LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

December'97/January'98 price £1/50p

inside...

- Livingstone on firefighters
- Corbyn on refugees
- Benn on Iraq
- New Labour sleaze

tough choices...



or soft options?

Labour Left Briefing

PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU
Telephone: 0181-985 6597
Fax: 0181-985 6785
Email: LLB@gn.apc.org
Web: http://www.labournet.org.uk/*LLB*

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

- **Editorial Board**: Graham Bash, Tony Dale, Liz Davies, Jenny Fisher, Kevin Flack, Jon Green, Simon Hewitt, Simon Kennedy, Des Kirkland, Liz Knight, John Leonida, Leonora Lloyd (Co-Chair), Sue Lukes, Dorothy Macedo (Co-Chair), Mike Marqusee (Political Correspondent), Fiona Monkman, Mike Phipps, David Pope, Jon Rogers, John Stewart, Alistair Ward (Editor).
- **Production Team**: Graham Bash, Dan Carter, Gary Drostle, Louise Kawakami, Dave Lewney, Leonora Lloyd, Dorothy Macedo, Mike Phipps, David Pope, Paula Smith, John Stewart, Alistair Ward. Web site editor: Chris Croome (chris@atomism.demon.co.uk).
- ***LLB* advertising**: £10 per column inch; £30 for 1/8 page; £55 for 1/4 page; £100 for 1/2 page; £175 for a page. 1/2 price for campaigns and strikers.
- ***LLB* email list**: keep in touch about labour movement events, swap news, debate ideas. Send an email to: llb_list@atomism.demon.co.uk with "join list" as the subject and your email address in the body of the message.
- ***LLB* web site**: http://www.labournet.org.uk/*LLB* " Attractive and well-organised with everything labour movement sites should include: full text of current issue, a search engine to look at back issues, audio files, an online mailing list, a first rate links page, organised in colourful tables...a well done job" — Eric Lee, author of The Labour Movement and the InterNet.
"Links to just about every left wing site on the InterNet. It gets our vote as the best there is." — Scottish Socialist Alliance.
- ***LLB* CDROM**: In March a CD of the first two years of the *LLB* web site will go on sale. It will have a java search facility and will work on Windows 95, Windows 98, Macs and all flavours of Unix. Each year you will be able to send the CD back and get another years worth of *LLB*'s added to it. It will cost £20, and £5 a year to update it. If you are interested in registering in advance for the CD you will get it at a special offer price of £15. Email llb_cd@atomism.demon.co.uk to register.
- **Copy deadline**: The next edition will be out for February. Deadline: Monday 12th January. If you wish to contribute please send an email, PC disk or fax. We reserve the right to edit all articles.

AGENDA

Labour sleaze, Disability Benefit, full employment, fox hunting, animal testing, London government, Ken Livingstone on Fire Brigade cuts, EMU, legal aid, SLP 4-13

Leeds North East witch-hunted, Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates on their rights to free speech, living in the post-PIP era, the Alan Simpson column 14-19

UNISON witch-hunt, Liverpool dockers, council privatisation, the Geoff Martin column 20-23

Chile, South Africa, Tony Benn on the Iraq crisis, Sinn Fein, Brazil, the Michael Hindley column 24-27

Jeremy Corbyn MP on the Roma refugees, NF march repelled, Onibiyo family victory 28-29

Reviews, Periscope, Correspondence, AOB 30-32

Cover cartoon: Dros

Be a winner with the *Briefing* Club

Every month someone must win £15, £10 or £5.

By joining the *Briefing* Club for as little as £1.00 a month, you will have a good chance of winning monthly prizes and 100% chance to ensure *LLB* can thrive. Send cheques (made out to *Labour Left Briefing*), or write for standing order or direct debit forms to: *LLB*, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU.

Last month's winner: E.P.Calderon (£15).



Subscribe to *LLB*

"*LLB* is a marvellous magazine. If you don't subscribe to it I hope you will" — Tony Benn.

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

Name .....

Address .....

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

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

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

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

The tip of the iceberg

SINCE *LLB* last went to press, our New Labour Government has:

• exempted Formula One from the proposed ban on tobacco sponsorship, a move accurately characterised by Clive Bates, director of the independent and utterly respectable Action on Smoking and Health (ASH), as "a naked and ill-judged capitulation to powerful business interests."

• doomed the bill to ban fox-hunting by refusing to give it Parliamentary assistance.

• insisted on scrapping lone parent benefit, despite a chorus of voices pointing out the immediate material damage it would do to single parent families.

• (according to the *Guardian*) developed plans to tax, means-test or eliminate outright a variety of essential benefits for people with disabilities.

• refused to revise the criteria for cold weather payments to pensioners, despite promises made in opposition.

• announced long term plans for compulsory second pensions to top-up the basic state pension. Turning its back on the increasingly militant pensioners' movement — which rightly demands improvements in the basic state pension — the Government now plans to hand over our social security to the private pensions industry which mis-sold millions of pensions in the last decade.



• insisted that its promise to stick to Tory spending plans was sacrosanct, even as it was revealed that it is running a £5.7 billion surplus in the public accounts, and is actually spending £3 billion less than Ken Clarke planned to.

• announced that it would prepare the country for entry into the Single Currency following a referendum after the next general election. This means that when the pledge to stick within Tory spending limits expires it will be replaced by the deflationary monetary and fiscal discipline of the Maastricht and Dublin criteria.

• resisted French and Italian attempts to push job creation measures at the EU employment summit in Luxembourg; instead, Blair once again insisted that EU efforts be confined to "making people more employable".

• broken with the precedent set by previous governments of all stripes by refusing to allow a specific Parliamentary debate or vote on the Defence Estimates, which remain magically immune to the pressures weighing down on all other forms of public spending.

• given unequivocal support — almost alone among western states — to the US sabre rattling against Iraq.

• Stood by helplessly as hospital waiting lists soared to a record high, despite Labour's election pledge to cut lists by 100,000.

• presided over the closure of hospitals, fire stations, coast guard stations, and libraries and the continued contraction in local education authority budgets. .

• shown not the slightest remorse over continuing high interest rates, despite the negative impact on exports and jobs, and despite Labour's manifesto pledge to maintain "low interest rates".

The overall picture is becoming painfully clear to more and more Labour Party members. It's feelgood sound bites and "hard choices" for the masses, and special favours for the elite. Those who have portrayed Blair and his clique as solely obsessed with cold electoral calculation have missed the big picture. The most recent British Social Attitudes Survey confirms that on taxation, public spending, welfare, and employment, voters of all ages, and especially the young, are more likely to support the prescriptions of the left than the policies of the New Labour Government. But that cuts little ice with Blair. Likewise, the huge popular majorities in favour of banning tobacco advertising and fox-hunting. The people Blair wants most desperately to please are those who have amassed great wealth and power. Politically, he believes that elections can only be won, and office retained, by their grace and favour. Ideologically, he is committed to neo-liberalism, as a consequence of which he identifies the 'national interest' with the interests of big business.

That is why some manifesto promises — notably on the top rate of income tax — are more sacrosanct than others. That is why, prior to the election, Blair put far more effort into courting favour with Rupert Murdoch than winning the votes of million of pensioners, trade union members, or single parents. That is why the same Government that cut corporation tax (already the lowest in western Europe) has ruled that benefit claims can only be backdated by four weeks, effectively punishing claimants for the DSS's errors and delay. That is why, while planning permission on out of town superstores is being eased, the second most powerful man in the Government, the Minister for Mendacity, Peter Mandelson, is seeking wide-ranging exemptions from the minimum wage. In this context, the Formula One fiasco is merely the tip of the iceberg. The danger here is that disillusionment with the New Labour Government will lead to deepening cynicism about democracy.

In these circumstances, the role of the Labour left is more important than ever. We need to turn up the volume of public opposition. If we fail to promote our humane and feasible alternative to Blairism, not only the labour movement, but the mass of Labour voters, will be effectively disenfranchised.

Labour Party and trade union members must get to grips with the severity of the attack on working class rights and living standards which is now being prepared by the inner core of the Blair administration. In the past, when *LLB* or others on the left have warned of betrayals to come, we have been accused of sour grapes, hysteria or paranoia. After the events of the last month, surely it is time for a less complacent view. ❑

LLB page 3

Pandering to the private sector

Mike Marqusee argues that Tony Blair's Formula One fiasco was neither cock up nor conspiracy but something subtler, and in the long-run more menacing.

WHETHER or not it was motivated by a desire to please a wealthy benefactor, the decision to exempt Formula One from the tobacco sponsorship ban was wrong in principle, and revealed a distressing bias towards private profit over public health.

The most recent issue of the *Lancet*, the leading medical journal, reports that tobacco sponsorship of motor racing plays a measurable and major role in luring young people into smoking. According to the *Guardian*, every day the tobacco industry has to recruit 300 new clients to replace thc 300 its product kills. Smoking related diseases cost the NHS £1.4-1.7 billion every year

None of the arguments in defence of the F1 exemption hold water. The claim that it would lead to 50,000 job losses has been exposed as a fraud; indeed, more jobs are immediately under threat because of the Government's refusal to intervene in the coal industry (whose workers over the years have given many more millions to the Labour Party than Bernie Ecclestone). The "globalisation" argument (that tobacco sponsored events held abroad will be televised in Britain) could apply to any number of sports (a point made by aggrieved snooker and cricket bosses).

Against the overwhelming arguments of public interest, Blair (who made the decision without consulting his own Cabinet) yielded to the importuning of Ecclestone. Yet even within the fast-and-loose milieu of commercial sport, Formula One is considered a corrupt, discredited, ramshackle industry. *Tribune* reports that Ecclestone hopes to float F1 on the stock market next year, transforming it into a limited corporation with a hugely profitable European-wide monopoly. If this is so, Ecclestone will require yet more co-operation from the Government.

No one should have been shocked at the notion that New Labour policies are up for sale to the highest bidder. In 1995, Blair and his entourage met Rupert Murdoch, and weeks later Labour abandoned its long-standing opposition to cross-media ownership. The rapprochement with Murdoch, which led to the *Sun* backing Blair against Major, was widely hailed as a shrewd move, but it is open to the same objections as the Ecclestone tie-up.

Blair doesn't need to be "bribed" to intervene on behalf of big business. Anyone who has seriously studied New Labour in theory and practice has noted the growing convergence of ideologies and interests between Blair and the Murdochs, Ecclestones, and Sainsburys. Gordon Brown's statement on EMU confirmed that New Labour identifies the priorities of big business as "the national interest". The Government seeks to serve big business, and expects the appropriate financial support in return.

