many, the "flexibility" endorsed by Blair is experienced as a new managerial tyranny. Blair and Blunkett harp on about "the new labour market" yet refuse to advance any concrete proposals to give workers some clout in that market.

And what of the "floating voter", said to be the key to Labour success? He is imagined as white, male, middle class, suburban, and socially conservative. The electorate is in fact more complex than Labour's focus group fixation has led it to believe.

Social attitudes surveys show that on public ownership, trade unions, public services, the costs of social division, and the environment, popular opinion is moving away from the free market assumptions of the eighties, even as Labour has moved towards them.

According to a MORI poll, 30% of the general population say they are middle or upper class; 63% say they are working or lower class. An astonishing survey published in the *New Statesman* revealed that more than 80% agree that there is a "class war" in Britain. If this poll is even remotely accurate, it would suggest that a Grand Canyon has opened up between social reality as experienced by the majority and social reality as defined by the intelligentsia, who regard the very notion of "class war" as laughable.



Perhaps the most revealing answers in the TUC survey were given to the question: who was in touch with the world of work? Trade unions enjoyed a 36% plus rating (i.e. the percentage of those who said they were in touch outnumbered the percentage of those who said they were not by 36 points); directors of large companies had a 22% minus rating; politicians (including Labour ones) had a 55% minus rating.

The point is not that Labour will lose the next election unless it swings to the left. The deep Tory crisis, the desire for change and the absence of any electoral alternative should outweigh improved economic indicators. The point is that there is more than one way to win an election. Labour must win in such a way that it lays the foundation for a government of real achievement. A Labour Government that fails to make a difference in people's lives is not so much a betrayal as a waste of a golden opportunity. ❑

LLB page 11

Say no to Blair's manifesto

How critical of the leadership should the left be in the run-up to the election? If the Socialist Campaign Group and their supporters don't speak out now, argues Mike Phipps, they may find themselves sidelined when an alternative is demanded.

For much of the last decade, the Labour left struggled to find a role. But by 1992 we had learned some lessons. Anyone who attended the founding conference in Leeds of the Socialist Campaign Group Supporters Network would have recognised an important breakthrough. By making the Campaign Group of MPs and the local Labour lefts the focus of organisation, we had at last moved towards a more inclusive approach, centred on the parliamentary and constituency left rather than the concerns of left groupings.

Despite dark days for the left generally, this perspective was sustained through the 1990s, even if our relevance was sometimes due to unexpected circumstances, such as the 400-strong Manchester conference in 1994 held during the leadership vacancy. But it was also fostered by a willingness to put aside past differences and work with broader forces among whom there was broad tactical agreement. We may have lost last year's battle over Clause IV, but in the process we can be proud of the fact that we helped build a genuinely broad coalition of forces, involving *Tribune*, MEPs and trade union leaders. Hopefully we sowed seeds for the future in doing so.

Now a new fight looms following Tony Blair's decision to submit his draft manifesto to a referendum of the membership. Once again the full weight of Walworth Road and Blair's cheerleaders in the media will be mobilised to maximise a yes vote. Any opposition will be denounced as playing into Tory hands, so members will be bludgeoned into voting for something they may not like. Some on the left have argued that we can't possibly win on this basis, so mounting a campaign for a no vote is pointless. Hugh Kerr MEP, writing in *Tribune*, recently called for abstention as a way of protesting. The Socialist Campaign Group Network is limiting itself to a call not to vote for Blair's manifesto.

Such an approach, however, is mistaken. The draft manifesto contains pledges that, if carried out, would be a disaster for working people in this country, notably the "fast track punishment" for young offenders and the commitment to a monetarist approach to tax and public spending. The upcoming Party referendum is about more than just the manifesto. It is a chance for members - their only chance - to express themselves on the whole direction taken by the leadership over recent months. Those who wish to downplay the issue out of fear of exposing the left's weaknesses are ignoring the very real groundswell of rank and file discontent with the changes in policy and the high-handed and unaccountable way in which they are being introduced.

To say "the left can't win, so better not to fight" is to marginalise ourselves for the battles to come. Even if the left cannot win on the manifesto, the scale of defeat will be a material factor for Blair in deciding how fast he can press on with his "reforms". A landslide, delivered because the left failed nationally to campaign, would not only marginalise the left, it would make it easier for the leadership to isolate and witch-hunt those pockets of resistance that won't lie down - in Leeds, Birmingham and elsewhere.

So we have no choice. *LLB*, the Network, CLPD and others must build the widest coalition of forces against the manifesto proposals in preparation for the next attacks on our Party.



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For an NEC that represents you

Christine Shawcroft, candidate for the Women's Division of the NEC, writes:
The NEC elections are particularly important this year, with a Labour Government just around the corner. It is vital if we are to have any hope of a second term (and a third, and a fourth) that the NEC should reflect the views of rank and file Party members, rather than being a continuation of the Shadow Cabinet by other means.

If you speak at ward and union branch meetings about a minimum wage at half median male earnings, full employment, public ownership of the utilities, restoring the value of pensions, or preserving comprehensive education, no one disagrees. These things are only controversial and unrealistic among *Mail* and *Telegraph* leader writers - and the yuppies surrounding the leader.

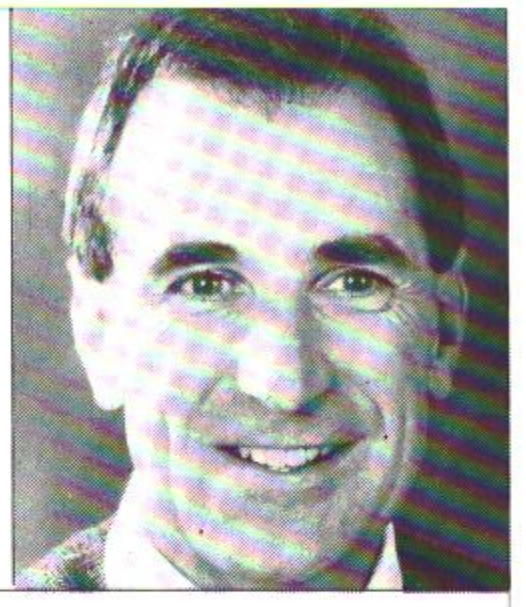
Views of the rank and file on such fundamental demands should be reflected in the NEC ballot. Last year, in the Constituency Section, half the members who cast ballots voted for Dennis Skinner. In the Women's Section, my own vote in the constituencies more than doubled from 20,000 to over 50,000. Ironically, had the Women's Division been elected by OMOV I would now be on the NEC!

As well as policy issues, one of the key battles on the NEC this year is likely to be over the union link. Disturbing things are now appearing in the papers about breaking the link altogether. Hopefully, things have not got so bad that a ballot on the link could be pushed through without the agreement of the NEC. Strengthening the NEC could kick this nonsense into touch.

Christine Shawcroft



the Alan Simpson column



Priorities for the left

The shape of the general election can already be seen - Evil Eyes v Tory Lies. Its parameters may make it hard for socialists to find anything particular to hang their beliefs on but there should be no ambiguity about our priorities. Winning the election is the precondition for positive change.

I can't think of any socialist who can list a single convincing virtue to be found in another period of Labour opposition. Those who argue it would make no difference fail to understand two essential points. The first is the sheer desperation of those hanging on by their fingernails in today's Tory Britain. The second is a recognition of the 'hope explosions' which would follow a Labour victory.

The Labour left has always been willing to discuss socialist policies with those inside or outside the Party, but there has always been one firm dividing line: those not committed to defeating the Tories end up on the same side as them. It is possible to focus on all the important areas in which Labour has yet to produce an adequate response: how we close the poverty divide; how we restore full employment, re-build public services and redistribute power; how we will put the environment before the market. These are all issues which the left has been far more willing to engage with than the spin specialists. They will not be resolved before the election. And in one sense it doesn't matter.

Irrespective of whether the Party offers itself on the basis of five pledges, ten commandments or no commitments, the electorate will have its own agenda and will fill the gaps. This is the terrain that the left must move onto, building new links with those beginning to formulate their priorities about where (and how) Labour must begin to build the recovery. Four suggest themselves immediately.

Local government will be looking for a new deal offering far more than the use of capital receipts. We must press for the removal of local government borrowing from the PSBR and for an end to 'capping'. Perhaps it's time to re-visit local authority bonds as a source of finance. Relaunched as Civic Bonds ("007, licensed to build"?) and backed by a genuine stakeholding by workers in the Pension and Insurance Funds - which hold £730 billion of their deferred wages - this could more than finance a sustainable recovery.

Similar challenges face us in connecting with the pensioners' campaigns which will force Labour to re-examine our funded 'second tier' assumptions. Not far behind will be the parents and governors who want Labour to end to the 'local management of cuts' role that LMS has been forced into, and who already have plans for the investment needed in education.

All of us face challenges from the burgeoning environmental movements which understand, far better than political parties, the imperatives which will turn our thinking about economics upside down within a decade.

No election marks the end of history. A Labour victory will merely mark a start on cleaning up the mess we will inherit from the Tories. No one should underestimate the scale of this, and we should all think carefully before going into a Dutch auction of tax cutting when the reality may be that all governments, for the forseeable future, will have to raise more simply to pay the costs of profligacy and privatisation which are the Thatcher/Major legacy.

It falls to socialists in the Party to voice the realities of this legacy, and to build the links (throughout the labour movement) which will turn the agenda to how we can best pay the costs of that legacy rather than how long we can pretend we won't have to.

LLB page 13



Liverpool dockers:

Liz Knight reports on the Liverpool docks strike one year after its inception and how a women's support group is once again promoting a key struggle.

WOMEN Of The Waterfront travel the country and abroad, winning support for the dispute. They pay visits to the houses of known scabs and managing directors of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC), picketing them with whistles and songs, and leafleting the neighbours to show they have scabs next door.

One scab's wife said she was "proud of my husband - he's a real man, determined to provide for his family, come what may."

The "come what may" is that her husband has stolen the job of one of 500 dockers, many of whom have worked there for 30 or more years. They were sacked last September for respecting a picket line mounted by young dockers refusing to accept casualisation.

The "come what may" is that the 500 dockers have spent a year fighting for justice, in the course of which most have lost all their savings, possibly their pension rights, and are now in danger of having their homes repossessed.

A critical point has now been reached. £28,000 a week is needed to run the dispute and prevent the families being starved into defeat. The TGWU has withheld hardship fund money from the dockers for the last twelve weeks, pleading the confines of the law.

This is also the month in which the central issues of this dispute have been clearly revealed. The measure of the significance of the struggle is how far its opponents will go to ensure its defeat. The dockers are fighting on at least five fronts: the port employers, nationally and internationally; the Government; the courts and police; the media; the Labour and TGWU leadership (the latter two acting more and more openly as the "partners of business").

The MDHC recently announced a 17.1% fall in half-year profits, with a £100 million loss on share values. The Port of Liverpool is at a virtual standstill despite the recent (conditional) return of the ACL shipping line; the international blockade has dramatically affected business.

Simultaneously, Bill Morris and the TGWU leadership are pushing for talks with the employers "without preconditions". Already the dockers have refused to accept any partial reinstatement or to sell their jobs.

Jimmy Nolan, Chair of the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards, explains: "We demand reinstatement of all sacked dockers, the removal of scabs from the waterfront, and the right to trade union representation on the job. These are preconditions for any negotiations".

The TGWU pleaded anti-trade union law as justification for not making the dispute official. At every turn the dockers face attempts to isolate them. The almost complete silence of the national media has been parallelled by the official silence of Labour Party & TUC leaders.

The Labour and trade union movement in this country still has a long way to go to match the level of solidarity by workers internationally. Swedish dockers in the Port of Gothenburg are each sending the Liverpool dockers an hour's pay per week. Here we must dramatically boost the financial support, implementing the minimum "£1 a week a worker", and, just as importantly, step up the active political support.

Defence of the dockers is defence of working class organisation itself on a world scale. The Women of the Waterfront remind us: "We, the working class, are the union." Victory for all our futures.

● Contact: 0171-627 8666 for dockers' solidarity information.

CPSA strike over JSA safety fears

***LLB* interviewed Steve Battlemuch, CPSA Benefits Agency EC.**

CPSA members in the Benefits Agency took their fourth day of strike action on the 23rd September in the ongoing dispute over staff safety arising out of the introduction of the controversial Job Seekers Allowance (JSA).

The dispute centres on the insistence of the Government to deliver JSA from unscreened job centres rather than screened Benefits Agency offices.

BA staff will be delivering the benefit, and over 250 CPSA members have had compulsory transfers to work on the benefit against their will.

The union has pointed to the high level of incidents and assaults in open-plan offices, including the stabbing of two staff in Bexleyheath job centre in January. Members will face real risks when the benefit is introduced from 7th October.

JSA is the Tories' latest attack on the unemployed and replaces unemployment benefit. It cuts entitlement from twelve months to six, and reduces benefit for under twenty-fives. It also introduces other vindictive ways of forcing the unemployed into slave labour jobs by cutting and stopping benefit if people fail to comply with tough new rules.

When the changes hit home, the unemployed may hit out at benefits staff rather than the absent Peter Lilley or Gillian Shepherd.

While understanding their anger with the system, it is also important that CPSA members have a safe working environment. This is why the campaign will continue.

Further strikes are planned for 7th and 8th October; further efforts are being made to persuade PTC members to join the campaign and for the dispute to be widened to include CPSA members in the employment service. Local CPSA branches have set up hardship funds as no strike pay is paid by CPSA HQ. Trade union branches should contact local CPSA branches to offer support.

LLB page 14

one year of struggle

Dockers and environmentalists unite

Chris Knight (London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers) reports.

WHAT persuaded "Earth First!", "Reclaim the Streets", "The Land is Ours" and an army of anti-roads campaigners to team up with the Liverpool dockers? Decisive has been the dockers own record on environmental issues.

In 1989 news broke that the Canadian Government had backtracked on a commitment not to export the PCB-contaminated remains of a fire at a chemical storage facility at St Basile le Grand.

The notorious waste disposal company RECHEM won a contract to dispose of approximately 3,000 tonnes of PCB-contaminated material to be sent to Liverpool in 15 separate consignments from August of that year.

But the very first consignment, on a ship called the Nadezhda Obukhova, was blocked at Liverpool by dockers who refused to unload the toxic cargo, forcing the ship to return to Montreal. This was a tremendous victory for the environmental movement: the Quebec Government cancelled RECHEM's contract and the Canadian Government announced an end to all exports of PCB-contaminated waste.

It has dawned on local environmentalists that now in Liverpool, scabs have taken the place of class-conscious, organised dockers. A scab by definition doesn't care: he will handle any shit for money. On the docks, such a workforce will simply obey orders, unloading anything regardless of safety. Hazardous waste passing through the Port of Liverpool has increased from a mere 754 tonnes in 1989 to 6,000 tonnes last year. This figure rises to 13,500 tonnes if solvent wastes are included.

Clearly, the profitable waste recycling industry has begun depending on Liverpool in a big way. This could help explain why the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company provoked the year-long dispute on the docks: they needed a docile labour force if Liverpool was to submit to its planned role as a dump. Toxins destined for a new local incinerator, radioactive waste bound for plutonium reprocessing at Sellafield, cheap coal mined by children in Colombia, explosives - nothing now seems excluded.

Across the water from Liverpool, the Irish chemical and pharmaceutical industry generates 100,000 tonnes of waste per year, of which 20,000 are exported, mainly to Britain. Irish environmentalists have so far successfully prevented any attempt to build in Ireland a "merchant incinerator" like RECHEM's controversial plants elsewhere.

But it is widely rumoured that RECHEM plans to build an incinerator in Liverpool like the one which has been pumping PCBs into the densely populated environment around Pontypool. Farmers from miles around that plant have complained of mysterious diseases killing their animals; duck eggs and other foods have been banned from human consumption. If the once-proud dockers of Liverpool are beaten into submission, will the city be turned into an immense dump for toxins and nuclear waste shipped in from the four corners of the world?

One man, certainly, would gain from this. Intriguingly, RECHEM is owned by a company called Shanks McEwan. Its Chairman is none other than Gordon Waddell - who is also Chairman of the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, which locked out the 500 dockers a year ago.



Second International Dockworkers' Conference

FOURTEEN ports in nine countries sent delegates to the second conference called by the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards last month in support of their dispute.

The first such conference in February played a major role in spreading the message of the sacked Liverpool dockers, organised financial and moral support, and hit the dock company hard. The MDHC has admitted a fall in half-yearly profits of 17% and a dramatic fall in share values which is increasing speculation of a takeover of the company.

As a result of the decisions of the first conference, Portuguese, Italian and Greek dockers hit shipping lines; Swedish dockers hit the ACL shipping line on a whole series of occasions, stopping work for up to 17 hours at a time; Australian and New Zealand dockers gave unstinting solidarity and financial support, as did US longshoremen. Montreal dockers assisted in the successful occupation by four Liverpool pickets of the CASI operations, and dockers in Zeebrugge and Hamburg have recently pledged industrial action against all shipping lines using Liverpool.

The August conference called for an international day of action. Leading officials of the International Transport Federation, in collaboration with Bill Morris of the TGWU, are trying to back-pedal on the resolution which was passed by the ITF in June.

LLB page 15

Post dispute: delivering a 'yes' vote

After seven rock solid strike days, the postal workers dispute has reached a crucial phase. Des Kirkland, Thames Central CWU, reports.



POSTAL WORKERS are feeling the blast of Tory propaganda on public sector strikes. They face the intransigence of Royal Mail (backed by a Government desperate to defeat the union). Now they have to cope with the red herrings of compulsory arbitration and threats of new anti-union laws from Tony Blair.

The Union's demand for a shorter working week started the discussions on the 'Employee Agenda'. So far the closest Royal Mail has come to the union's demand is promising that if productivity improves once changes are introduced, the working week may be cut. Among these changes would be a requirement to make staff finish the work of the day even if it is beyond finishing time! Under this arrangement, even if there are reduced working hours, postal workers could still be expected to work longer. During meetings at ACAS, some elements were taken off the table, but not the most contentious ones - team working and streaming.

A meeting sponsored by 31 CWU branches and called by the London District Council was held to discuss the way forward. This gave a clear commitment to escalate the dispute through longer, continuous strikes, and to oppose any settlement that included team working and loss of the second delivery. If a ballot was organised, the union should campaign around these issues.

Victimisation of union representatives was discussed. South West's Geoff Caldwell faces dismissal over allegations concerning a strike-day incident. Milton Keynes took unofficial action defending a steward falsely accused of hitting a manager on the picket line; his suspension was lifted after a week. A ballot has been organised in Edinburgh for action following a member's sacking, with four more facing appeals. Southend took action after a member was accused of head-butting a manager.

The meeting also discussed lack of support from the Labour Party leadership and called on Labour MPs, local parties and members to pledge their support to the dispute and challenge the leadership's negative stance. Blair's call for a re-ballot on the day that the Postal Executive met gave a massive propaganda boost to Royal Mail. He seems happy to talk tough to unions but is not so tough on employers who are given free rein by his accommodation with "the enterprise of the market" and "the rigours of competition".

London update

***LLB* spoke to CWU London District Regional Committee Secretary Dave Ward.**

Q: What has the LDC done in this dispute?

A: We have set a positive agenda, organising from the beginning, including the rally on 14th August. We meet regularly with branches, keeping people updated and discussing tactics.

Our pamphlet, *Not on London's Agenda*, covers Royal Mail's last document. We see dangers in the proposed agreement and also to the union's independence. If we accept this type of agreement, you end up with a staff association. This is a major part of Royal Mail's 'Employee Agenda'.

Q: What are the lessons of the dispute so far?

A: The main lesson concerns the direction of the Union. Elements of the leadership are trying to move towards 'social partnership'. We must dig in for a long dispute. That's why, tactically, it would have been a mistake to call an all-out strike at this stage. The issues are so fundamental in this dispute, particularly around 'team working' and the delivery side of it, that we should play a long game and up the ante gradually. That has to be our tactic unless the Post Office do something that forces us to change our position.

This is an attempt by the Post Office to introduce a one-delivery postal service without public debate or a political row about it. The Royal Mail is one of the most successful postal services in the world. I think we are entitled to ask, why does it have to be changed in this way?

Q: What's your response to the union's decision to ballot members on further action?

A: In London we will get firm support for industrial action. We would have probably preferred not to have the ballot but we understand the reasons why it is being done. It will give us an opportunity to restate our case and perhaps more importantly for the Union internally to redefine our objectives in the dispute. Maybe it will be a good thing in the end.

Q: So you don't think that the move to ballot will damage the fight against the 'Employee Agenda'?

A: I don't think so at all. The overwhelming majority of members, who must have been affected by the media campaign, really want a ballot to be able to say no to the 'Employee Agenda'.

There was no sign from any of the membership in London that they wanted to accept the Employee Agenda. I'm sure that will be their response in the ballot with a vote to support further industrial action. I am very confident.

LLB page 16

Hillingdon strike - one year on, staying strong

Jon Rogers, deputy convenor, London Region UNISON reports.

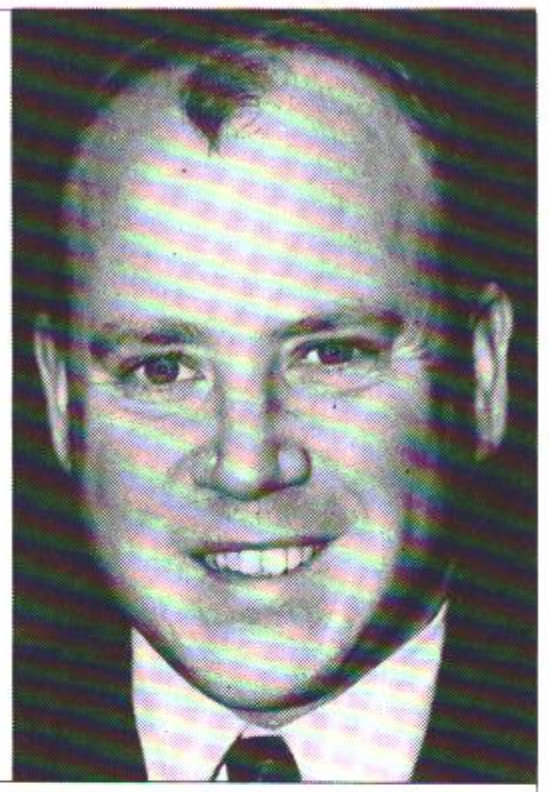
FIFTY three UNISON members employed by Pall Mall Services at Hillingdon hospital, Uxbridge are about to enter the second year of their strike action, having been dismissed for refusing to accept a pay cut of £30 a week. UNISON's campaign against the Davis Service Group, parent company of Pall Mall, is continuing. In September the strikers spent a week picketing the London HQ of the Davis Group, which last year rewarded its Directors with pay increases of up to £800 a week and boasted that a 13% rise in profits was attributable to the hard work of employees. Also in September, UNISON members began pickets of HSS Tool Hire shops, owned by the Davis Service Group.

The Hillingdon hospital strike illustrates the need both for a decent national minimum wage and for the return of public services to the public sector. Strikers who had worked at Hillingdon hospital for 20 or 30 years have heard their pleas for support ignored by hospital management who take no responsibility for the action of private contractor Pall Mall.

The strikers - who earlier this year rejected overwhelmingly an insulting cash offer from Pall Mall and are fighting on for reinstatement - remain determined. UNISON's campaign has been hampered by the lack of confidence of some members and officials, and by a sectarian hostility to left wing groups which have shown support for the dispute. However, support for the dispute has been sustained - in the face of local hostility including racist abuse - through the determination of the strikers, led by shop steward, Malkiat Bilku.