Blair is constructing a new US-style interface between government and big business. It is in this light that Party members should scrutinise not only the F1 U-turn but the Government's approach to defence spending, the Private Finance Initiative, contracting-out under Best Value (see page 22), Welfare to Work, and the Millennium Dome.

Labour MP Robert Marshall-Andrews has tabled a Commons question regarding secret contracts worth some £450 million — awarded by the New Millennium Experience Company, a company with one issued share and no direct lines of information or accountability — to Parliament. The second biggest corporate investor in the Dome is BA, which is also awaiting a Government go-ahead for a proposed fifth terminal at Heathrow. The development is strongly opposed by local residents, who were dismayed to learn that BA had recently conducted a raffle for Labour MPs. First prize — Concorde tickets worth £11,000 — went to the Labour MP for Hove, Ivor Caplin; Janet Anderson, a Government whip, won a flight to Paris. Shortly after the election, BA boss Bob Ayling was asked by Blair to head up his personal office; Ayling declined, preferring to concentrate on BA's battle with the TGWU.

The new Register of Members' Interests *reveals that Barclays Bank has been providing staff to help run Blair's constituency* office. Martin Taylor, Barclays' Chief Executive, heads Blair's task force on tax and benefits. He is also enmeshed in a bitter dispute with unions over an effective pay cut he is trying to impose on 25,000 employees. Last year, the Bank's profits were £2.35 billion.

Alec Reed, union-busting chairman of Reed Executive, contributed £100,000 to the "blind trust" which funded Blair's office in opposition. Reed has now been asked by Blair to come up with a solution to the crisis in teacher recruitment. One of his subsidiaries, Reed Personnel Services, has been awarded the contract to run a pilot project for the Welfare to Work scheme. The chair of the Government's task force for this scheme is Peter Davis, another veteran union buster, now running Prudential, which has admitted

Amuse your allies — infuriate your Blairite relatives with an *LLB* Drosmas card



Four designs, four colours, blank inside for your personal message, *LLB*'s New Year's resolution on the back. 8 assorted (£2 including p&p), 20 assorted (£4 including p&p). Cheques to *Labour Left Briefing*, PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU. Dispatched by return of post.

to massive mis-selling of pensions. Should New Labour's compulsory "second pension" proposals go ahead, the Prudential stands to make a killing.

Blair's apologists will insist that this magic circle of access and influence, public policy and private profit is entirely innocent. They miss the point. The whole arrangement is corrupting, whatever role individual donations or gifts may or may not have played. As in the US, the boundaries between private and public are being blurred, and with them the Labour Party's accountability to the people who elected it.

Blair's BBC interview with John Humphreys revealed that despite (because of?) his years at the Bar and in the Commons, he does not understand that a conflict of interest is by definition a potential conflict of interest. His indignant insistence that he was not influenced by Ecclestone's donation is irrelevant. What emerges from the whole fiasco is the massive insensitivity of the Prime Minister and his clique to the ethos of public service. They simply have no idea where the line should be drawn.

Those of us who have observed the resistible rise of the Blairites inside the Labour Party are not in the least surprised by the F1 revelations. We expected nothing else from people who routinely broke the rules of their own party, lied about their own actions, smeared fellow Party members, abused Party funds to pursue factional advantage, rigged votes, repeatedly revised policy without consulting any of the Party's democratic organs, and ensured a steady flow of jobs and patronage to those loyal and useful to the leadership. Their attitude to the rules that apply to ordinary people is like Leona Helmsley's towards taxes: they're "for little people".



Stand by for more New Labour sleaze. If you're a Party member, and you don't want people scorning you the way they now scorn the Tories, you had better get cracking.

Gory details

SOMETIME prior to the general election (we still don't know when), Bernie Ecclestone secretly contributed £1 million either to the Labour Party or to the 'blind trust' which funded Blair's office. (We still don't know which.)

1st May: Labour wins election with pledge to ban tobacco advertising.

17th May: Frank Dobson and Tessa Jowell, at their first Department of Health press conference, announce plans to ban tobacco sponsorship of all sports.

19th May: Dobson repeats message to Royal College of Nursing; the Government will ban tobacco sponsorship.

20th May: David Mills, Jowell's husband, resigns as director of Benetton Formula One, though he remains involved with the company through his law firm.

July-August: Dobson and Jowell enter EU negotiations on tobacco ban. At the same time, party officials are seeking an additional gift of £500,000 from Ecclestone.

23rd September: Jowell talks to F1 secretary Max Mosley.

16th October: Blair meets privately with Ecclestone and Mosley. No one from Department of Health is present. Notes taken by Blair's chief of staff, Jonathan Powell, who as fund-raiser had helped negotiate the £1 million gift.

17th October: PM's office writes to Dobson instructing him to exempt F1. Soon after, Dobson in letter to Cabinet colleagues makes first mention of concessions to F1.

4th November: letter to European ministers indicating change in British policy on F1.

5th November: Jowell announces U-turn. Rumours of Ecclestone donation begin to spread. Denied by PM's office and by Labour Party.

7th November, morning: newspapers run stories about Jowell's husband's links to F1 (as well as his deep entanglement with Silvio Berlusconi, the Italian TV magnate who was briefly the country's PM, thanks to neo-fascist support.)

7th November, 7pm: Letter is faxed to Sir Patrick Neill, composed by Blair, signed by Tom Saywer, asking if it was OK for Labour to accept a second gift of £500,000 from Ecclestone. Letter does not ask about propriety of first gift or reveal its size.

8th November: Labour spin doctors insist information on donors cannot be divulged either "internally or externally"; implication (false) is that Blair knows nothing about Ecclestone donation. Millbank tries to scare off journalists by claiming Ecclestone would sue.

10th November: After advice from Sir Patrick Neill, Labour finally admits to receiving gift from Ecclestone, which it says is an amount over £5000. Dismisses reports of £1 million as "wild and seriously inaccurate".

11th November: following statements by Ecclestone himself, Downing Street admits gift was £1 million.

12th November: Blair claims in Commons that he had consulted Sir Patrick as soon as a potential conflict of interest arose — which he dates from 6th November, one day before fax was sent, several days after journalists began asking questions, weeks after his meeting with Ecclestone and months after receiving the gift.

16th November: Blair on BBC TV says he told Ecclestone on 5th November that he could accept no further donations from him (flatly contradicted by contents of Sawyer's letter on 7th November).

19rd November: Jowell announces that F1 exemption will be "permanent".

23rd November: Labour secures £1 million to repay Ecclestone from boss of Planet Hollywood restaurants (official residence: Orlando, Florida).

New Labour, New Jobs?

Manuel Cortes, Edinburgh South CLP, argues that New Labour can and should start creating employment.

THE TORY record on job creation was abysmal. Their solution to solving the growing number of people without work was to fiddle the figures continuously and use coercive tactics to get the unemployed off the register. There is little doubt that one of the main reasons why Labour swept to power was because no one in the country believed Tory claims of a booming economy. In fact, the official unemployment figures are more discredited among ordinary people than Norman Lamont's effort to steady the pound on Black Wednesday was in the markets! The question in the mind of every Labour and trade union activist is whether New Labour will mean New Jobs.

Unfortunately, the first signs are not good. Gordon Brown's decision to hand over control of monetary policy to the Bank of England, thus absolving himself of responsibility for setting interest rates, is an act of political cowardice. Ken Livingstone quite rightly pointed out that "it is absolutely bizarre that, having struggled to win political power for 18 years, our first action should be to hand over part of the power we have won to a central banker who has never expressed a single progressive thought. To hand power to set interest rates to the Bank of England is to insulate a key area of economic policy from democratic accountability."

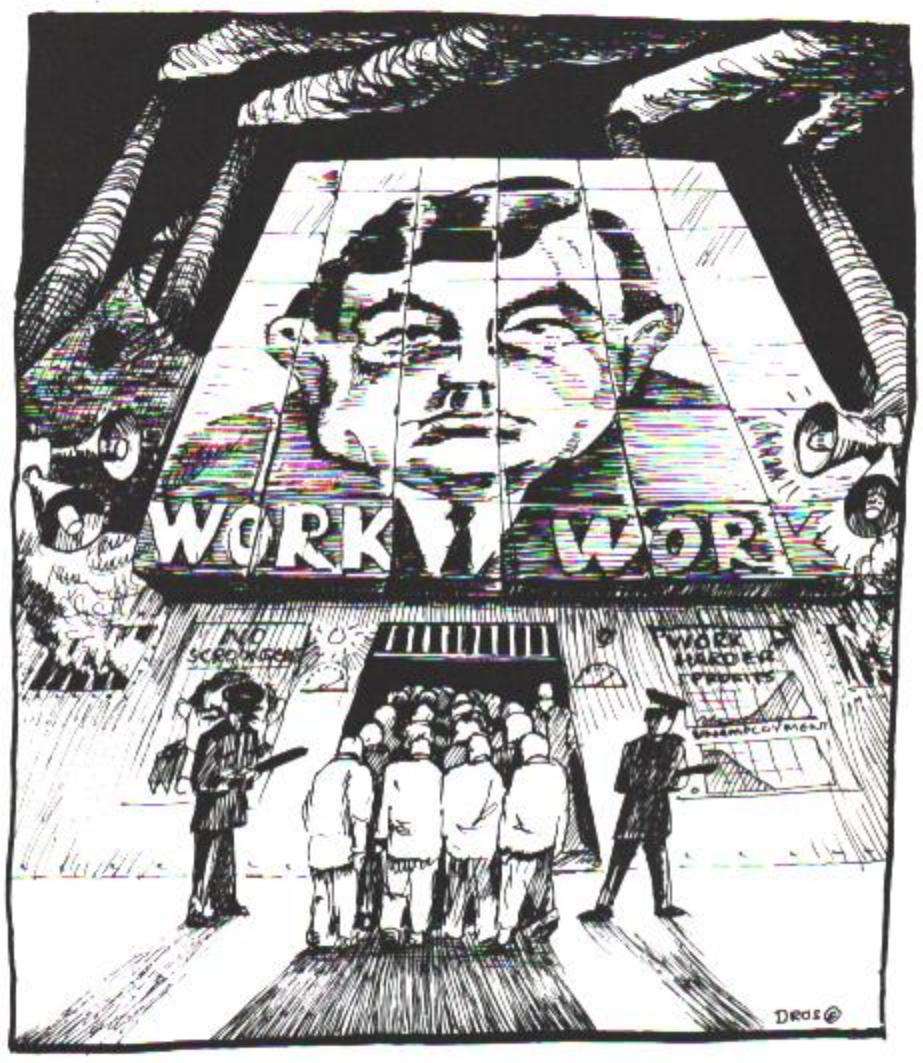
Ideologically, Brown's move is a massive victory for monetarism and orthodox economics. The idea that economics is a technical discipline that should be above the political debate is not new. Yet, until the New Labour project was set rolling these ideas had been flatly rejected by the labour movement. Jospin's victory against all the odds in France shows that ordinary people do expect governments to create jobs. The idea that governments are powerless to do so is increasingly discredited among academics, policy makers and voters across Europe.

During the election campaign Labour promised to be the party of fair taxation. If that principle had prevailed Labour should have raised rather than lowered corporation tax. A higher top rate of income tax and an end to the National Insurance holiday enjoyed by people on incomes above the Upper Earnings Limit should have been priorities. In addition a Labour Government should not shy away from borrowing to invest. Financing public infrastructural projects through the Private Finance Initiative is like borrowing from a loan shark.

New Labour's welfare to work programme sounds fine as a concept. Socialists want to see everyone who wants to work to be given the chance to have a job. But Labour's plan will deal with the symptoms and not the causes of high unemployment. Millions of people in this country are desperate to get a real job — the problem is that there are not enough jobs to go around.

The key to tackling mass unemployment lies in increasing investment in public services and infrastructure. The money required to do this should be raised through progressive taxation and increased borrowing. Even the Commission on Social Justice (1994) correctly noted that "it is in the non-tradeable sector where job growth must come". It is not difficult for socialists to identify obvious areas of unmet social need. An increase in public sector employment is a necessary and essential step to create full employment.

The Full Employment Forum has already set out clearly costed plans on how to start the ball rolling by creating a million jobs in the first instance. There are also signs that trade unions are at odds with Blair and Brown over full employment. For example, the Scottish Trade Union Congress has published plans on how to tackle unemployment in Scotland through direct government intervention. New Labour lacks the political will but we can't let them off the hook. Campaign for full employment and make the "New Labour, New Jobs" slogan count.



Work and Welfare

Policies for Full-employment and Social Justice in Scotland

Saturday 17th January 1998
Glasgow Caledonian University

Speakers include: Maria Fyfe MP, Ken Livingstone MP, Roger Berry MP, Alex Smith MEP.

Jointly organised by the Full-Employment Forum and the Campaign to Defend the Welfare State. Sponsored by UNISON Scotland.
Further details: Matthew Creighton, Lothian Trade Union Resource Centre, 26 Albany Street, Edinburgh EH1 3QH.

LLB page 6

Cosmetic changes to cosmetic testing

Barrington Hayter writes: Although the National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS) congratulates the Government on taking a small step towards reducing animal suffering, it believes the Government's "voluntary ban" on cosmetic testing does not go far enough.

The Government's achievement in halting testing on finished cosmetic products will affect a few hundred animals, but does nothing to change the secrecy of the decision-making process that allows over 2.5 million animals to suffer and die in British laboratories every year.

It doesn't matter what the product is — whether it is cosmetics or drugs — the decision to use animals has to be challenged when the licence application is made, and the question of whether it is acceptable to use animals for a particular test must be posed. This is the pivotal moment — when the ethical and scientific decision to use animals is taken.

At present, this decision is being made on the public's behalf by the animal-using community — Government inspectors, and those with a financial interest in the lab animal industry, in complete secrecy, and behind the closed doors of the Home Office. This decision rightly belongs in the public arena.

The NAVS has proposed that all licence applications to test on animals be subject to open review, in order to allow outside experts to suggest a non-animal method before the animal licence is awarded.



©NATIONAL ANTI-VIVISECTION SOC.

Rabbit in British laboratory.

The Government has an advisory body (a quango), the Animal Procedures Committee (APC), which can advise the Home Secretary on selected licence applications. However, the APC is dominated by people with lab animal industry interests and those with backgrounds in animal experimentation; it is not publicly accountable and its meetings and decisions are secret.

The NAVS has asked that the Animal Procedures Committee be reconstituted to provide genuine objectivity and transparency of decision-making along the lines of the Nolan report. This would be a clear sign to the public that the Labour Party has taken seriously its commitment to animals and to freedom of information in all areas of government.

The Labour Party was supported by many voters because it gave a commitment to do something about all animal testing; people believed that Labour was committed to providing safe products on the market that had not been tested on animals. That is still what the public wants to see.

- The National Anti-Vivisection Society can be contacted at 261 Goldhawk Road, London, W12 9PE. Tel: 0181-846 9777.

U-turn on fox-hunting

Barrington Hayter reports: On 28th November, there should be a massive majority in the House of Commons for a Private Member's Bill to ban hunting. Yet however large the number of MPs who decide to break with precedent and stay to vote on a Friday afternoon, the attempt at legislation could well come to nothing.

Although there was no commitment in the Labour manifesto beyond a "free vote" on the issue, both Tony Blair himself and various Labour Ministers did give commitments, prior to the election, in written answers to campaigners (revealed on BBC's *Newsnight*), that implied the new government would ensure sufficient parliamentary time to pass the Bill. What's more, Labour spin-doctors persistently created the popular impression that the new Labour Government would facilitate a ban on fox-hunting; indeed, on that basis, many people around the country voted Labour on 1st May who might otherwise have either not voted at all or voted for another party.

Indications are that the bill may be supported by as many as 70% of MPs, so if it fails to reach the statute books it will be for one of two reasons:

- superior tactics by the minority of pro-hunt MPs filibustering and amending the bill at committee and report stages.
- unelected hereditary peers blocking the legislation in the Lords, so it runs out of time in the Commons.

If either of the blocking measures succeeds, the campaign for the protection of hunted animals will need to step up a gear and increase its nationwide activity, now claiming the moral high ground on democracy, rather than cruelty, grounds and pressuring the Labour leadership rather than ordinary MPs.

Labour Party Conference will become a battleground on this issue, as animal welfare and pro-Lords reform campaigns clash with the Government's parliamentary managers, who do not want to push the anti-hunt bill at the cost of other bills being thwarted in the Lords.

The culmination of this campaign must be to force Blair, a supporter of the abolition of hunting, to commit the Government to give time to ensure this bill goes through Parliament. If necessary, he must risk losing other bills in the House of Lords, which will bring the full weight of public opinion down on the unelected "vermin in ermine", or state clearly that the Government itself will bring in a bill to ban hunting in the November 1998 Queen's Speech. ❑

Yes, Yes, No

TGWU 1/1148 branch secretary John Perry calls for a Campaign for a People's London.

ON THE 24th October, the Government finished its so-called consultation with London on the form and function of the proposed Greater London Authority (GLA). This was the date for people to respond to the Green Paper titled *New Leadership For London*. There has been much widespread criticism of the secrecy of the consultation process. Many libraries reported not having the full paper and the sparsely-distributed leaflets gave little information on the proposals being made.

While certain organisations, predominantly from the world of big business, were kept closely informed and their views actively sought, ordinary Londoners have only been made aware of the issues through TV programmes and press stories largely focusing on the trivial question of which personality might become London's first directly elected Mayor. Nick Raynsford, Minister for London, sharply rebutted any criticism with meaningless soundbites such as "We were elected as New Labour — we will govern as New Labour."' But what does that mean? In the Green Paper the Government proposes an assembly elected by proportional representation. Yet it does not state how this dovetails into the local authority structures. Does this mean all London boroughs will be represented on the new assembly?

It is proposed that the GLA should be given a budget, but not have tax-raising powers. Yet if a London-wide authority is to make an impact on such fundamental issues as traffic gridlock and environmental enhancement, the ability to set "green taxes" must be given. London is crying out for city-wide measures to tackle the crisis in our fire service, hospitals and housing. Yet the proposals give no real indication on how the GLA will work in partnership with local borough councils to co-ordinate much needed action.

Instead the Green Paper concentrates on directly electing a Mayor who would be aided by "advisers" who would set proposals and budgets for the assembly to either approve or amend. Just three days after the consultation process ended, the Government printed the bill to enable a referendum to be called on Thursday 7th May 1998. Despite numerous submissions pointing out the weakness of the proposals, no amendments were made. The Government will only be asking one question on whether Londoners want a directly elected Mayor and a Greater London Assembly.

The Campaign for a People's London was launched in October at the House of Commons. Ken Livingstone MP was joined by community and trade union representatives and the Greater London Pensioners Association. It was the public launch of a demand for a multiple choice referendum:

- Yes to a democratic GLA,
- Yes to tax-raising powers,
- No to a directly-elected Mayor.

It was pointed out that, under the Government's proposals the democratic rights given to the people of Edinburgh will be denied to the people of London.

The campaign seeks to draw together progressive London organisations to unite against the imposition of a "Boss Mayor", a toothless and bureaucratic assembly and subservience to big business. We need to be a network of diversity, setting out a programme of protest and campaigning at every level. Initiated by the Greater London Association of Trades Councils, it has already drawn support from voluntary sector and community organisations, pensioners, trade unions, Constituency Labour Parties, transport activists and health campaigners.

After 18 years of Tory administration London's various interest groups have been marginalised. The GLA referendum has the potential to unite and co-ordinate active democracy.

- Public meeting — Fighting for a People's London, 7.30pm, Monday 8th December, Room 119, Lambeth Town Hall, Acre Lane, Brixton SW2. Speakers include: community organisations, transport activists, pensioners groups, NHS campaigners and trade unionists. This is a planning meeting and all are welcome to make a contribution.

Contact the Campaign for a People's London, c/o GLATUC, 12 Northcote Road, London E17 7EB, 0181-520 5386. Media enquiries: 0468-007 649.

Liverpool Dockers World Cup Raffle

supported by *Labour Left Briefing*

Last chance to win two tickets to the World Cup Final in Paris!

Other prizes include a return flight to Cuba and a week in a country cottage.

There are still a few tickets left in the raffle in support of the sacked Liverpool dockers. Send your cheque for £5 for each book of ten, made payable to "*LLB* Dockers' Raffle", to *LLB* Dockers' Raffle, PO Box 2378, London E5 9QU. Phone 0181-556 8113 for more details.

Send those stubs in now!

The raffle draw is on 19th January 1998 and we must have the stubs and monies by 15th January at the latest. But please, to make a large amount of work easier for us, if you've been sent tickets, don't leave it to the last minute. Send those stubs and cheques now to beat the Christmas post!



Members of the London dockers support group receive a cheque for £1,000 on behalf of the Liverpool dockers from* LLB*'s Peter Frankentahl who donated the first prize World Cup tickets.

LLB page 8

Cuts cost lives

Ken Livingstone MP argues the case for adequate funding for London's Fire Service.