- Information about the strike is available on the Internet at *http://www.gn.apc.org/labournet/hillingdon/index.html.*

the Geoff Martin column



- Here we are then back from the summer and ready for the final lap between now and the General Election, subject to the generals deciding that a Blair Government will be such a threat to the establishment that a military coup is in order. I wouldn't bet on that one.

My summer hols this year consisted of three days over in Cork where I spent a couple of good hours on the picket line outside the Dunnes department store. It was brilliant to be on a line which nobody, apart from a handful of sheepish looking managers, would cross. No staff, no customers.

The strikers were nearly all in their late teens and early twenties and they were telling me that union membership is rock solid. That night in Cork the pubs were full of people wearing the strikers stickers - top stuff.

- Down at the UNISON Conference I was chatting to a member of the SWP about the importance of staying in the Labour Party and taking the fight to the Blairites.

Unconvinced by my arguments she launched a half-hearted recruitment bid: "come on Geoff, why don't you join the revolutionaries?" "I'd love to," I replied "but unfortunately they're looking for a drummer" On that point, inspired by the Pistols reunion, there is a strong move towards a Secrets Now! comeback gig (that's my old band in case you've forgotten). The main opposition to a comeback has always come from our old drummer, Clumsy Gus, but he's now given in to the lure of bundles of fivers. Another world exclusive for *LLB.*

- I've been doing a fair bit of work for the campaign against the monetarist framework for a single euro currency over the past few months and I'm taking full credit for kicking off the televised row between Alan Simpson and ultra-Blairite Denis McShane. I'd been invited along to a Commons press conference to launch the *Peoples Europe* document when I noticed that McShane, a Euro fanatic, had sneaked in at the back.

I was still hacked off with a newspaper article that McShane had written claiming that UNISON had "voted itself into the James Goldsmith camp" by opposing the single currency. When I came to speak I let the clown know exactly what I thought about his attempts to portray UNISON as a bunch of narrow-minded nationalists.

Cue the gibbering which you may have seen on the box. I'd been dragged outside to do an interview for Welsh TV so I left Simmo to ably deal with McShane. Poor old Dennis then got his knuckles rapped by the spin doctors for drawing attention to the People's Europe campaign. Some people are born losers.

- Finally, my thanks to the UNISON members at Weymouth General Hospital who patched me up after a split head type incident in the early hours of a recent Sunday morning.

Despite rumours to the contrary Weymouth is in Dorset and the injury was not the result of a revenge attack by the Hampshire Popular Front (Campaigning Democratic).

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

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

FIGHT TO DEFEND

Undefeated: the Sans Papiers of St Bernard

A special report for *Labour Left Briefing*.

ON 18TH March, 300 African 'Sans Papiers' (without papers) occupied St. Ambroise church in Paris. Four day later they were expelled from the church by police. In the months that followed the Sans Papiers moved from place to place, publicising their plight and drawing increasing public support, as well as denunciations and demands for "action" from the far right. In June, the Sans Papiers occupied the church of St Bernard. Ten went on hunger strike in early July. Trade unions, human rights groups, church leaders, artists and writers came out in support of their demand for "regularisation".

On 23rd August, the fiftieth day of the hunger strike, 1500 riot police smashed into the church while mass was being said, seized the Sans Papiers and attacked many of their supporters. That evening 20,000 attended a protest demonstration. The following day there were demonstrations in other major cities, including Lyon, Bordeaux and Dijon. The Government's action failed to satisfy the far right: "It is regrettable that the Government has taken seven weeks to act. The National Front would have taken only 24 hours to act. Still nothing has been resolved". The courts ordered the release of most of the detained Sans Papiers because of legal irregularities.

As we go to press, 200 are holding out in Paris. A delegation comprising representatives of the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism, the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, the Southall Monitoring Group and *LLB* visited the Sans Papiers and their supporters in Paris on 14th September. The Sans Papiers include not only immigrants who have never enjoyed legal recognition in France but also many whose legal status was stripped from them by the Pasqua laws. Some supporters of the Sans Papiers (including the Socialist and Communist Parties) have tried to distinguish between the two groups, confining their demands for "regularisation" to the victims of the Pasqua laws. The Sans Papiers themselves refuse to be divided into "legitimate" and "illegitimate" camps. They point out that the Government is being dragged to the right by Le Pen and that state racism and the far right breed off each other.

The Sans Papiers campaign is very much a "coming out" by human beings who refuse to be "clandestine". They are saying: we are not criminals, we will not live underground; we have rights and we claim them.

Throughout the campaign, the Sans Papiers have retained their autonomy, backed by a loose but effective confederation of unions, political parties, co-operatives, lawyers and artists.

At the Fete de l'Humanite, the Communist Party's massive annual festival, the delegation met Madjiguene, spokesperson for the Sans Papiers of St Bernard. "They have issued papers for only 50 of us over the last six months," she explained. "Thirteen have been deported, including two men whose wives and children were left behind. Four men are in prison awaiting trial for having no papers. But there are still more than two hundred of us resisting. We have moved twelve times since we began our struggle in March. There are now 23 collectives of Sans Papiers and nine in the Ile de France region alone. By taking action we have won over popular opinion. A recent poll showed 50% support us. "We come from Senegal, Mali, Guinea, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Zaire, Haiti. We are among 200,000 Sans Papiers in this country. Our demands remain: Papers for all, abolition of the Pasqua Laws, and freedom

"The cry of the Sans Papiers is the cry of all France. There is a convergence of the social movement of last autumn and the movement of the Sans Papiers. We call for greater solidarity between the Sans Papiers, the workers, the dispossessed and the homeless. and all those deprived of their rights to construct a new third estate in this country. There is something defiant in this country which offers a new model of democracy and we are proud to defend the democracy of France".

- Mohammed Ouachkiedi, National Co-ordination of Committees in Support of the Sans Papiers.

"The right of 'regularisation' proceeds from the higher principle which is that of the European Convention of Human Rights. The Government acts in an arbitrary fashion. Its decision to regularise 48 people in June was entitled 'humanitarian'. But the people of St Bernard fulfil the same criteria. We are thrown into judicial confusion as the Government acts for political reasons and does not apply the law consistently".

- Henri Leclerc, Human Rights League

"We are indignant about the Government's decision. We have sent letters to all airline personnel and aircrews asking them not to co-operate with these expulsions".

- CFDT (trade union) of Air France

"The police intervention reminds us of the most sombre hours in our country's history. SUD Rail has proposed to all other unions of transport workers that they will all oppose the use of the railways for the expulsion of the immigrants".

- SUD (rail trade union)

The Pasqua Laws were passed by the Chirac government in 1993 in response to the growth of the National Front vote. They ushered in a wave of repression and terror against legally resident communities.

The Pasqua laws overturned the tradition that those born on French soil had citizenship rights. The right to permanent residence for foreigners legally residing in France for three years or for parents of children born in France was abolished.

Under the Pasqua laws, children of non-French citizens born after 1993 are deported and told to apply for citizenship on their 16th birthday. Foreign students who bring in their spouses, change courses, or fail exams are deported. Long stayers without correct papers are rounded up in police sweeps on immigrant areas. Asylum is almost never granted and the right of family reunion is not recognised.

LLB page 18

ASYLUM RIGHTS

for the people in prison and the return of the deported people."

"We need support from abroad. We need you to explain the truth of our situation, to popularise our struggle and also to contribute financially."

Earlier in the day, the delegation visited the headquarters of Droits Devant (Rights First), who have provided support and assistance to the Sans Papiers from the beginning. The group, which originated two years ago as a squatters' collective, sees the Sans Papiers struggle as central to building resistance to racism and fascism in France. Under-25s in France are not entitled to benefits. With unemployment and homelessness more acute than in Britain, and state power more brutally deployed, increasing numbers of young white French people have been drawn into direct action, first in an effort to claim their own rights, and now in solidarity with the Sans Papiers.

"We have one million homeless youth. We have 3.5 million unemployed and 2 million with only temporary or agency work. By the year 2000, 50% of the workforce will be excluded from full time employment," explained Jean-Claude Amara, secretary general of Droits Devant.

"Meanwhile, we have laws barring free circulation - laws attacking beggars, indigents, unemployed people. We are being expelled from the shopping precincts and the city centres. We have identity checks on the Metro and on the roads. Some 37 cities, including cities ruled by the Communists or Socialists, have passed by-laws preventing freedom of movement.

"The Government has decided to scapegoat immigrants for its failure to provide jobs and housing. Faced with the social movements, with resistance, they take action to divide and break up communities; they start an ethnic cleansing of French society. There is a potential to develop a big social movement out of all the struggles of immigrants, homeless, jobless people. Our task is to make one whole movement out of all of these. We have to build bridges between these groups and the organised workers' movement. The unions are becoming more active on social issues, and we do now have the possibility of building a popular movement for social change- which is the only way we can stop Le Pen." Droits Devant insist that this is a European issue. "What is happening today in France will happen tomorrow in Britain. The Pasqua laws are a foretaste. To meet this challenge we need European wide co-ordination and action."

On September 18th, representatives of the Sans Papiers lobbied the European Parliament in Strasbourg. That evening, a picket of the French Embassy in London was called by a wide range of groups, including CARF, the SMG, Newham Monitoring Project, The National Assembly Against Racism, and the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns. MPs Jeremy Corbyn and Harry Cohen delivered a letter of protest and made their outrage clear in a brief meeting with the French Ambassador.



And back in the UK ...

Gargi Ghattacharyya writes on behalf of Winson Green detainees: At Winson Green prison there are at least 50 immigration detainees who live from day to day under a very harsh regime. The average detainee has been held for at least six months. Detainees are locked in cells, two to each cell, measuring seven by 13 feet, for a standard 23 hours a day.

In many cases they are locked up with remand prisoners awaiting trial or with convicted criminals. Immigration detainees only have access to a telephone once every four days for approximately ten minutes. They can only use the phone after 4pm.

Immigration detainees are brought to Winson Green in Birmingham from all over the country. Their families, who may have to travel long distances to visit them, are restricted to one thirty minute visit on weekdays and only a one hour visit every second Saturday. There are no visits on Sundays. All visits are closely watched by prison officers.

Immigration detainees are not allowed to lie in bed between 7:30am and 8:30pm. If caught doing so by prison officers, all privileges are withdrawn. These include visits, phone calls and use of the gym.

Immigration detainees are clothed in prison wear and are allowed a shower approximately every four days. Immigration detainees have diverse religions as they come from all over the world. But the prison denies them the fundamental right to worship or be allowed items for use in worship.

Having in mind that the Home Secretary claims to maintain a firm but fair immigration control, balanced with the fact that these immigration detainees who have committed no crime other than to seek sanctuary from persecution and to be allowed to remain with their families, it seems very clear that continued detention of these people is an act of injustice.

We pray that this inhumane treatment of honest men will be corrected. We ask the general public to protest on our behalf.

LLB page 19

Bullets and ballots

Ronan Bennett reports on a long and politically hot summer in Ireland.

ELECTIONS in May; 'all party-but-one' talks in June; marches, stand-offs and riots in July and August; death threats in September. If the party leaders were hoping for calm in which to consolidate and plot, they were disappointed.

In May, "hurdle" elections were held to a special "Forum" to determine those invited to all-party talks. This was a panic response to the Canary Wharf bomb, as the British Government hoped Sinn Fein (SF), who usually poll 10 to 12 per cent, would be wiped out electorally. The result was deeply shocking: SF took almost 16%, making it the fourth largest party, just 64,452 votes behind the largest (David Trimble's UUP). Electoral politics in the north is about small numbers and big emotions.

In fact SF strategists are now concerned that the Major Government, dependent on Unionist support at Westminster, has in effect given up on the peace process. They await the election of a Labour administration, which they hope will prove more imaginative, independent and flexible. Such hopes will surely be disappointed. So far SF's efforts to engage Mo Mowlem in any kind of meaningful discussion have been rebuffed.