SINCE THE abolition of the GLC, the London Fire and Civil Defence Authority (LFCDA) has been making continuous cuts in London's fire service. A thousand firefighters' jobs have gone and seventeen fire engines have been scrapped. The LFCDA has now estimated that if this year's Standard Spending Assessment is no more favourable than last year's, it will be forced not only to spend its reserves, but to make yet more cuts. These cuts could be as deep as the closure of two fire stations and the reduction of four others to part-time crewing.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

FBU lobby the Department of Environment, 14/11/97.

The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) has now been forced into the unenviable position of having to ask a Labour government to reconsider proposed cuts, which if carried out will not only affect firefighters' employment, but will hit a service vital to the lives of millions of Londoners. The FBU organised a mass picket of the Department of the Environment on 14th November and is now preparing to take its case to the Labour Party. They point out that even London's Chief Fire Officer has said "Our service is deteriorating to a level which is unacceptable".

Writing to John Prescott, FBU London Region made it clear that if "the latest cuts go ahead, we are recommending to our members that we ballot for strike action". The position the firefighters are in is simply a result of Tory spending limits. Adhering to those limits, and refusing to consider an alternative economic strategy which could begin to resolve the fundamental problems faced, means that successive groups of natural Labour supporters are finding themselves in conflict with their government.

Students are now battling against proposals for tuition fees and the abolition of grants. These will not only fail to resolve the funding problems in higher education, but will leave thousands of people with several years of hardship and then lifelong debt. Almost symbolically the Government has carried on with the cuts in lone parent benefit which will hit the poorest people in our society the hardest. Simultaneously, allowing the Bank of England to raise interest rates five times has now had a real impact on Labour-voting middle income earners.

The Government's narrow economic framework is also one of the key factors in its proposals for the new Greater London Authority. The Government's Green Paper on the GLA says, "any additional spending in setting up the GLA would need to be offset by savings...Thereafter, the savings achieved will allow the GLA to secure a wider and better range of strategic activities for London without increasing spending." It is simply not possible to improve London's fire service without committing extra resources, but the Government has set itself against the introduction of a London corporation tax. In addition the Green Paper rules out an accountable structure for the LFCDA, which will become a Board responsible to the GLA, while its members will be appointed directly by the Mayor, with some representation from the London Boroughs.

As long as Labour remains within its current economic framework there is no reason to believe that other groups within society will not find themselves in conflict with the Government. A London firefighters' strike would take place in the run-up not only to the London Borough elections in May, but also to the referendum on the Greater London Authority. The Government must consider what effect such a dispute will have on Labour's support — the sight of green goddesses on the streets during the last Labour Government is one of the enduring memories of the worst days of that administration. This dispute is an indication of the deep tensions at work between Labour's aspirations and its current economic framework. If the firefighters are forced to strike to defend the fire service in London, they will deserve the backing of every member of the Labour Party committed to saving lives in the capital. ❑

LLB page 9

Single Currency

Labour must rethink its economic objectives before deciding to sign up to the Single Currency, argues Dr Brian Burkitt, Pudsey CLP and Senior Lecturer in Economics, University of Bradford.

GORDON BROWN's statement on Labour's European Monetary Union (EMU) policy on 27th October was a masterpiece of short term political tactics.

The combination of a clear commitment to the Single Currency in principle with a pledge not to enter in the lifetime of this Parliament was a double-whammy sufficiently adroit to silence critics on both the pro and anti-Single Currency wings of the party. It also possessed the additional bonus of re-opening Tory divisions.

However, its status as a benchmark of future Government strategy on this crucial decision is dubious, while its relevance to a socialist programme remains still more obscure, particularly when Gordon Brown stresses the need for "a mainstream, pro-European, national consensus — stretching across the country and in particular the world of business".

Just saying the UK will join EMU only when it "works" economically begs crucial questions. Not least, who does EMU "work" for — unelected central bankers, bureaucrats and corporate Europe or for the socially excluded or unemployed?

The Maastricht criteria have already caused unemployment and taxation to rise. If we adhere to them in a recession, public expenditure will be pulverised, with catastrophic increases in unemployment as a result. Also what happens if EMU stops "working"? How can Labour be sure that the regime it joins will operate efficiently in perpetuity? All fixed exchange rate regimes in history have ultimately collapsed due to changing circumstances.

After eighteen years of Tory rule, which initiated one of the largest-ever redistributions from the poor to the rich (a Robin Hood in reverse amounting to around £31 billion through changes in public expenditure and taxation), it is unrealistic to expect Labour to reverse completely such divisive policies over the course of one Parliament. However, it is imperative that a democratic socialist government taking office in these circumstances produces an effective strategy for moving towards at least three objectives:

- to restore and maintain full employment,
- to improve the quality and quantity of public service provision,
- to reverse the Tories' regressive redistribution by directing resources towards the poor.

The Labour Government has (almost) ruled out EMU membership during the present Parliament, but appears committed to it over a longer period. Press comment suggests that Blair and Brown believe (in defiance of historical evidence that alternatives always exist) EMU membership to be inevitable. Socialists within the Labour Party face two tasks:

- to ascertain whether EMU will assist progress towards the crucial objectives outlined above,

Police Protection Bill?

Frances Ross examines how cuts in legal aid will increase police brutality.

THE POLICE MUST be laughing. Not even Michael Howard went this far. If current proposals on reforming legal aid spending are carried out it will become virtually impossible for anyone to take legal action against the police for intentional actions such as assault and battery, false imprisonment and malicious prosecution. One of the only avenues for holding the police to account in the public domain will be closed.

In recent years the police have paid out millions in damages to people who have suffered at their hands. In many cases the money has not been the motivation behind the legal action but a determination to hold the police to account in public and to expose police violence and corruption. The lawyers who take on these cases do so from a commitment to ensuring the state cannot consistently abuse a number of its citizens and get away with it.

With a few memorable exceptions the state consistently fails in its responsibility to take action against police officers who abuse their power. Police officers are rarely prosecuted or disciplined. Within that framework civil actions are an important factor in policing the police.

People who take legal action against the police are mainly working class. They are only able to take this action because it is funded by legal aid. The police officers who have subjected the individual to mistreatment enjoy the backing of the extensive resources of the state in defending their unlawful actions.

If legal aid for these cases is abolished they simply will not come to court. The police will be able to abuse people, face no public scrutiny and the one independent check on police abuse of power will go. The Lord Chancellor and his Parliamentary Secretary of State, Geoff Hoon MP have said that they want to pursue the idea of a separate fund for public interest cases. But whether these cases would be included in the fund, how it would operate, and who would decide the public interest is not clear. What is clear is that an individual who has been subjected to abuse by the state must have access to some form of justice and be advised and represented by specialist lawyers with a commitment to police accountability .

Geoff Hoon MP said recently that the Government is aiming "to give civil and human rights a new reality", and that "access to justice must be high on the agenda". He believes that the current situation is a "story of ruined lives and the undermining of civil society, so that ideas of citizenship and individual freedom remain sentiments with no substance".

Abolishing legal aid for civil actions against the police takes a massive leap in the opposite direction and would be tantamount to introducing a "Police Protection Bill".

LLB page 10

will not work

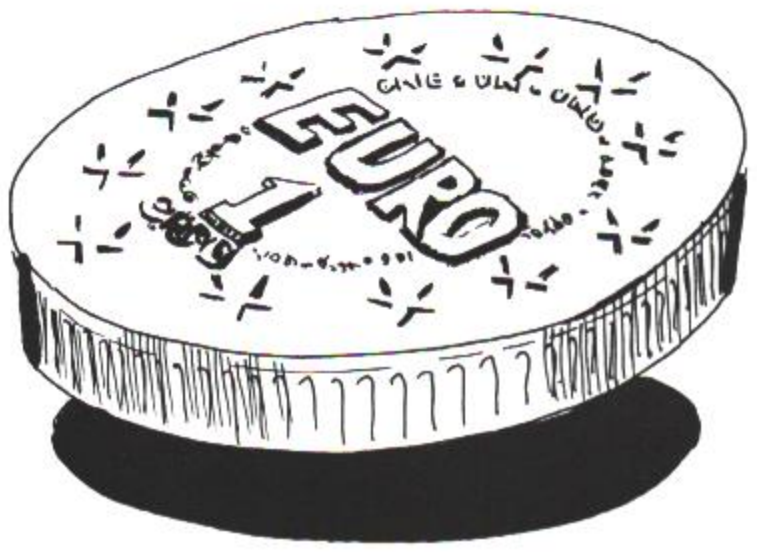
• if EMU is inimical to such progress, to outline alternative strategies for achieving them.

EMU could conceivably establish and preserve full employment, with associated rapid rates of economic growth, if all participating countries agreed: (a) to co-ordinate their economic policies, (b) to use such co-ordination to achieve levels of employment unheard of since the 1970s. At the present EU conjuncture, (a) is feasible though improbable, but (b) will never happen within present lifetimes, because on the remote chance that (a) occurs, it will do so on the basis of the existing, deflationary Maastricht criteria.

A recent study estimated that EU members suffered a deflation of around 4.5% of their national income during the 1990s through pursuing these criteria. It is essential to realise that the arbitrary fiscal convergence targets of the Maastricht Treaty not only stifle growth during the run-up to the Euro's launch on 1st January 1999, but will also do so permanently thereafter because they must be achieved subsequently on an annual basis. In theory "Britain leading in Europe" (Blair's mantra) could change the Maastricht provisions, but in the actually existing world the difficulties of ratifying Maastricht render any such reforms highly unlikely.

Opportunities to enhance the quality of public services will be diminished by the EMU process. The establishment of a European Central Bank (ECB) implies a uniform monetary policy, rate of interest and exchange rate. These can operate effectively only if participating countries possess similar economic structures and international trading patterns. For Britain, at least, these conditions do not apply. Any change in EMU monetary policy will be disproportionately channelled through the British economy, which would thus become disproportionately volatile. A recent study by the Centre for Economic Policy Research demonstrated that in Britain the impact of a given movement in interest rates on economic activity is four times the EU average. Consequently an EMU-wide monetary policy can never meet the individual requirements of each member nation. Crucially any convergence ameliorating such problems would inevitably be temporary.

In a dynamic economy changes in productivity and technology continuously undermine any apparent convergence, whether at Gordon Brown's target date of 2002 or any other arbitrarily chosen time. These divergent monetary requirements will generate pressures on fiscal policy; the so-called "growth and stability pact" is all stability and little growth. Consequently British Government budget decisions would be focused even less on welfare recipients' needs and even more on the outdated, monetarist Maastricht criteria. The implications for future welfare spending are dire.



Opting-into EMU does not formally preclude a Labour Government from redistributing resources, with the associated life chances, from the rich to the poor. However, it is likely to prevent such a strategy in practice. The ECB, an institution removed from any democratic influence, whose sole objective as laid down by the Maastricht Treaty is price stability, will be anxious to assume the mantle of successor to the *Bundesbank*. Accordingly, it will tend to err towards over-deflationary policy, which will increase the already high level of EU unemployment (currently at 18.5 million), which is the largest single cause of poverty. Simultaneously, budgets will contract. As the countries joining EMU, with the exception of Luxembourg, only just meet the Maastricht criteria, they will be compelled, after entry, to concentrate upon fiscal retrenchment. Economies that perform relatively strongly will be happy to accrue surpluses, while the relatively weak will be forced to raise taxes or cut spending to ensure that deficits do not exceed the specified limits. In these circumstances, redistributive measures are unlikely to be undertaken at all; if they are, their scope will be severely limited by the EMU and stability pact provisions.

If EMU goes ahead, the overwhelming probability is that much of the EU becomes further depressed and unemployment will rise. Political support for European integration will weaken, racist groups thrive and nationalist pressures increase. The difficulties of meeting the Maastricht targets have ensured that the Euro begins life as a soft currency, which could do profound damage to EMU members. Britain gains nothing from economic fragility and political instability on the continent, but will suffer its consequences less if it remains outside a single currency.

Labour's priority should be creating jobs by stimulating aggregate demand, not deflating the economy to achieve the Maastricht criteria. In the long run government borrowing is reduced by increasing economic activity, which generates tax revenue and cuts expenditure on benefits.

The Treasury estimates that each involuntarily unemployed person costs the Exchequer approximately £9,000 per year via lost tax revenue and higher social security payments. Labour must reject the Single Currency because its risks of deflation and greater unemployment are too high.

Conceived in an inflationary era, the Single Currency project has ensured that the EU experienced deflation when it should have enjoyed reflation. It has been imposed on Europe's unemployed by politicians who were long on "historic vision" but short on economic common sense.

By opting-out of EMU, Labour can ensure that UK citizens possess an economy that serves their interests. Non-participation carries positive benefits, a fact that the Labour Government has completely overlooked. Outside the Single Currency, Labour could pursue an expansionary economic strategy by reducing interest rates, increasing the money supply and allowing the exchange rate to reach the level required to achieve balance of payments equilibrium at full employment.

The success of such a strategy will enable Labour to create jobs, improve welfare services, abolish poverty and reduce inequality. Indeed the successful expansion of employment in Britain might eventually stimulate new ideas within the EU outside the obsolete, anti-prosperity Maastricht framework! ❑

Socialist Labour

Egotistical intolerance

The much-delayed Second Congress of Arthur Scargill's Socialist Labour Party (SLP) will, in former member Ian Driver's opinion, be the reading of its last rites.

WHAT PROMISED to be a unique opportunity to construct a powerful socialist movement outside the Labour Party has been squandered on the altar of Scargill's egotistical intolerance of opinions contrary to his own, and his perverse "back to the future" efforts to create a grotesque caricature of Stalinism.

When I joined I naively believed, like hundreds of others, that there was a chance to create a broad-based, democratic socialist organisation that could challenge the Blairite neo-liberal consensus. However, our calculations failed to take account of the fact that the word "democracy" does not figure in Scargill's vocabulary and soon we were forced to downsize our expectations.

The Party constitution and many key policies, such as the European question, were decided by the leadership without any membership discussion or vote. The organisational structure was imposed upon members. Election candidates were forced upon branches and alliances with non-SLP socialists were unilaterally ruled out of order, often leading to the SLP splitting the left vote. Initially most members reluctantly accepted this imperfect state of affairs. As a new party with hardly any resources, it would take time to discuss and decide upon so many issues. However, it soon became apparent that Scargill and the leadership had no intention of allowing any such discussions to take place.

When members began to get together to discuss constitutional and policy changes, abusive missives from Scargill stated it was unconstitutional to try to change a constitution and policies that had not been voted on by the membership in the first place! Members signing petitions or sponsoring meetings critical of the leadership received letters from Scargill asking them to confirm or deny they had done this, and threatening disciplinary action. Branches having the audacity to question or challenge the wisdom of Scargill were closed down. Individuals regarded as "troublemakers" were expelled without any form of appeal or seeing the evidence against them.

When such actions failed to stem the growing opposition within the SLP, Scargill and his supporters resorted to crude gerrymandering and manipulation. Almost all the resolutions to December's National Congress calling for democratic change have been ruled out of order for spurious and inconsistent reasons. I understand moves are underway to exclude leading democrats and debar them from standing for elections to leading party posts. To enforce its authoritarian regime the Scargill leadership allowed virulent homophobic propaganda to be openly distributed within the Party aimed at discrediting their critics, and turned a blind eye to violence and intimidation — which I personally witnessed and complained of to no effect.

Eventually, I decided I no longer wanted to be part of this crude, totalitarian regime and in September followed the lead of many other committed socialists and quit the Party. I anticipate my resignation will not be the last and more will follow the stitch-up that masquerades as its Congress in December. Having said that, I refuse to line up with those who smugly declare that the SLP was destined to fail, that it was premature, etc. Despite my experiences, I still believe that Scargill was 100% correct to call for the establishment of a socialist alternative to New Labour. Although the SLP will not fulfill this role, I am convinced that discussions now beginning to happen between Labour left-wingers, disgruntled SLP members, the Socialist Party and others, will eventually give rise to the broad-based socialist movement that thousands of us have been seeking for years.

● Ian Driver was the SLP Parliamentary candidate in Vauxhall where he polled 981 votes. He has been a Southwark Councillor since 1990 and a member of NUPE/ UNISON NEC between 1987-1991.

LLB warped and unbalanced

Dave Palmer (ex-member *LLB* editorial board, 1986-1997) and Paul Field (ex-member *LLB* editorial board, 1991-1997) write.

WHY DOES *LLB* display such hostility towards the Socialist Labour Party, when success by the SLP can only strengthen the hand of any remaining 'left current' within the New Labour monolith? Why does *LLB* run yet another hostile, inaccurate and tendentious article (*LLB*, November) prophesying fatal internal strife, doom and disaster for the SLP? What motivates such self-serving, but unfortunately predictable sectariana?

Wishing misery and failure on your neighbours and relatives is not an edifying mode of behaviour. The roots usually lie in low self-esteem and lack of success in the protagonists' own activities. Unfortunately the defeat and marginalisation of the socialist tradition both domestically and internationally seems to have strengthened the utterly negative factionalism endemic on the British left — behaviour *LLB* supporters claim to eschew. The source of *LLB*'s warped, unbalanced and pre-determined attitude to internal or external difficulties the SLP faces — real, imagined or exaggerated — is obvious. *LLB* supporters have a dogmatic, unsustainable and incoherent attachment to continued political work within New Labour under any conditions. As a result most of those involved with *LLB* actually wish the attempt to construct an electoral alternative to New Labour — now a self-evident historical necessity — to fail.

The strength of one's own political positions and strategy cannot be derived from identifying the weaknesses in others. We could all make untold public criticisms of various left groupings and personalities operating both within and outside New Labour. Doing so should only occur in the most exceptional circumstances.

In order to further the greater good *LLB* (supposedly) has a correct tradition of not publicising, or making, factional capital from internal divisions on the left — an attitude it clearly does not display towards the SLP. We ask that *LLB* disowns this unhealthy act of factionalism in its next edition.

LLB page 12

Party — debate

Establishing a new socialist party

Nick Long from Lewisham Socialist Labour Party describes the SLP's continuing growth.

DON ROCINANTE'S article (November *LLB*) is wishful thinking. Socialists hostile to the SLP have been predicting splits and collapse for over a year, yet its organisation and growth continue. A clear and focused strength has been needed to establish a new socialist party and it's doubtful that any working class militant other than Arthur Scargill could have established it.

To argue that the SLP failed to organise a national campaign is daft! Socialist Labour stood in 63 seats, distributed over 4 million election addresses, gave out hundreds of thousands of leaflets and knocked on thousands of doors, resulting in a doubling of our membership. Our election broadcast, produced by Ken Loach, was seen by over 6 million people. We gained over 51,000 votes, the highest left vote since the Communist Party in 1966! Remarkable for a party barely a year old and against an overwhelming desire of working people to simply get rid of the Tories.

For the first time in over 100 years trade union branches and regions have affiliated to a political party other than Labour. Many leading trade unionists have joined — Jimmy Nolan (T&G), Frank Cave (NUM), Joe Marino (Bakers), John Mulrenan (Unison), Bill Freeman (GPMU), Ronnie Macdonald, (OILC, Offshore rig workers) and Bob Crow (RMT).

Since the election branches have continued sinking roots in their local communities, supporting trade unionists in struggle, building trades councils, fighting by-elections and working with local groups and tenants campaigning to save public services.

A debate is taking place within the party concerning its direction and organisation, that is a healthy sign. A majority recognise that a centrally-controlled Stalinist Party is not the way forward and are seeking to work in partnership with other socialists, community activists, and environmentalists. Lewisham SLP comrades have worked closely with the Socialist Party and tenant leaders to establish a Save Lewisham Housing Campaign. A Socialist Group has been formed on the Council by the SLP and SP and both councillors are working together to support the town hall unions fighting proposals to externalise services, set up a private housing company and form public/private partnerships which will lead to poorer services and reduced pay and conditions for workers including many black people and women. An internal Labour Party document reveals their town hall machine is worried. For the first time a red/green opposition is emerging to challenge Tammany Hall politics and local Labour Party sleaze.

The SLP seeks to build a mass inclusive, democratic party filling the void being left by Labour as it moves ever further right. Prospects are extremely favourable — it is Labour which is facing a split. Thousands of Labour Party members remain suspended and excluded from participation in decisions. Socialists are denied the chance of standing as local councillors. It is Labour members who are leaving in disgust at the undemocratic and centralised control of the party.