The present Labour leadership looks doomed to repeat the mistakes of every administration, Labour or Tory, since 1969, and Tony Blair, now busy recasting himself as a liberal radical in the Victorian tradition, has probably forgotten that Gladstone actually was a radical as far as Ireland was concerned. Blair said two years ago that "Ireland is insoluble", that nothing could be achieved there. Presumably nothing has happened since then to change his mind. For a Blair administration, peace in Ireland doesn't look like being anything more than a platitudinous and empty slogan.

The SF vote also sent a message to the SDLP and its leader John Hume. Hume's policy of talking to Gerry Adams and his de facto broad front with SF have been opposed by significant sections of his own party. MPs Seamus Mallon and Joe Hendron argue that Hume has conferred political respectability on their main electoral rivals. In West Belfast, where Hendron defeated Adams in 1992, SF took four of the five seats. In Derry, Hume's power base, SF doubled its vote, winning two of the five seats. This has intensified the internal strains within the SDLP and increased pressure on Hume. When Hume eventually goes - through in-party intrigue or personal exhaustion - the likelihood is that the SDLP machine will fracture. SF, whose cohesion is never in doubt despite serious debates within the membership about its direction, is the likely benefactor.

The volatile David Trimble, main advocate of the May elections, saw his party's share of the vote fall and Paisley's DUP overcome challenges from the electoral newcomers of the Progressive Unionist Party and the Ulster Democratic Party (linked to the Loyalist death squads of the UVF and UDA/UFF respectively.) The smaller Loyalist parties only just managed to secure representation at the talks. Their capacity to mount any long-term real challenge to the UUP-DUP duopoly must be questionable.

When the Forum talks began, SF was locked out, ostensibly because the IRA had not renewed its ceasefire. Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness and their elected representatives were turned away at Stormont's gates after making speeches condemning their exclusion as blatantly partisan and anti-democratic. A general, though muted, recognition that without SF the talks would be worthless proved correct as Paisley's DUP frustrated all attempts at meaningful discussion. The SF argument that without republican participation the process was a waste of time received a set-back after the Manchester bomb. Bombs never help Sinn Fein, and the timing could hardly have been worse. But just as it seemed that republicans were at the bottom of a deep hole and needed to spend a long time digging themselves out, along came David Trimble and Drumcree. The ugly old sectarian face of unionism showed itself again.

The political consequences of that dreadful period in July - the murder of a Catholic taxi driver; widespread intimidation including arson attacks on Catholic homes; the severest rioting for many years; and the use of plastic bullets against nationalist demonstrators - have been most marked for Trimble himself.

Greeted by the right in Britain as the best man to modernise unionism, Trimble was expected to put its case forcibly and persuasively. His public image was not dented by his opposition to the peace process, and it withstood reminders of his history as a supporter of Vanguard and the Ulster Clubs.

Blair vs Corbyn

FOR THE HEINOUS crime of booking a room in the House of Commons for Gerry Adams to hold a press conference to discuss his newly published autobiography Jeremy Corbyn MP has been attacked by right-wing Tories and Tony Blair.

"I do not approve of the IRA's bombing campaign but I believe we must talk to everyone if we are to secure peace in Ireland. Gerry Adams is the leader of a major political party and demonising and excluding him achieves nothing. I have provided a time and place for British journalists to question Adams on his book and his politics. I find some of this outrage rather contrived. After all, Adams has spoken to more Tory Ministers than I have!"

Adams, of course, is a former member of the House, and his book is published by the eminently respectable firm of Heinemann, a subsidiary of the giant Reed International. If Blair is so offended by Corbyn's hosting of the press conference he ought to be livid at Reed's decision to make the book available to the public as a whole. For some reason, however, the multi-national corporation was spared the leader's wrath.

What Blair should be complaining about is the banning of the press conference by the Sergeant at Arms.

LLB page 20

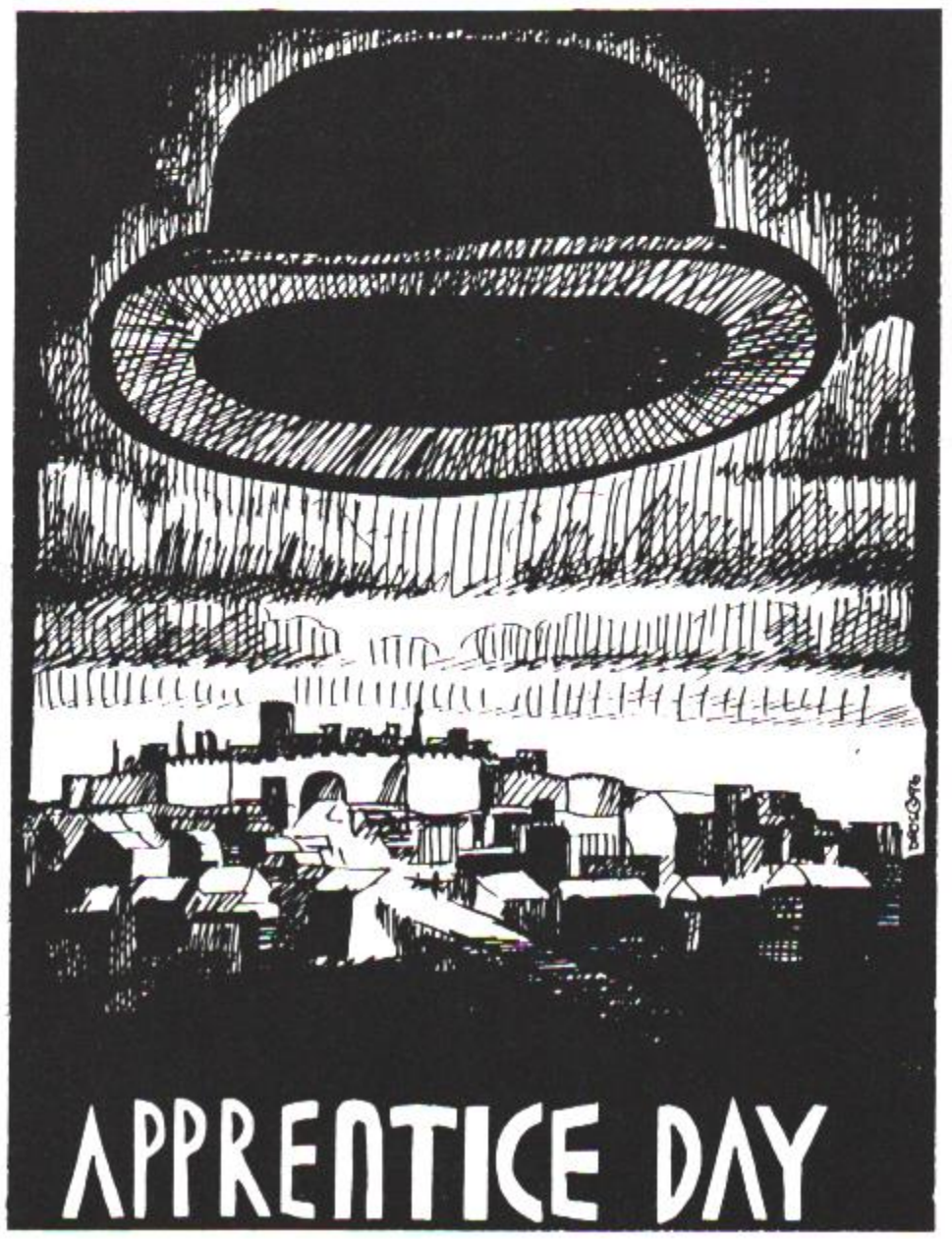
for the Irish people

Playing down his continued membership of the Orange Order, he made the extraordinary claim that his role at Drumcree cost him votes in the leadership election - and his favoured reply to persistent questioners was patently unconvincing: "I don't even own a bowler hat."

Following the second siege of the Garvaghy Road, there was little evidence of support for Trimble, bowler hat or no. A Commons debate on the unionist-inspired riots was notable for the chill winds blowing in his lonely direction. Nonetheless he retains the support of John Major, who on *Panorama* blamed everyone from Cardinal Cahal Daly to SF for the recent violence, but, mindful of Parliamentary arithmetic, uttered not one word against the Unionist leader.

The main beneficiary of the summer troubles was SF. The Catholic middle-class, normally solidly SDLP, was shocked by the sectarian hatred, and frightened by the violence. The Catholic doctor reported as being glad the IRA hadn't handed in their weapons voiced a general view. Moderate nationalist SDLP supporters were forced to question whether talks with the unionists could be successful. What dialogue was possible with the Trimble of Drumcree?

If Drumcree put mainstream unionism under an unflattering spotlight, the UVF death threat against Billy Wright, a hardline critic of the paramilitaries' new political direction, brought unwelcome publicity to loyalism's rougher edges. Paisley and Trimble argued for the exclusion of the PUP and UDP from the talks. With shock electoral results, party intrigue, and the first significant hints of a future reconfiguration of voter allegiance, not to mention riots, bullets and bombs, it's been an interesting summer in Ireland.



The Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey

A STRIKE WAVE continues to hit Turkey. 20,000 textile workers in Gazi-Antep, Turkish Kurdistan, won their strike for union recognition and an eight hour day. In Ankara 200 coach drivers have been out since June for better wages and conditions. In Izmit 150 transport workers employed by Inchcape Retrans, sacked and savagely attacked by employers' hired thugs and police for defending the right to join a union, are still holding out after more than a year.

The Kurds in Turkey continue their struggle for national liberation. 3,000 villages have been destroyed or emptied by the military. At the same time, the workers' movement, brutally smashed in the 1980 coup, is being regenerated.

Unity between the Kurdish liberation struggle and the workers' movement nationally and internationally is what the regime fears most.

The Emek (Labour) Party, founded this year, is working to build just such a movement - which explains why the Government is taking measures to ban it and to close down the newspaper *Evrensel,* which has the same position. In July, officials of the Emek Party were imprisoned.

The final court hearing on the banning of the Party will take place soon. The Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey (CHRT) plans to send a delegation of trade unionists, lawyers, MPs and MEPs to the hearing. Hundreds of supporters were savagely attacked at the previous court hearing in June. If its court appeal fails, *Evrensel* will be subject to a ban of at least 125 days (this may be extended indefinitely). In July *Evrensel*'s Istanbul office was raided by armed police. Following the murder of one of its journalists, Metin Goktepe, by police in January this year, attacks, arrests and torture of other journalists continue.

The HADEP (People's Democratic Party) is also suffering serious harassment. Dozens of its members, including one MP, have been killed by death squads in recent years. Hundreds more have been arrested.

The CHRT is planning European-wide action in defence of political prisoners and the workers and oppressed peoples of Turkey. Dockers representing unions in 14 countries from Canada and the USA, through Europe to Australia are also actively supporting the Campaign.

CHRT is calling for the EU to suspend its co-operation agreement with Turkey until human rights violations cease and to ban completely the supply of all weapons, military, logistical and intelligence aid.

The question of European aid to Turkey is high on the agenda of the European Parliament as it goes into session in Strasbourg. The Campaign aims to alert MPs to the fact that the Turkish authorities have already reneged on their commitments to political prisoners made under national and international pressure in July after the deaths of twelve hunger strikers. Political prisoners have just issued a joint statement condemning the Government for continuing violations of basic human rights. The hunger strikers in prisons outside Istanbul have still not received any medical treatment, and many will die or suffer permanent damage as a result.

- Contact: The Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey. Tel. 0171-275 8440.

Iraqi Kurdistan: what next?

After the Kurds' sufferings over the years through the destruction of their villages, the use of chemical weapons at Halabja and the enforced flight of two million in 1991, who would have believed that Saddam Hussein could be invited into Kurdistan? Stan Newens MEP explains.

THE RETURN of Saddam Hussein's forces to Iraqi Kurdistan, at the invitation of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) led by Massoud Barzani, shocked supporters of the Kurds around the world. The last time Kurds allied with Saddam, in 1983-4, the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) was responsible.