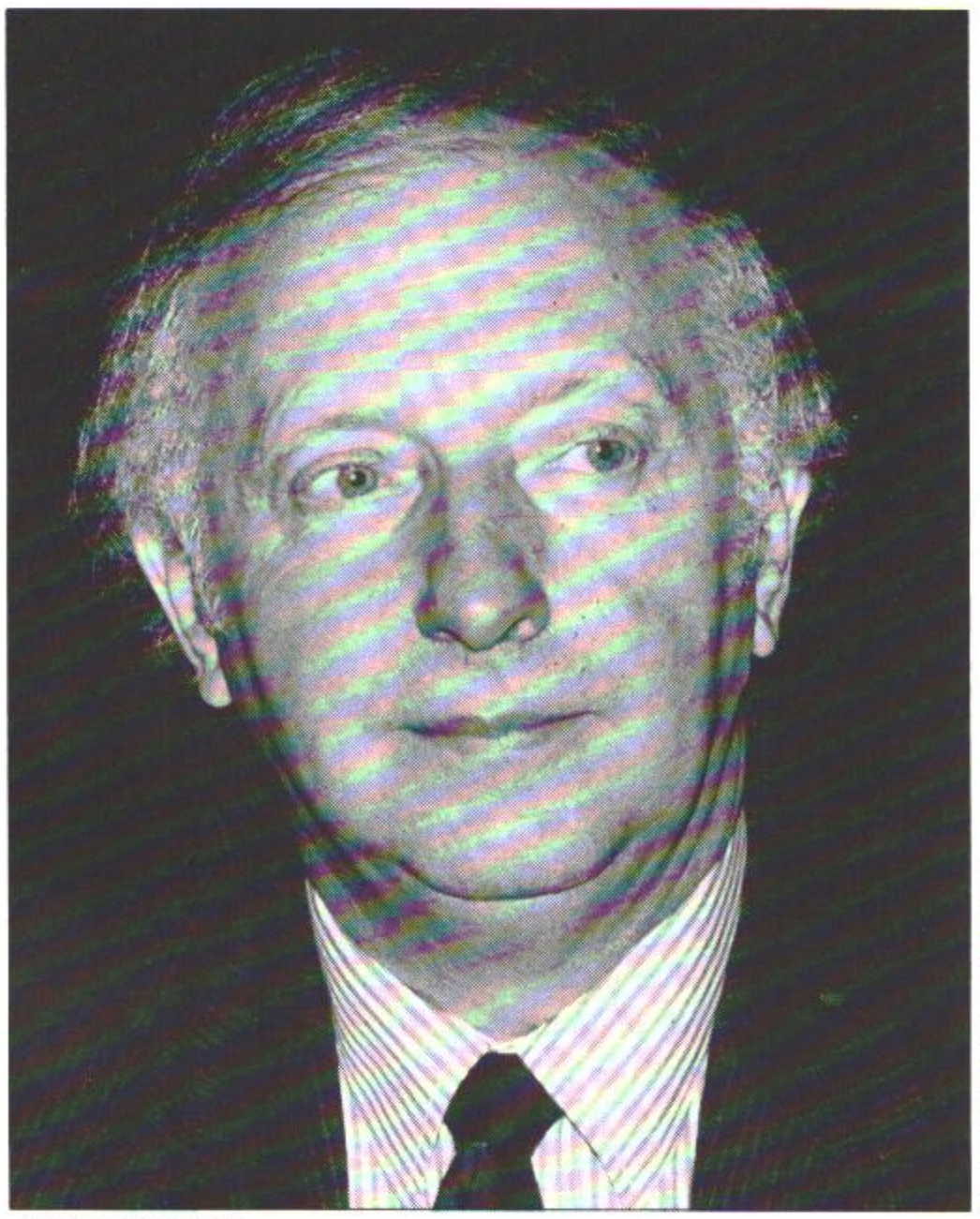


PHOTO: BRYN GRIFFITHS

Arthur Scargill

MEPs are being denied the right to debate reforms proposed for Euro elections, including the closed list system and are being suspended for doing so. Working class representatives for Parliament were blocked and right-wing, centrally-imposed candidates slotted in. After only 6 months in office the character of New Labour is becoming clear — buckling to any resistance put up by the rich and powerful, continuing attacks on lone parents, privatising services and committed to the "market". Prospects for parliamentary socialism have died, the door has been firmly bolted on turning around the position inside the Labour Party and councils are likely to move dramatically to the right after May 1998.

The prospects for a growth of trade union organisation and resistance, community activity, rebirth of socialism and the emergence of a truly socialist party with roots in the working class and trade union movement have never been better. The creation of assemblies in Scotland, Wales and London under alternatives to First Past The Post, along with reforms to local elections, holds the prospect for socialists and greens to gain seats. Comrades in the SLP have made a brave and bold start. I am aware that a growing number of *LLB* comrades are reviewing their position within the Labour Party in light of *Party Into Power* and the defeat of left policies in October.

The tectonic plates of British left politics have started to move. A re-foundation of British socialism is on the agenda and it is likely that the SLP will be important in shaping its direction. Reports that a group of MEPs have approached the Greens to stand as Red/Green candidates in 1999 indicate events are moving quickly. The introduction of a centrally-approved candidates list and the adoption of a tight disciplinary code for the Parliamentary Labour Party are likely to result in Campaign Group MPs being disciplined. It could well be that by the time the SLP holds its Congress in December it could have its first parliamentary representatives! ❑

Why did they want to gag the Strasbourg Four?

Last month four MEPs (Hugh Kerr, Ken Coates, Michael Hindley and Alex Falconer) were threatened with suspension for refusing to be gagged about proposals for a new system of electing them. The threats have now been dropped. Here Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates explain why the issue was important.

ON 30th October 1997 the Labour Government published its European Parliamentary Election Bill. It sank without trace in the press, somewhat overshadowed by the furore over EMU. Yet the week before, the papers were full of stories about four Labour MEPs who had refused to be gagged by New Labour on this very question.

Unlike recent converts in the Labour Party, we have been supporters of PR for a long time. We are European Socialists who believe in the need to have a European jobs creation plan as proposed by the Full Employment Convention within which a Single Currency has a role to play. This is not a battle of "Old Labour" versus New, but a struggle for democracy against authoritarianism and centralist tendencies in all parties including New Labour. Now we have the European Elections Bill it reinforces our view that we were correct to speak out. The Labour Government has produced a Bill which is potentially less democratic than the system it replaces. It is a closed party list system, based on regions, where the elector will merely tick a box on the ballot paper marked "party".

There are a number of problems with this system. First, it loses the link to the constituency MEP that the current system has. Currently many people may not know their MEP's name in Britain, but the new system will mean that no-one will know their name or which area they represent. If you are in the South-East with 11 MEPs in a region stretching from Oxford to the Isle of Wight, you won't have a clue who your MEP could be. It doesn't have to be this way, Labour could have proposed retaining single member constituencies with a national "top up" of additional members — this is after all the system they are proposing in Scotland. They could have also proposed a single transferable vote - this is how MEP's are currently elected in Northern Ireland and the Government plans to continue this practice there. Another effect of the closed party list system is that electors cannot vote for particular candidates, split their votes between parties nor even make a choice on good and bad MEPs in the same party.

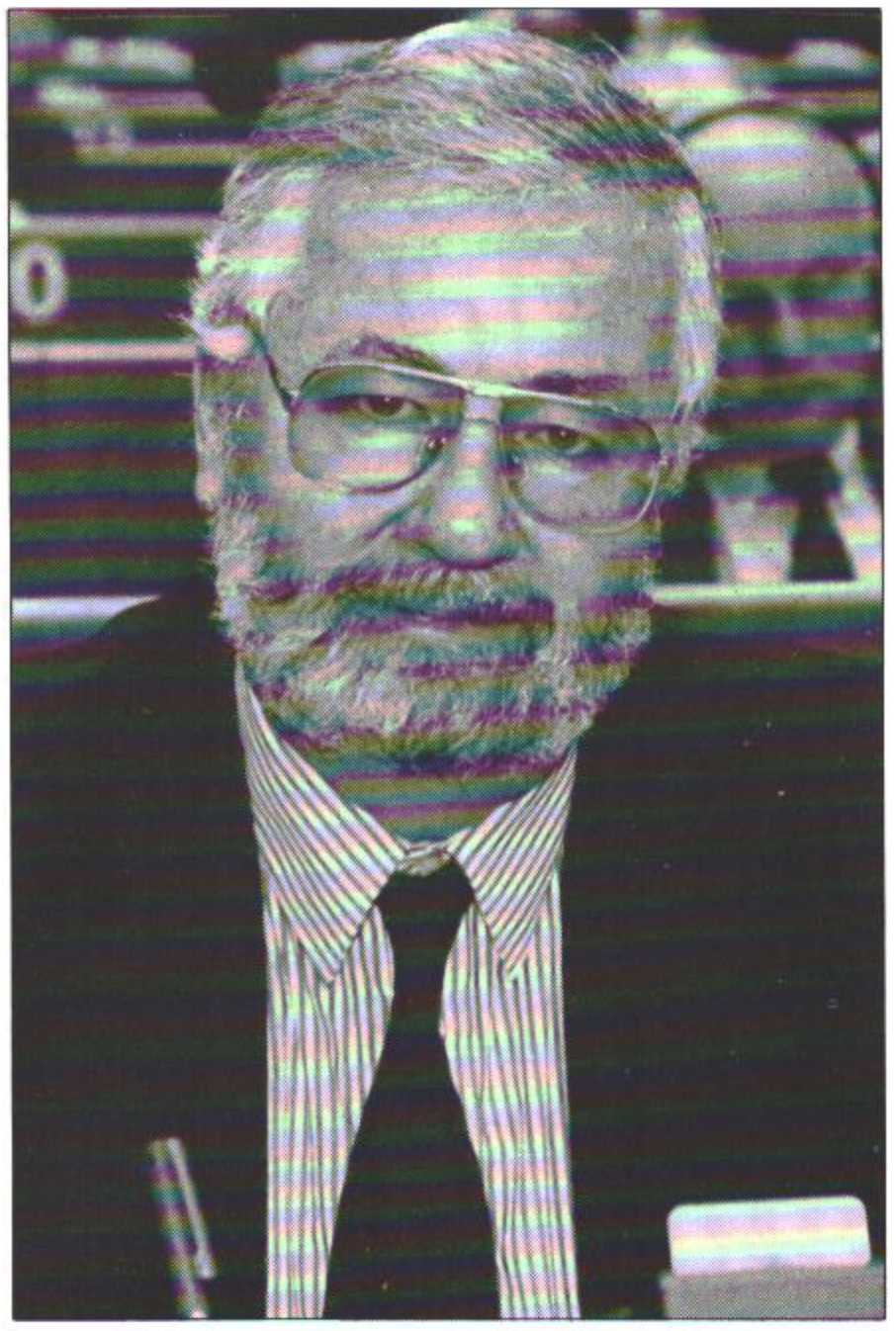
Third, the system is only very crudely proportional. In some areas minor parties will have to get over 20% to get elected (unlike in Europe where most parties that get more than 5% of the vote get representation). We suspect that New Labour is not keen on allowing minor parties to be represented in British political life.