These events illustrate the duplicity characteristic of politics in the region. The Americans used Massoud Barzani's father, Mustapha Barzani, to hammer Saddam Hussein in the early 1970s in support of their client, the Shah of Iran. When the latter secured his aim of control over the Iranian side of the Shatt-al-Arab entrance to the Gulf, he cut off military supplies to the Kurds forthwith. 200,000 Kurds were forced to flee to Iran and the KDP was discredited as a CIA puppet. Jalal Talabani's Patriotic Union of Kurds (PUK) was set up as a result.

Iraqi-Kurdish refugees in Penjivin.



PHOTO: S.J.LAIZER

Again in the Gulf War in 1991, the United States appealed to the Kurds to rise up against Saddam. When they did, the west halted operations, allowing Saddam to turn on the Kurds. As a result, two million were forced to flee across the Turkish and Iranian borders. Only a public outcry induced the west to institute a policy of safe havens in Iraq which enabled the Kurds to return.

In 1996, it is the KDP which has resorted to duplicity. When efforts to negotiate an end to fierce fighting with the PUK broke down, KDP-held territory was attacked by the PUK with Iranian military support on 17th August, during KDP celebrations of the 50th Anniversary of the Party's foundation. In response, Barzani is said to have informed the British and the Americans that if they did not assist him, he would be forced to turn elsewhere - to Saddam.

The KDP then played the Iraqi card. Saddam's forces advanced up to Arbil in great strength and seized and executed 96 Iraqi deserters, captured the local Iraqi Communist Party HQ and killed other opponents. Soon the KDP occupied all the important towns in Kurdistan.

Saddam's forces have now withdrawn and Barzani is anxious to distance himself from him. An amnesty has been proclaimed and many fugitives seem to have returned. The Parliament, which was paralysed as long as its seat at Arbil was under PUK control, has met at Saglowa, with a few of its PUK members present and has agreed to extend its term for up to two years. New elections have been promised.

In the last elections, the PUK and the KDP each won 50 seats and the Assyrian Christians won five. The PUK is sure to lose electoral ground after being defeated militarily. There is naturally intense speculation as to whether the KDP has made any secret concessions to Saddam Hussein.

KDP leaders strongly deny this and claim there was only a temporary military agreement. Saddam has proclaimed an amnesty for all Kurds except those who have worked for western agencies. Large numbers in this category have already crossed into Turkey. Saddam clearly intended to strengthen his position by intervening and now hopes a deepening split between the US and the KDP will force the latter back into his hands.

The US attitude to Saddam is ambivalent. Although he is represented as a great hate figure and by any standards is a ruthless tyrant, the west is more afraid of the advance of equally ruthless Iranian and Islamic fundamentalist forces. If Saddam could be replaced by a more acceptable figure, this would be warmly welcomed.

The refusal of the west to seek a permanent settlement encourages instability. Although there must be no let-up on the military embargo on Iraq, sanctions on other supplies only serve to hurt the civilian population.

The Iraqi Kurds should be granted and guaranteed extensive autonomy. The lifting of non-military sanctions could be used to achieve this. The KDP must be kept under the strongest possible pressure to stand out against Saddam and to guarantee the full political freedom of all its opponents, provided all military activity ends. The KDP risks being blamed for any outrages by remaining Iraqi agents.

The PUK and KDP party militias must be disbanded or incorporated in a national defence force, not under the exclusive control of either. New elections should be held to create a basis for a civilian authority.

Iraqi Kurdistan badly needs development aid. The present economy is not viable and there has been too much dependence on unofficial 'taxes' or 'tolls' which in reality are little more than protection money extorted by rival peshmergas or militias on the movement of goods and other aspects of life.

Socialists should maintain their solidarity with the Kurds but campaign against all forms of oppression throughout the region. Democratic and human rights must be upheld, whoever is violating them. In the longer run, some settlement of the Kurdish national question is a precondition for tackling the grave problems of poverty, social inequality and underdevelopment besetting the region.

LLB page 22

Scotland Against The Job Seekers' Allowance

JSA - No Way!

March
Saturday 5th October
Assemble 12 noon

The Mound
Edinburgh

March called by Edinburgh Trades Council and sponsored by the Scottish TUC

Greetings to Labour Party Conference delegates and visitors

from
Stan Newens
MEP

Group of the Party of European Socialists

Cuba Solidarity Campaign

Public Meeting

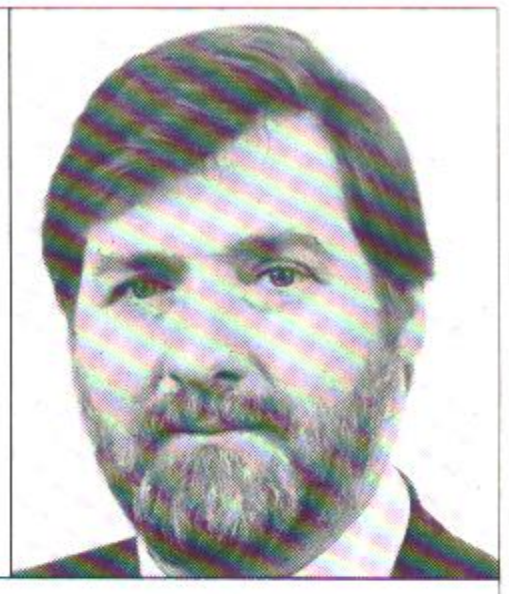
7.30pm,
Thursday 17th October
Conway Hall, WC1

Picket of US embassy,
Grosvenor Square, W1
1-3pm,
Saturday 19th October

Week of Action,
14th-20th October

[details from CSC 0171-263-6452]

the Michael Hindley column



The end of welfare?

THE JOB SEEKERS' Allowance (JSA) will replace Unemployment Benefit and Income Support this month. Like all previous cuts in social welfare, these measures stem not only from the attitude of blaming the poor for being poor but also from the exigencies of competition in the global economy.

Mainstream politicians in industrial countries are convinced they have to cut the social budget in order to be competitive. So far the EU with its abiding, though declining, commitment to social consensus, is holding out better than elsewhere.

According to the European Commission, the UK is "the leader in imposing stricter conditions on the entitlement to Unemployment Benefit", despite having the lowest rate of Unemployment Benefit in the EU.

The old line that the EU would civilise the UK is fading. Blair's clear statements that he would hand a veto to the Confederation of British Industry on the Social Agenda gives us little hope that Labour will defend welfare, let alone as once promised, lead the charge throughout Europe to improve it.

In fact a greater influence on our thinking than Europe is the USA. Since the mid-1980s the British Government has been greatly influenced by US attitudes towards "welfare dependency" and the idea of linking work and welfare. In 1992 Bill Clinton promised "to end welfare as we know it". In August 1996, Clinton signed a bill passed by the Republican Congress, forcing heads of families to find work within two years or lose their entitlement to benefit and health insurance. Noone will be able to claim benefits for more than five years in a lifetime. The Bill is targeted at families with children, especially single mothers.

Clinton has stolen the right-wing's clothes, but managing to pass this off as being modern. Such is the fascination with Clinton that a horde of Labour MPs and MEPs flocked to the Democratic Convention in Chicago. Incidentally, a short trip out of the convention hall to Chicago's South Side would have revealed the terrible social deprivation, wrought by a market economy, which the Clinton administration has done nothing to alleviate.

The philosophy of "welfare-to-work" behind Clinton's original Work and Responsibility Act has been supported by the Tories, Labour and the Lib-Dems in the UK. All used it as an argument for "new" policies on entitlement to benefit. The cutting of benefit levels, the reduction in benefit periods and the requirement to attend training and other courses have all found their way into the JSA.

Labour's document *Getting Welfare to Work*, is described as "a new vision for social security". It is influenced by the US Welfare-to-Work approach. Its main emphasis is on the long-term savings the strategy will make for the taxpayer. The only promise is to "review the workings of the JobSeekers' Act". A commitment in the original policy, that a Labour Government would abolish the JSA, is said to have been deleted after an intervention by the Party leader (it "would send the wrong message out" about people staying on benefit).

Fortunately there is other organised action against the JSA. The Civil and Public Servants Association, which represents 30,000 staff in the Benefits Agency, successfully balloted its members in July for strike action over concerns that the JSA would provoke violence in the new open plan job centres.

Tthe JSA is contrary to international standards as defined by the International Labour Organisation whose Convention 44 says that an unemployed claimant shall not be disqualified from benefit for refusing a job "if the rate of wages offered is lower, or the other conditions of employment are less favourable...than the standard generally observed at the time in the occupation and district in which the employment is offered." This safeguard will be scrapped by the JSA.

Will the future Blair Government refuse to annul legislation which the ILO has decreed to be against UN-approved standards? The Labour leadership may have no intention of challenging this latest shift away from the welfare state, but others will continue to oppose it.

LLB page 23

Free the Kings Cross Two

Five hundred Asian youth were on the streets of London in August to demand justice for the Kings Cross Two. Sujata Aurora from the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism explains why.

WHITE schoolboy Richard Everitt was killed in Somers Town, Kings Cross on 13th August 1994. A trial wrongly convicted Badrul Miah of murder and Showkat Akbar for violent disorder.

Richard's death was a tragedy. The Free The Kings X Two Campaign unequivocally condemn it. But the solution to a tragedy is not to convict the innocent.

Who actually killed Richard Everitt has never been established, but Miah was given a life sentence. The basis of the charge was the doctrine of 'joint enterprise', or 'common purpose'. This allows people to be prosecuted for being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The doctrine of joint enterprise has never been used to convict members of racist gangs involved in attacks which have resulted in the deaths of black people.

Following the murder, the police immediately spoke of a possible 'racial motivation' in the media. A day after the murder the police retracted this statement. They said that the case was in fact one of mistaken identity: the murderers were looking for a white boy who had stolen jewellery and a mobile phone. But this was too late. Richard had already become a white martyr: the BNP claimed him as a 'victim of a multiracial experiment'. There was widespread condemnation of 'racial violence' from people previously silent on racist attacks. "Murdered for being white" - screamed the front page of the *Sun* echoing the *British Nationalist*. Asian Tory MP Nirj Deva, Barbara Windsor, and even Princess Diana, came to lay wreaths where Richard was killed.

Everitt's murder set off a huge police investigation: over 300 local Bengali youth were questioned. This was in stark contrast to the police investigation into the death of Stephen Lawrence. According to community workers, Asians reporting racist attacks to the police were questioned about Everitt's murder. Others were stopped in the street and taken to police stations on pretexts but then questioned only about the murder. The police sought to establish the whereabouts of every Asian youth at the time of the murder to eliminate potential alibi witnesses.

Two aspects of the trial particularly angered the local Bengali community. First, the prosecution insisted on portraying the killing as racial. Badrul was challenged in court that he would stab any white youth. Second, the prosecution's use of joint enterprise meant that the whole of the Bengali community was put on trial as 'racist'. Badrul was effectively a scapegoat. He was convicted of murder even though it was never suggested that he had killed Richard Everitt. The trial judge said he was 'carrying the can' for the murder.

The campaign has faced considerable opposition from sections of the left and from the Labour council, who wrongly believed that a demonstration would increase local tension. At best this amounts to an accommodation to the worst forms of racism among the white working class and at worst results in blaming black self-organisation for racism. The demonstration, organised largely by local youths themselves was a significant development in black community mobilisation in the area, and in the event, attracted little opposition from the local white community (a counter demonstration called by the Everitt family attracted 13 people). More significantly, it showed that the Bengali youths of Somers Town will not passively allow either council bureaucrats or left-wing parachuters to set the agenda. Our immediate aim is to mobilise for the freedom of Badrul and Showkat whose appeal starts on 8th November in the High Court. There will be a lobby at 10am. In the long-term we hope that by organising ourselves effectively we will be able to challenge the police harassment and racial violence which has prevailed in Somers Town for far too long.

- Donations/information: Free The Kings X Two Campaign, Box 132, 63 Camden High Street, London NW1 7JL. Tel: 0956 145964/ 0956 646703/0973 632827.

Race & Class ...

presents the first Hilary Arnott memorial lecture, with Barbara Ransby - activist in the US black women's movement, historian, writer and lecturer in African-American Studies and History at the University of Chicago / Illinois - speaking on racism and the politics of poverty.

Thursday 24th October

Friends Meeting House
Euston Road
London NW1

Doors open at 6.30pm

meeting starts at 7pm

Socialist Campaign Group

[Supporters' Network]

AGM

Making Labour deliver

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

LLB page 24

Asylum Bill: where's the opposition?

Sue Jones reports on the legislative progress of the Tories' latest racist attack.

THE GOVERNMENT finally dragged the Asylum and Immigration Bill through Parliament on 24th July. They packed the Lords and relied on the inability of some Labour MPs to vote on an issue of principle, even if (or maybe because) there was a chance of defeating the Tories. Of course, the Party leadership must also take responsibility for its spineless and wavering approach, but these MPs allowed the Act through.

Their constituents who will now face immigration checks when they apply for housing, race discrimination when they go for jobs, and the refusal of benefits if they choose to appeal against Home Office decisions, have a right to know why these MPs could not bestir themselves to vote.

Some no doubt were "paired" and will claim that their absence was balanced by that of Tories, but in this case the pairing arrangements allowed the Tory dissidents to express their dissatisfaction without putting the Government at risk. Councillors may also like to question these MPs about their absence.

Since 19th August, councils can no longer offer tenancies to many people because of their immigration status, or even help them if they become homeless. In many authorities, especially in London, we now have social service departments gearing up to become housing providers because those refused benefits are still entitled to help if they have children or are sick or disabled. The benefit cuts are an expensive mess, with court actions challenging the Government's attempts to backdate the legislation to when they first, illegally, tried to stop some asylum seekers getting basic survival benefits.

Meanwhile, refugee communities face a real crisis: the Home Office now uses a special short procedure on new applications for asylum that neatly cuts out legal representation and advice, and often removes adequate interpreting services. Unsurprisingly, the refusal rate is high: on the pilot project it was 100%. As applications are refused, people lose benefits and their communities have moved in to support them. Most report that they are at breaking point.

So far, most of those responding have been religious groups, the refugee agencies and some community groups, with some councils helping out. This is not going to be enough. The scale of both individual and community suffering is great. The Iranian man who was recovering from torture but walking the six miles from Manor House to Vauxhall every day in constant pain so that he could get lunch is only one of many.

Labour MPs who did not vote against the Asylum and Immigration Act

Richard Burden (Birmingham), Dennis Canavan (Falkirk W), Michael Connarty (Falkirk E), John Cunnings (Easington), Lawrence Cunliffe (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), David Marshall (Shettleston).

Leonora Lloyd reports on the reality of being a refugee: The new Asylum legislation mainly affects single people and childless couples. Where there are children, the local authority is required to continue to provide housing and other services under the Children Act 1989. In the summer, some local authorities threatened to take the Government to court to force them to provide funding to cover this situation. The Government agreed but to date has not come up with any proposals, so councils are having to meet costs out of their existing social service funding.

For childless asylum seekers and refugees, the situation is desperate. Family centres dealing with the homeless and refugees are already under great stress and cannot help them. These are people who have suffered in their own countries from torture, rape, political or religious persecution. Many were well-educated, middle-class professionals; the poorest refugees tend to go to neighbouring, equally poor countries. So by leaving, they have already lost status, their standard of living, their homes and families. They are treated with suspicion at the port of entry, even if they comply with the rules about applying for asylum immediately.

Samual was tortured and imprisoned for a year in Angola, suffering deep physical and emotional trauma. In London, he lived on the streets, where he became very ill, urinating blood. After treatment at St Thomas's, he was referred to social services who decided he needed to stay in hospital. Instead, he ended up back on the streets. Although he is currently being housed by social services, once they consider him to be fit again, he has only the streets to return to.

Fazil was arrested for campaigning for democracy in Iran, tortured and kept in solitary confinement for almost a year. He escaped to Turkey, only to find that the Iranian secret service was also active there, and finally ended up in England, where he stayed with family friends in London, who put him in touch with a solicitor. But he has no documents or money and nowhere to go except the streets.

Handrin, a Kurd from Turkey, was arrested and tortured before escaping via Spain to London, where he stayed with his sister, who threw him out when his money ran out. He sold his watch and camera, slept rough, eating out of bins, then tried to commit suicide by jumping off Tower Bridge, as a result of which he ended up in hospital for ten days. He has only one set of clothes and nowhere to live or any means of support. ❑

500 years of injustice

Mike Phipps reviews Return of the Indian *by Philip Wearne, published by Latin American Bureau and Cassell, price £15.99.*

"FOR CENTURIES...the Americas stood empty of mankind and its works...this is the story of the creation of a civilisation where none existed." This comes not from the diary of a 16th century conquistador but an eminent American history book less than ten years old. Such is the ignorance - or ethnocentrism - regarding the indigenous peoples of the Americas.

2,500 years ago, the Mayan city of Tikal, with its 200 foot high pyramids and population of 120,000 may have been as large as ancient Rome. The Mayan calendar was more accurate than the Julian one used in Europe until 1582. In mathematics, engineering and social organisation the Aztecs and Incas surpassed Europe.

When Columbus landed in 1492, 112 million indigenous people lived in the Americas - one-fifth of the world's population. Today there are less than 40 million. The 5% who are lowland forest-dwellers make up 80% of the 800 different ethnolinguistic groups, one third of whom live in Brazil.

Military conquest, disease, slavery and expropriation of land and culture have been an ongoing holocaust for the indigenous peoples of the Americas. The biggest exterminators were previously unknown diseases like smallpox, plague, measles and influenza, which killed a staggering 20% of the world's population. This was not just a natural disaster: as late as 1969, writer Norman Lewis exposed a Brazilian Government report detailing how Indians were deliberately injected with smallpox virus instead of vaccine.

Massacres were also not confined to the early days. The Guatemalan army's onslaught against the indigenous population intensified in the 1980s when 440 Mayan villages were wiped out and over 40,000 civilians killed, many of them children. "Re-education camps" sought to root out and destroy the culture which was the basis of indigenous people's resistance.

Alongside economic enslavement, the denial of human or legal rights often included defining "Indians" as non-people.

Yesterday's widespread slavery in mines and plantations has given way to the tyranny of international capital as neo-liberal economic policies wreck local markets with cheap imports.

Indigenous peoples' land has been stolen and privatised through war, invasion, eviction, treaty violation, purchase and relocation. Relocation of the Innu people of northern Canada away from their traditional lands led to a massive leap in the suicide rate. In 1993 Innu children were filmed barricaded inside an unheated shack in temperatures of 40 degrees celsius below zero, sniffing gasoline, screaming that they wanted to die. Seventy five per cent of the deforestation of the Brazilian Amazon has occurred in the last twenty years, typically followed by an influx of settlement, disease, rancher-bandits, prospectors and environmental poisoning by mercury or oil spillages. This destruction was compounded by organised Christianity - the torture of the Inquisition has been replaced by Protestant fundamentalist sects like the Florida-based New Tribes Mission (annual turnover $20 million), but the effects are similar.

Despite this bleak picture, there is hope and resistance. A growth in self-education and new organisations is fuelling large-scale co-operation between indigenous communities and a tendency towards a "pan-Indian" national consciousness in response to such local problems as racism and land seizures. Modern methods, such as the Zapatistas' innovative use of the Internet to spread word of their 1994 uprising, are matched by a readiness to use both official and unofficial channels for campaigning. Indigenous people have been elected to parliament in Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador. The 1988 Brazilian constitution recognised Indians' collective rights, organisations and beliefs. The 1991 constitution goes further, although reality seldom reflects the fine words.

Hence the importance of direct action to secure their demands. In 1990, an Ecuadorian indigenous organisation blocked roads with boulders, took police hostage and occupied land, effectively closing down parts of the country and forcing the Government to negotiate. The same year, a march for land and dignity was met by the Bolivian president and half his cabinet, who conceded key demands. In Canada, Mohawks protested militantly against the desecration of an Indian cemetery by a proposed extension to a golf course.

Philip Wearne's book is highly readable and comes with over 80 illustrations and photographs and an optimistic foreword by Mayan activist and 1992 Nobel Peace Prize winner Rigoberta Menchu. "After 500 years of injustice," she writes, "we are moving into the light of a new era for our people...From our diversity will come the true wealth of the Americas."

- Special offer for *LLB* readers

Return of the Indian is available at the special price of £14 post free - a saving of £3 off the normal price by post. Send your order (with cheques payable to LAB) to Latin American Bureau, *Labour Left Briefing* Offer, 1 Amwell Street, London EC1R 1UL.

Parliament at a glance

Dan Carter, our man with his eye on Parliament, approves of The Parliament and Government Pocket Book 1996. *(NTC publications/ Hansard Society, tel: 01491 411000)*

Without doubt the most concise and informative of the parliamentary guides available. Fits in your pocket (for a quick glance under the table to make you look the best-informed person in a meeting), it also covers more areas than most. So if you need to know not just MPs and their constituencies, but their interests, majorities, voting record on key issues, all the members of the Lords, pressure groups and Government expenditure, this is for you. Essential for journalists and campaigners who deal with parliamentary affairs.

Revolutionary optimism survives downturn blues

According to The Sunday Times*, playwright Trevor Griffiths has abandoned revolution in his latest play* Who Shall Be Happy... *Steve Smith disagrees.*

ALTHOUGH not as well known on the left as Ken Loach, Trevor Griffiths ranks as a major contemporary socialist dramatist.

His latest play, *Who Shall Be Happy...*, was recently shown at London's Bush Theatre as part of a nationwide tour by Belfast's Mad Cow Productions, and prompted *Sunday Times* reviewer John Peter to claim that it represented Griffiths' abandonment of revolutionary ideas.

Of the host of socialist writers who flooded the British stage with their work in the 1960s and 1970s, Griffiths was the most explicitly ideological and talented of them all: Gramsci, Lenin and Trotsky were all used for lead roles in his plays. But Griffiths was never content to play to the theatre-going elite, battling with television producers to get his work to mass audiences.

His record of success in the 1970s was impressive, including *The Party*, which had characters from different far-left currents debating revolutionary strategy, and *Bill Brand*, which had a Bennite MP battling the Labour parliamentary hierarchy. His most high-profile project, the Hollywood collaboration with Warren Beatty on the John Reed biopic *Reds*, predictably had more mixed artistic results.

Griffiths' best work was in the optimistic 1970s and he has not adapted so well to the harsher Thatcherite climate. *Who Shall Be Happy...* deals with the left in retreat.

The play is set in a Paris dungeon at the height of the French revolutionary terror of 1794. A prisoner claiming to be the arrested leader Danton awaits the inevitable outcome of the showtrial ordered by Robespierre. The prisoner (played by Stanley Townsend) is watched over by a semi-illiterate guard, Henry (Kulvinder Ghir). But is the prisoner actually Danton? The audience learns that a nearby cell holds another prisoner claiming to be the great leader - the authorities have also imprisoned a mad actor with a Danton persona to confuse any rescue plot.

Despite being in chains, the charismatic personality of the prisoner dominates the timid guard. By a tremendous display of verbal cajoling and deception, Danton persuades the guard to smuggle his last political testament out to the waiting French masses.



PHOTO: JILL JENNINGS.

Danton?

Danton's doomed situation recalls the plight of Trotsky and the old Bolsheviks, and this point is stressed by *The Sunday Times* in arguing that the parallels drawn in the play between the two great revolutions show that Griffiths is accepting the inevitability of revolutionary failure.

In fact, this misreads the actions of the character whom we the audience gradually accept must be the "real" Danton. While the prisoner's continual unfinished refrain "who shall be happy...?" appears to indicate his bewilderment in the face of Thermidorian reaction, his imminent death still sees him engaged in frantic struggle - a battle of wits with the guard to ensure the French masses can hear his last words.