Fourth, the Bill envisages the registration of political parties. Is this the forerunner to state funding which New Labour is keen to use to sever the links with the trade unions? Or is it just a further device to keep out minority parties or alternative slates at election time? Again, we need a full debate on these issues.

Finally we come to the crucial issue of how parties select candidates and in which order they are placed on the list. This is open to abuse by party leaders. The fear of many MEPs is that their respective leaderships want to replace independently minded people with more compliant 'on message' MEPs. At present, Labour MEPs are selected by OMOV in their Euro-constituencies by our local Party members. OMOV is a key principle of New Labour. Will we see it in this case? Is it likely to be replaced by OLAV (one leader all votes)! At best will we get a plebiscite? Two months before the election we may be presented with a list prepared by the Party leadership, and we will have to vote in the knowledge that there is no time for an alternative list.

We will continue to speak out on these vital democratic issues. These elections are the first time that we will use PR for elections in Britain as a whole. It is very important that we get it right and improve democracy and accountability. We need a full debate, and that is why it's crucial that Labour MEPs play their full part. We welcome the decision of our colleagues in the EPLP to assert our rights to speak out.

When we were originally threatened with suspension we thought that the Millbank machine was moving to crush us. It subsequently transpired that this was another misjudged attempt at discipline by the Labour leadership in Brussels. Serious questions are now being asked of this leadership. However, we are determined to continue the debate on the issue. There is widespread concern over the European Elections Bill and the way MEPs are to be selected and elected. We will be organising a conference in the New Year to debate the issues fully. Watch for further details.



Hugh Kerr MEP

LLB page 14

"That's how we work"

Celia Foote, until recently chair of Leeds North East CLP, reports on her expulsion from the Labour Party.

I WENT TO a party today in Wakefield and got expelled. The party was NEW Labour and the reason for my expulsion was that I fought to be a member of the Labour Party, which it would seem is against the rules. Along with many members in Leeds NE, I had been put in the invidious position of having to campaign for the re-instatement of my own CLP after Blair's officials had declared our AGM invalid because we refused to break the rules. The real reason we were suspended was that the AGM had voted in the "wrong" set of officers, despite months of work by paid officials promoting a "right" slate.

Leeds North East CLP has had a troubled relationship with the Party's paid officials for several years. In 1992 the Constituency protested over corrupt voting procedures in the trigger ballot for the Euro-Elections — and the less than rigorous response of regional officials. We forced them to re-run the ballot and they never forgave us. In 1994 national and regional officials proposed to make us disappear as a result of boundary changes: we headed them off.

In 1995 we selected Liz Davies as Prospective Parliamentary Candidate. Since there had been no criticism whatsoever of our conduct of the selection, the next selection process was run for us by a regional paid official. This was a big help in ensuring that the right man, Fabian Hamilton, won.

The Constituency and four of its officers were suspended in February 1997 pending "an inquiry and report into the conduct of the previous officers of the constituency party during the period running up to the annual meeting." By June 1997 its remit had widened. Leeds NE members were told "the Inquiry is wide ranging and will be prepared to cover any associated matter relating to the functioning of the Leeds North East CLP." Having realised their original claims about the AGM were unsustainable, the paid officials used the inquiry to trawl for anything, true or untrue, relevant or otherwise. Not a single charge against me related to: "the period running up to the annual meeting."

There were three allegations against me: that as chair I had refused a directive from the NEC's representative; that I had mailed letters to various people about the suspensions; and that an account had been set up in my name to raise funds to campaign against the suspensions. The NEC's recommendation was that I be expelled for breaching rule 2.A.8, for a sustained course of conduct prejudicial to and acts grossly detrimental to the Party. The Panel from the National Constitutional Committee was Derek Install, Theresa Price and Diane Hayter. Advising them (frequently) was Mike Penn (National Constitutional Officer). Presenting the case was David Gardner; with him was Tony Slatcher, the regional official who had "organised" the second Parliamentary selection in Leeds NE.



Celia Foote

Yorkshire Television had asked to be allowed in to film the proceedings — I was willing but Party officials refused. Nor would they allow me to tape-record the proceedings. Could it be they had something to hide?

As the hearing proceeded it became apparent that much of the "evidence" against me did not relate in any way to the three charges. Instead Gardner was intent on smearing me with a catalogue of vague and unsubstantiated allegations about everything from branch meetings to campaigning. The Leeds Area Organiser, Colin Challen, gave a long, detailed and highly imaginative version of his involvement with Leeds NE, its AGM and the difficulties he supposedly encountered as the (imposed) Parliamentary election agent due to my activities.

From the statements of three CLP members and Gardner's presentation it appears I was, on the one hand, too incompetent and disorganised even to run CLP meetings (one witness accused me of consistently chairing Campaign Committee meetings badly, a remarkable claim since I have never chaired one at all); and on the other hand, a manipulative mastermind able to influence a significant number of members into campaigning entirely at my direction and almost single-handedly threatening to lose the election, not only in Leeds NE but nationally.

Much as I prefer the second assessment of my abilities, both are pure fabrication. The panel were quite happy that Gardner, acting as prosecutor, should select from the June inquiry only that evidence hostile to me, relevant or not. All the dozens of supportive letters and all the oral evidence given in my support to the inquiry were simply suppressed. When challenged on this, Diane Hayter said "that's how we work." After nine hours I was told that the allegations were upheld and I was expelled from the Party.

I will watch with interest the careers of those who have participated in this pathetic exercise in authoritarianism. I will continue to take every opportunity to fight those who want to impose this totalitarian regime on the Party. ❑

Labour in the Everything to play for

Following last month's *LLB* discussion on the future of the left under *Partnership In Power* (*PiP*), Tim Pendry (vice chair, Labour Reform) argues for maintenance of the alliances which defeated Mandelson's NEC candidature.

THE WORK on maintaining the coalition of interests that resulted in a 43% vote for the delay of *PiP* continues. Our ambition is simply to construct a working relationship between "classic" left, possibly the "soft" left (including union and PLP left establishment) and our unique brand of "radical centre". The first and last of these appear to be in perfect accord based on a rare mutual frankness and respect. The "soft" left takes a little longer to make decisions but the logic of co-operation is clear.

Our talks with our comrades to the left indicate that we all have more to gain than lose by sticking together but that we need to remain differentiated to mobilise our respective constituencies. The logic of this is three-way co-operation on elections to every part of the Party with some way of equalising the representation between the groupings at all stages. This should result in a majority for what may come to be called New Labour left, whether we radical centrists like it or not. The left could well, in turn, be the majority within New Labour left. So there is everything to play for.

What we all need is a workable "resistance to tyranny" slate for the NEC and the National Policy Forum — opposed to the Progress/Labour First machine and those more royalist than the king in our Party. We can do this if we keep our collective nerve and no-one gets greedy. The social democrats in the Party can only win if the opposing vote is split. We should certainly think medium term rather than short term: perhaps a "three-year pact" to take us through to the next Manifesto. Under these circumstances, Labour Reform would find it much easier to commit to no "sell-out" in return for a left commitment to some degree of collective discipline.

We have our own constituency which sees itself as a modernising force for democratic accountability and it will make its own views clear at our General Meeting on November 29th! If I am still in office on November 30th, as you read this, we will know that the circle has been squared.

Solidarity is a key value to all of us but we must all be able to concentrate on what unites us and to respect what is likely to be a cause of difference. We must also avoid fighting old battles and move on to new territory. Labour Reform will not get involved in attempts to reverse *PiP* but we will fight very hard to make *PiP* work for the ordinary Party member and activist. In good faith, we will continue to support those courageous small groups of advisers and bureaucrats inside the Party machine that are sincerely interested in giving all of us a voice.

Remember at all times that *PiP* is vague enough to be engineered in a radical way if we only have the shared discipline to do so. Not only the NEC places and the NPF places, but the motions permitted to Conference under *PiP* are all issues on which we might selectively unite. Philosophically, centralisation of power is a shared issue and we may well share similar views on the current manipulation of regional and local government. What is happening in London could happen anywhere in the UK regions.

Furthermore, a commitment to subsidiarity and locality, to opposing "flexible labour market ideology" and a critical (but constructive) stance on radical welfare reform will also tend to unite all classes of democratic socialist.

Although Labour Reform has no firm policy agenda, writing privately as a prominent "right-wing" member, it remains hard to see how we can tackle any of these issues without a sensible shared critique of the obsession of the Chancellor's advisers with maintaining an anti-taxation philosophy. Formal taxation is simply being replaced by back-door hypothecated taxes in any case.

On the other hand, Europe, petty nationalism and constitutional reform split all three trends within the left/centre and we (LR) can play a role in creating a working consensus. We are convinced that in all these areas open, transparent debate amongst members where we have shared core values and without the interference of professional lobbyists and irresponsible journalists can lead to democratic socialist solutions to otherwise intractable problems.

On other issues, expect constructive disagreement — for example, Labour Reform members tend to be more sympathetic to public/private partnership and wealth creation through managed markets, more concerned with community co-operation and less interested in "political correctness".

The Radical Right in the Party is like the emperor with no clothes. The speeches we heard at Conference were triumphs of mental vacuity. A constructive, disciplined co-operation between three of the four great strands in the Party (I exclude the social democrat) could ensure a return to our core values without our losing the opportunity for Labour (and not a Lib/Lab Coalition) to be the natural party of government.

We must also accept that the trade unions and the constituency movement have different interests but that this is no reason not to see a long term future for co-operation. Labour Reform representatives and the unions were aware of each others' position at each stage throughout the delay campaign. We have not and will not condemn their 96% block vote against us. Their first duty was to their own agenda.

The question is now — will we see three

LLB page 16

post-*PiP* era

machines within our Party with a union interest playing hard to get between democratic socialists and the social democrats? LR is fully prepared for the unions to take that view but they must be warned in no uncertain terms: tolerance towards old-style fixing will not last long. Democracy, accountability and transparency are values in themselves.

From our perspective, the trade unions are the parents of sensible modernisation and we hope that a new compact between them, us and the left will restore balance to our Party in support of a reforming socialist government. But if they try to be the AFL-CIO to Blair's Clinton, they may be undercut from below.

But on one issue, let there be no doubt. There is much talk in the left press about planning for secession, a new party under new electoral arrangements. LR is dedicated to opposing this proposition. We still feel that the Labour Party remains the only vehicle for democratic socialism and that its lurch to the neo-liberal right is a temporary aberration that can and should be corrected.

However, if the Party comes to be nothing more than the nineteenth century Liberal Party re-born for the next century, be assured that most of us will not follow that route. Let me make this clearer. If our values are to be betrayed, this must be seen to have become inevitable before we split. Let democratic socialists then find another home with as clear a conscience as possible, and with as many members and with as united a programme as they can muster. Premature splits are infantile and serve only those special interest groups who claim, absurdly, an ideological quick fix solution to the problems of a complex world.