It is this spirit which pervades the play and gives it a searingly tragic yet utterly inspirational quality. Danton's last spoken words finally solve the mystery of his refrain. "Who shall be happy...if not everyone?". These are the words branded into Danton's memory as a young revolutionary by a downtrodden peasant at Louis XVI's coronation. Danton's last political act is to pass on the peasant's challenge to those coming after. Griffiths real historical parallel is not so much with the Bolshevik failure, but with that of the contemporary left he is part of and whose feelings of despair he confronts. Danton's last testament fails to reach the masses after the supposedly timid guard turns out to be the real "actor" by destroying the last written words in the play's final scene. Yet just as Danton struggled to his last breath to lessen history's burden on the revolutionaries who would follow him, the inspirational message is clear - so must we. ❑

New Interventions

A socialist theoretical journal dedicated to open, non-sectarian dialogue - articles and reviews welcomed.

Subscriptions £9.50 for four issues (non-UK £12.65). Cheques (Sterling only) to *New Interventions*, PO Box 485, Coventry CV5 6ZP.

LLB page 27

Perverse behaviour?

Peter Tatchell reviews The Geography of Perversion *by Rudi Bleys (Cassell, £14.99)*

PRESIDENT Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe has renewed his attacks on lesbians and gay men, again decrying homosexuality as alien to African culture. Sodomy is, he claims, a modern debauchery imported from the west.

Eight hundred years ago, at the time of the Crusades, Europeans were claiming the reverse. They depicted homosexuality as a "foreign vice", introduced by Muslim infidels.

The *Geography of Perversion* explodes both these myths. Drawing on researches and diaries of the imperial era, 1750-1918, Bleys presents a wide-ranging account of same-sex behaviour in Africa, Latin America, Asia and the Middle East. He argues that "within the (European) narratives of discovery and conquest, same-sex behaviour was employed as a signifier of cultural difference."

Blackness became equated with barbarism, and barbarism with sexual perversion. In the fevered white imagination, the sodomy of indigenous peoples was "proof" of their boundless depravity. This led to the simultaneous demonising of racial and sexual difference.

There was, says Bleys, an intimate connection between the rise of imperial, racist and homophobic ideologies. The acceptance, and sometimes veneration, of same-sex behaviour in many non-European cultures horrified the Christian colonising powers, being cited frequently as evidence that non-white people were "savages" and "sub-humans". The homosexuality of the "heathens" became yet another rationalisation for racialist notions of white superiority and the "civilising mission" of western conquerors.

It is, indeed, a perverse twist of history that Robert Mugabe is now espousing a homophobic agenda not dissimilar to that which was once imposed on black Zimbabweans by the colonisers that he fought a war of liberation to overthrow.

A welcome reassessment

Dan Carter reviews The First New Left *by Michael Kenny (Lawrence & Wishart).*

IT IS A good time to reassess the importance of the "New Left" of the late fifties and early sixties. This book is perhaps the first to look at the practical as well as the intellectual effects of those loosely grouped around the New Left. The attempted industrial organisation, the electoral success of the Fife socialists around Lawrence Daly (probably better known to readers as a miners' leader) and the effects on the peace movement are all analysed. This is a well-researched book, showing the reliance of the New Left on strong, local, independent groups that often brought together socialists inside and outside the Labour Party after the Communist Party's collapse over Hungary in 1956.

One reason for the failure of such a left is seen as "the capacity of the Labour Party to resist - and occasionally co-opt - novel ideas as well as the tendency of the political system in Britain to hive off ideological innovation." The New Left, without a particular guiding ideology, soon slipped into irrelevance, but the lessons of its strengths and weaknesses are worth learning today.

New socialist poems

Born in China and now 75, Arnold Rattenbury has lived for 30 years in the slate country of North Wales. His sixth volume of sharply observed, socialist poems, Living Here, *has just been published by Katabasis at £6.95.*

BANNERS

For Andy Croft
We didn't make the banners of course.
Professionals did them. But they were ours
in a larger public sense than tradeforce,
region, family, narrow purpose.
Ragworks or things made out of leavings
wouldn't do for what we believed in.
Nor would a mate's invention do
for causes larger than a me and you.
And so we paid for portraits of founders,
workscenes, services members could count on.
You know the result, or saw the like
on a newsflash during the great coal strike.
Likeness (you see) had never been
our art, but a vision (you have to imagine).
Colour was ours, the swaggering bunting
effect, trumpets and drums up front,
and something the scale of a kingsize bedspread
flaring about us overhead.
You see few of them now. Defeat
has left them rolled in cupboards. And yet
sometimes we march. And when, at Greenham
or Treekeep, people uprise, women
mostly, blazons begin to appear
in patchwork, from rags - ours for sure.

Bragg goes upfield

Jane Thompson, Greenwich UNISON, reports from the Roundhouse.

FOR FANS OF Billy Bragg, the question was whether he could perform to the standard we had come to expect after a two year break. To anyone hearing Bragg's new album *William Bloke* and attending his recent London gig at Camden's Roundhouse the answer is a resounding "yes".

Billy Bragg devotees have waited a long time for his return to the stage and were rewarded for their patience by more than one and a half hours of social comment, bad jokes and pure pop.

As a man who supported Red Wedge in the 80s Bragg sees clearly where his politics lie in the 90s, still firmly in the labour movement if not the (New) Labour Party. There's something encouraging about a 38 year old confirming his belief in socialism yet recognising the need to encompass grass roots movements, such as the action at Newbury, as a way for the left to move forward.

Bragg's songs are, and always have been, a mixture of personal love and politics and work best when these vital ingredients are combined. What is new is his increasing reference to his more recently acquired status of fatherhood. Fortunately this hasn't stopped him writing songs full of passion such as *Thatcherites* - a scathing attack on those who have supported the destruction of our society over the last 17 years - and *Red to Blue* which reminds us only too well that far too many are willing to sell out to "get on" or send the kids to a "good " school.

- Bragg's album *William Bloke* is out now on Cooking Vinyl.

LLB page 28

Review

Leonora Lloyd reviews *Solidarity at work: the case for free trade unions:* Maria Exall and Paul Moore, Thames Central CWU.

THIS IS THE sort of publication activists in every union should be producing. In the case of the CWU, policy passed by their annual conference calling for repeal of anti-trade union laws and for positive rights for trade unionists was flouted by their general secretary at last year's Labour Party Conference. The authors argue that fighting for positive rights would be a popular move with the electorate, as public opinion polls have shown regular rises in support for this position.

The pamphlet is not always as clear as it could be if it is to reach out beyond committed activists to rank and file trade unionists. For example, there are several references to the 'repudiation section' of the 1990 Employment Act, but no clear explanation of what this means.

- The pamphlet is available from Thames Central CWU, Room 157, Edinburgh House, 154-182 Kennington Lane, London SE11 4EZ. Please include a donation for postage.

Obituary: Don Billingsley

Jon Archer writes: I first met Don Billingsley in the old Wood Green Labour Party in the early 1980s, when we had both retired.

At that time, the local organisations of the Party were deeply concerned to find means to mobilise forces which could check the attacks of the Thatcher Government. Don found himself in a natural alliance with Mary Archer and the other supporters of *Unite and Fight*.

He had spent his working life in engineering and had become a Labour councillor in the old Hornsey borough after the war. He played an important part in the re-organisation of education and the introduction of comprehensive schools.

Don always seemed to me to have the best characteristics of what we have since come to call "Old Labour", without the opportunism that misdirected so many well-meaning socialists. To him the interests of the class came first.

He would listen to what working people said and think about it. His manner was gentle and courteous, but it would have been completely impossible for any bureaucrat to browbeat or intimidate him. He was flexible and patient.

It is among such as Don, rather than in Scargill's SLP, that we are finding the human material from which we can build the organised opposition to a future Blair Government.

Paul Richards: an apology

In the July issue of *LLB* we reported that Paul Richards, PPC for Basildon, had described the Labour Reform Group as splitters when interviewed on *Newsnight*. This was completely wrong and we apologise to Mr Richards for any embarrassment we have caused him.

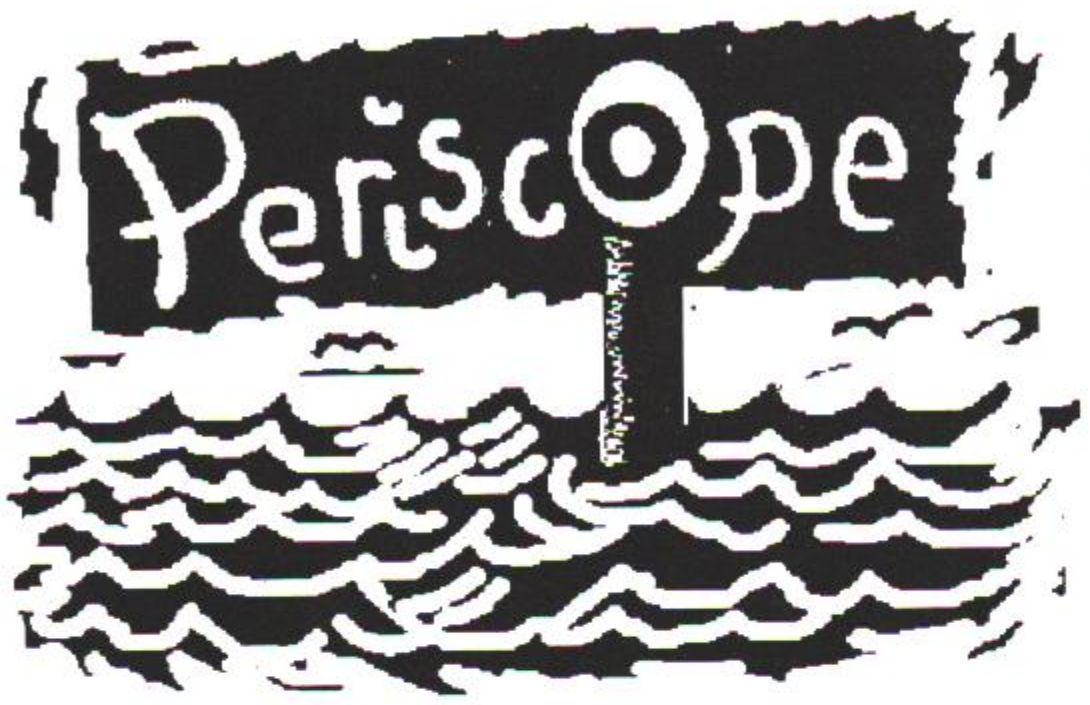
Alf Lomas MEP

Greetings to Conference delegates and visitors.

Say no to a Europe controlled by bankers



Group of the Party of European Socialists



Will our worm turn?

On Labour Day, the President of the trade union federation, the AFL-CIO, **John J. Sweeney** was arrested on a picket line at the *Detroit News* which has had 2,000 of its workforce on strike for over one year. Now that **John Monks** has found the gumption to criticise Tony Blair for his attempts to wreck the TUC Conference, *Periscope* is offering odds on how long it will take him to make some modest resistance to the anti-trade union laws.

Money for old rope

Now that millionaire printer **Bob Gavron** feels "comfortable" with the Labour Party he has donated 500,000 smackeroos. When **Blair** was employment spokesperson Gavron told him he was unhappy about Labour plans to reverse some of the anti-union laws. At that time he donated a mere £100,000 to **Kinnock**'s general Election campaign. Amazing what an extra £400k can do!

Gorgeous Votes

Periscope condemns the scurrilous suggestion that MP **George Galloway** was one of 35 MPs who handed their shadow cabinet ballot paper blank to the Labour Whips office, to be filled in as **Blair** instructed. We think litigious 'Gorgeous' George should sue all those publications who have suggested this. *LLB* offers him space to publish the list of who he actually voted for.

Lambeth

UNISON

sends greetings to Labour Party delegates

****

In Lambeth UNISON we know all about New Labour councillors - Little Devils!

They mean it man

Can it really be true that at a recent **Labour Students** school, attenders were asked, hypothetically of course, how to explain the reasons for breaking the union link?

Divided we fall

An ironic twist in the long-running **Liverpool docks dispute** is the company's sacking of some of the **scabs** it hired to replace the original workforce. The employer evidently holds them in as much contempt as the sacked dockers, for it decided to slash their already paltry £4 an hour pay to £2.50. When some scabs rejected the new terms, they were sacked and even considered organising a picket line - but thought better of it.

Moore grief in Lewisham

Step forward *Periscope*'s Freethinker of the Month, chair of Lewisham Council's Education Committee, **Gavin Moore**. In a letter to an NUT member who had written in to the local paper he wrote "you may be interested to know that Lewisham's Code of Practice does not permit staff to engage in public debates concerning local political issues".

Short changed

How sad that in order to ensure there was one letter in the *Guardian* supporting her following her demotion, **Clare Short** had her researcher **Daniel Harris** write in on her behalf.

Bang to rights

Following the NEC's decision not to endorse **Liz Davies** as Leeds North East PPC **Tom Sawyer** briefed journalists about the reasons behind the decision. The *FT* reported that he had said there was "some evidence" that she had incited violence. Davies' solicitor wrote to Sawyer pointing out the libellous nature of the remark. Mike Penn, the Party's Constitutional Officer repudiated the story. In a letter to Davies' solicitor he wrote: "David Hill [the Party's communications officer] was present at Mr Sawyer's media interview and does not believe that Mr Sawyer [used] the words "some evidence" in the context that Ms Davies "had incited activists to violence"". Davies sued the *FT* and subsequently accepted a payment into court from the newspaper. In the process, the *FT* produced a tape recording of the media briefing in which, in answer to a question about the 'inciting violence' allegation from Patrick Wintour, Sawyer says: "NEC members did feel that this kind of attitude and behaviour is unacceptable ... there's certainly some evidence of it ..."

Fares not fair

A recent House of Commons Early Day Motion calling on the Government to end its policy of above-inflation fare rises and to increase investment in London's public transport, was supported by less than half of London's Labour MP's. The motion, sponsored by the **Capital Transport Campaign**, was cold-shouldered by Labour's front-bench which is quite happy to rail against the Government's policy of under-financing while proposing nothing to redeem it. Worse, not a single sentence in the Party's new draft transport strategy is devoted to this subject. Capital Transport describes the leadership's time-honoured excuse that it can't make specific commitments without knowing the precise economic circumstances it will inherit - as "disingenuous". A 2% fares cut, for example would cost a mere £14 million.

Making it up as you go along

In an article in the *Observer*, Tony **Blair** lamented the "division in radical politics at the end of the last century and the beginning of this between Liberals and Labour Party." He went on to assert: "The TUC was created when some trade unions disapproved of the unions forming the Labour Party and wanted their own organisation". It's one thing to rewrite Labour's constitution; another to rewrite history. The TUC was formed in 1868. The Labour Party several decades later - partly as a result of a motion to set up a Labour Party carried at the TUC. We are told the leader writes his own articles. Is this good news or bad?

CORRESPONDENCE

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

Write to:

Labour Left Briefing
PO Box 2378
London E5 9QU



I find the latest controversy over the use of the word 'socialism' amusing but predictable.

Kim Howells is only stating what the Party is actually doing. Some commentators will argue that Blair has moved the Party away from its essential socialist orientation. Others will accept that socialists have always been a minority within the Party but that Blair has, nevertheless, fundamentally moved the Party to the right.

I believe that there is nothing new whatsoever about 'New Labour'. Yes, Blair is trying to play down links with the unions and none of the leadership's policies are socialist. But fundamentally, as regards the crucial cleavage between social democracy and socialism, Mr Blair is no different to Ramsay MacDonald, to Clement Attlee, Harold Wilson, Jim Callaghan et al.

In fact Blair's response to the upset at the TUC Conference, to state that the Labour Party is a national rather than a sectional party is identical to Ramsay MacDonald's appeal to the electorate in the late 1920s.

Labour started its life as a social democratic party, has continued to be so throughout the 96 years of its existence and still is today! What's the surprise? The *Guardian*'s response is perplexing. They are asking whether Tony Blair is a Liberal and whether he has abandoned traditional Labour values. Again, I feel that there is no fundamental difference. Labourism was born as a result of radical Liberalism's failure to support financially working people to be MPs. However ideologically there was no major split with radical Liberalism and in fact the vast majority of trade unionists who created the Party were radical Liberals.

Paul Allender,
London NW2

"...socialists in Britain should focus on one question - what can we do to help bring about peace in Ireland?" (*LLB* Editorial Statement, July)."Peace: presence of quiet and tranquillity" (the dictionary in my office). I assume that *LLB* is recommending by default that the question "what can we do to help support the majority of the Irish working class to achieve self-determination against the military occupation by our own imperialist armed forces?" should be the focus for members of the Noise Abatement Society.

Jenny Fisher,
Tower Hamlets

A Chara, in your July issue you carried an interview with myself. Although I was fairly pleased (both with the magazine and the interview) I must take exception to a misquote. Where I said "a nationalist consensus" you quoted a "united nationalist front". The former being agreement between the different nationalist groupings on a few points such as no internal settlement in the six countries and the latter smacking more of elitism.

Yours with respect,
Councillor Bobby Lavery,
Sinn Fein,
Belfast.

I found your web page via the Labor Net (US) page. I'm curious about your quite unflattering depictions of Tony Blair. Shouldn't you be saving this animosity up for John Major and his corporate cronies? Blair (as with Clinton) may be far from ideal, but surely preferable to the Tories? Maybe I'm just a stupid American, but it seems that the question is who to smite. I'd trade our Clinton for your Blair any day, based on the question I've observed on C-Span (TV broadcasts of the US Congress and various international parliaments).

Ed Lacy,
USA

AOB

"You cannot vote through an increase of £9,000 a year and then say to the poorest workers in the country 'you cannot accept for your full year's work as much as we have got as an increase'. It's double standards". - *Rodney Bickerstaff.*

"MPs with a constituency more than 150 miles from London make nothing out of this". - *Gerry Bermingham Labour MP on his pay-rise.*

"You should be able to keep as much of the money you have earned to spend as you like." - *Tony Blair.*

"Wherever Ms Davies is now, I suspect that she will be drawing a grim satisfaction from the fact that the witch-finder has herself been put on the ducking stool". - *Andrew Rawnsley on Clare Short's demotion.*

"I sometimes call them the people who live in the dark. Everything they do is in hiding. We go to the shadow cabinet, we go to the national executive committee. Everything we do is in the light. They live in the dark". - *Clair Short.*

"The obvious example is Peter Mandelson who seems to be in the paper far too often, who seems to be on television far too often, who seems to take himself, and be taken, far more seriously than I think is appropriate". - *Roy Hattersley.*

"What is it that is so brilliant about Peter Mandelson...After all, he did play a key role in losing the past two general elections?" - *Brian Sedgemore MP.*

"Something else makes Blair uniquely repugnant to Labour people. And that is that he is not Labour. Kinnock was a terrible turncoat, but always Labour. Smith was always honestly and openly right-wing, but always Labour. Blair is just Blair". - *Jeremy Hardy.*

"There has never been a better time to be a young person than in the Britain of 1996." - *Charles Hendry MP, Vice Chairman of the Conservative Party.*

"It's like the Labour Party, it might go this way, it might go that way...". - *Billy Bragg on the weather at the Reading Festival.*

"It is especially important that I am kept appraised of all policy developments". - *John Prescott MP. [We suggest John takes out a subscription to the Guardian].*

"For too long, the Party's energy wasted. On verbs. For the British people, now, no more verbs. Tough on verbs, tough on the causes of verbs...Verbless sentences sound as if they are firm promises. Like so much of the manifesto, each verbless phrase offers a fine aspiration, worthy in every way, utterly estimable, and entirely vague." - *Simon Hoggart.*

"The new document isn't intended for you as party members. Your role is to endorse it, preferably with acclamation. " - *Austin Mitchell MP self-styled squashed hedgehog on the road to the manifesto.*

"I look forward to a Labour Government". - *John Moores, the director of Littlewoods.*

"Can the unions as we know them change enough - and in time? Yes - progressive trade unionists of the Jack Dromey stamp could still influence the culture of management-worker relations." - *former SDP candidate Polly Toynbee.*

McSpies testify on infiltration

Dan Mills presents an update on the McLibel Trial, a mammoth legal battle between the $30 billion a year McDonald's and two activists (Helen Steel & Dave Morris).

THE UNION busting bandits are suing them for libel over a six-sided Factsheet produced by London Greenpeace entitled *What's Wrong With McDonald's?*. For perhaps the first time in history, a multinational corporation has effectively been put on trial over its business practices - promotion of junk food, exploitation of workers and animals, advertising to children, and damage to the environment.

The last section of evidence in the trial concerned the publication of the Factsheet. McDonald's claim that the defendants, by virtue of their involvement in London Greenpeace, were responsible for the production and distribution of the Factsheet "wheresoever and whensoever" it had taken place! The Defendants are claiming that, because McDonald's infiltrators had been actively involved in the group and had helped to circulate the Factsheet, McDonald's had consented to its distribution.

Sid Nicholson (McDonald's UK Vice President) admitted that in 1989, he had a secret meeting at McDonald's HQ with two members of Special Branch where he obtained information about people involved with London Greenpeace. Company documents revealed that McDonald's continued to receive information from Special Branch until at least 1994.

Mr Nicholson stated that the company received information from the Economic League about London Greenpeace, and also said that "we may very well have got reports on union activity". The Economic League kept a 'blacklist' of 'subversives' - political or trade union activists - gleaned from various sources, which subscribers could use to vet prospective employees. It was the subject of great controversy in the late 80s and has since closed down.

Mr Nicholson admitted that in 1989 when considering legal action against the small environmental collective, McDonald's had hired two private investigation agencies to infiltrate London Greenpeace. A total of at least seven agents participated in the group from October 1989 to the Spring of 1991.

One of the 'enquiry agents', Brian Bishop, confirmed he had staffed a stall, some of the time on his own, at a well attended public event, where, he said, to the best of my knowledge the anti-McDonald's Factsheet was available for the public to take away.

Another 'enquiry agent', Allan Clare, admitted taking several letters sent to the group. He also confessed to breaking into London Greenpeace's office and taking photographs in there, stating "the door lock on the office to London Greenpeace was basically not very strong and it was decided that entry to it would not be a problem..... I used a phone card to swipe the lock". Mr Clare attended 17 meetings and admitted sending out the Factsheet.

Frances Tiller, another agent, appeared for the defence, testifying that "I felt very uncomfortable doing that particular job", "I did not like the deception, prying on people and interfering with their lives". "I did not think there was anything wrong with what the group was doing".

The evidence closed in July and the case resumes in October for closing speeches (lasting up to nine weeks). Judgement is expected in early 1997.

● Contact: McLibel Support Campaign, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX, UK. Tel./fax 0171-713 1269.



Abortion on the agenda this Autumn

by Leonora Lloyd

WHEN abortion fills the summer news columns, you can safely bet on the chances of an autumn private member's bill. It is claimed at least 20 MPs headed by David Alton wanting to crown his Parliamentary career, want to propose such a bill. No political party wants to touch the issue this side of an election and any bill will fail in the same way as those put in previous years.

However, it is still necessary to oppose vigorously a bill or any other attempts by anti-abortionists to change the law. They have already won a recent pyrrhic victory, with the successful injunction forbidding the woman wanting to abort one of twin foetuses. Luckily she had already had the abortion, but in the past such attempts by uninvolved third parties failed.

The National Abortion Campaign recently held an activists' meeting to plan the fight-back. All agreed that the campaign must be based on NAC's positive policies for a woman's right to choose.

An emergency resolution at TUC Congress committed the trade union movement to campaign actively against attacks on the 1967 Act, and it is hoped to put an emergency motion to the Labour Party Conference. Training for speakers, encouragement to establish local groups, contact with key labour movement figures and essential fund-raising are now under way.

Abortion rights are a vote winner. Around 80% of people support the 1967 Abortion Act, over half wanting it liberalised. But whether Tony Blair will support liberalising the law in line with Party policy is another matter. There is a hard battle ahead and organisations and individuals should affiliate and contribute to NAC now.

● To contact NAC, phone 0171-923 4976/Fax 4979.

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