Within two decades of Ramsey Macdonald's betrayal, Clem Attlee had overseen the creation of a welfare state. That lesson, that politics is a long game, should drive us together not apart.

New Labour, new rules, new opportunities

Christine Shawcroft, chair of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, outlines the new rules for the NEC and National Policy Forum.

THE LABOUR Party's new electoral structures mean that the left has to find new ways of organising. We have to become a truly national, activist based organisation. No longer can we rely on famous MPs to stand on the front line, fighting the policy battles. Now we have to spread our resources much wider.

So, how do we get people onto the NEC? There are two new sections of immediate concern to Party activists, Division III (CLPs) and Division IV (local government). I'm assuming none of my readers are Euro MPs — or if you are now, you won't be much longer.

Division III has six members, at least three of whom must be women. Candidates must be nominated by their own CLP and at least two others. Crucially, they must be CLP delegates to Conference (Rule 3C4.3(c) unaltered.) The six will be elected by an OMOV ballot of all individual Party members.

Division IV consists of two members of the Association of Labour Councillors, at least one of whom must be a woman. They have to be nominated by a Labour Group. I can't see in the rules that they have to be nominated by their own Labour Group. They will be elected by a ballot of ALC members. Memo to Left councillors — make sure your ALC subscription is up to date.



Christine Shawcroft

All members of the NEC will be ex officio on the National Policy Forum. If you didn't make it onto the NEC, here's how to get onto the NPF:

Division I — 54 members nominated and elected by CLPs. There will be six each from Scotland, Wales, and the seven English regions. Of these groups of six, one must be Young Labour, and at least two out of the remaining five must be women.

Division II — thirty trade unionists, at least fifteen of whom must be women.

Division III — eighteen representatives, two each from the Scottish, Welsh and English regional conferences or Policy Forums. At least one of these two must be a woman.

Division IV — nine local government reps, four from the Local Government Association Labour Group (at least two women) and four from the Association of Labour Councillors (at least two women) and one from the Labour Group of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities.

Division V — three members from the Socialist Societies, at least one woman.

Division VI — four members of the Black Socialist Society, at least two women.

Divisions VII and VIII are for the PLP and the EPLP. Then there are places for the Cabinet — eight, at least three women, and two for the Co-Operative Party, at least one woman.

The NEC will lay down guidelines for these elections, which will be for two years. Interestingly, the last NEC decided that only half of the CLP positions should be elected this year, and that they will be elected by regional groupings of Conference delegates. This seems to be in conflict with the rule stating members should be nominated and elected by CLPs. So, if you're regional, a councillor, a trade unionist, black, a woman, a co-operator — go for it! ❑

Things can only get better...

Will McMahon, Secretary of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, argues for a new way of deciding the left's NEC slate and consequently a resolution to its crisis of accountability.

MANY middle of the road Labour activists are not impressed. Les, with whom I occasionally share lunch at my local cafe, sums this attitude up. In May, things could only get better, in July he was a bit worried about arms sales to Indonesia, by September he was annoyed about tuition fees. This week Les came in and announced that the Labour leaders were "a shower of shits". A Party member for over twenty years Les, and many other middle of the road Labour activists, have had enough.

The Labour leadership's performance over the last few months has been a monumental disaster. The Blair babes, it seems, can only spin when they are winning. That Blair was forced to appear on On The Record to shore up a bankrupt policy — financing a party of labour with funding from big-business — left everyone smelling a rat. Major faked being a man of the people by eating a fry-up at the Little Chef. Blair will be known as a man of the millionaires who lives at the Berni Inn.

The strong vote for the left in the NEC elections followed by the fiasco on tobacco advertising — not to mention lone parent benefit, disability allowance, fox hunting and tuition fees — are indicators of a changing of the balance of forces in the labour movement. A space has begun to open for the Labour left.

By excluding MPs from the CLP section of the NEC elections, Blair has effectively put on the agenda the election of an extra-parliamentary leadership of the left on the NEC. There are a number of issues posed by this. In an immediate sense there is widespread agreement amongst the left that a slate for the NEC has to be built on the basis of building a coalition of forces that are opposed to the policies of Blairism.

The last Network Steering Committee meeting agreed unanimously to aim for a centre-left slate for the NEC elections. Also agreed was a resolution that encouraged the slate to adopt the political platform of last year's SCG slate. The root of this resolution is an understandable fear that the left may be in danger of selling its policies to build a coalition with Labour Reform that can defeat Blair. Clearly there is a lot of negotiating to be done. Some of the NSCG's AGM will focus on this. Compromise on policy is inevitable when the slate is negotiated in a series of informal meetings. But the central political issue is the policies on which the slate is built — not the alliance with Labour Reform itself or the dot and comma of the SCG slate. Put bluntly, the slate has to be constructed on a modernist defence of 1945: more effective progressive taxation, free education, a free NHS, the restoration of lone-parent benefit and a minimum wage. This would draw a line in the labour movement against Blair and would start to develop a coalition aimed at removing the Blairites from leadership.

Being a Christian Democrat, Blair is a break from the labourist traditions of the long term mass Party membership. The bulk of Party members will not fall in behind a generalised attack on the leadership but many will be won over through single issues about which they feel passionately. The central problem that they face is a crisis of accountability in the Labour Party. There are no broad Party forums where a real debate is possible. The resolution of this crisis will be central to a regeneration of the Labour left.

This year the left will be unable to resolve this crisis meaningfully. The left's NEC and Policy Forum candidates will have to be agreed though informal arrangements. Next year we must elect a slate rather than select it. As someone once said: the battle for socialism will be won on the field of democracy. The left will have to find a representative structure to avoid two pitfalls. First, the impression that the left's NEC slate is decided in a smoke-filled room and second, the prospect of a conference of the left dominated by unrepresentative activists. The left will have to get together in a room to decide on basic policies and candidates for the slate but such a conference will only work if it is democratically accountable with delegates from agreed bona fide and affiliated labour movement bodies. Delegations from Party wards to regional bodies would have weighted votes and the legitimacy of delegates should be open to verification.

Currently there is no left wing body that has the authority to do this because of a crisis of accountability on the left itself. It is this problem that has be resolved in the next six months. It is not beyond the ken of left labour movement activists to organise a conference for next year on such a basis and it is that which should be focused on.

To create such a workable and representative conference would raise the profile of the left and the candidates that it selects to run for the NEC and would provide an obvious counterpoint to how the right will select its candidates. It would also play a central role in resolving the crisis of accountability in the Labour Party itself and be a springboard for ensuring that labour has representation in national political life.

Network of Socialist Campaign Groups

AGM

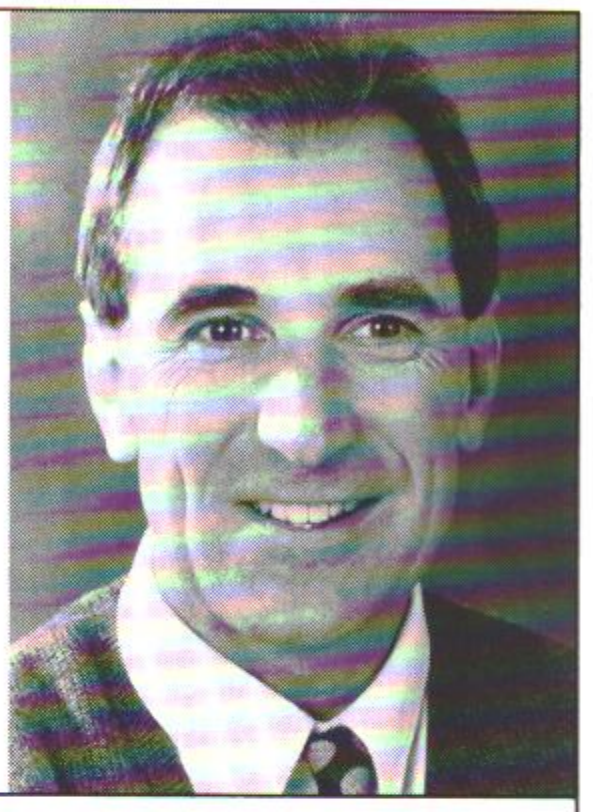
10:30am,
Saturday 6th December

Swarthmore Education Centre,
2 Woodhouse Square, Leeds, LS3.

Speakers include
Ken Livingstone and Alan Simpson.

LLB page 18

the Alan Simpson column



The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

THE FIASCO over Formula One, Labour Party fundraising and tobacco advertising has been a steep and embarrassing learning curve for New Labour. Whether this is the end of the saga or not remains to be seen, but there are already some stark conclusions to be faced up to.

The first is that the Party stepped back from a confrontation with those who said "take away our tobacco advertising and we will take Formula One out of Britain and broadcast it from locations with no advertising restrictions". Any country which can prevent hard core and child pornography from being openly broadcast on TV also has the ability to exclude events with unacceptable adverts/sponsors.

The issue is not so much about cigarettes as globalisation and the authority of nation states. Trans-national corporate interests have powers to squeeze nation states — for favours, subsidies, concessions, etc — only as long as we refuse to withdraw the one thing corporate capital lives for: access to affluent markets to sell in. Remove that and it threatens their lifeblood. Tobacco sponsorship of Formula One motor racing was merely a litmus test of how a government faces up to high power, highly financed corporate interests.

The second issue will have been no less traumatic for the modernising zealots of New Labour: capital does nothing for free. In that sense, big business is relatively simple and straightforward. It only sponsors what it expects to derive a benefit from. This is the Demi Moore and Robert Redford lesson from *Indecent Proposal*. When $1m was on the table, the expectation was something more than being included on someone's Christmas mailing list.

When the trade unions first set up their Labour Representation Committee they too had expectations: that a party funded through the labour movement would pursue policies in the interests of the labour movement. This was never an uncomplicated relationship but it sent out clear messages to those asking "whose side are you on"?

The US has never had such a system. Two parties of capital slugged it out and labour movement support for the Democrats has been reduced almost to a "who will hurt us least?" basis. Now, American unions are no longer clear about the answer and British unions are beginning to wonder too. Who will represent working class interests? Who will stand up for the newly marginalised class of workers with high skills but whose jobs may be transferred to the developing world at wage rates of 1/30th of their own? Who will stand up for lone parents, for a decent state pension, for free education, for the homeless, for universal benefits, and a living minimum wage? The challenge this raises is about a crisis of representation. The rule of thumb is that the more parties tie themselves to private sponsors, the less keen they become on defending public (redistributive) agendas.

THE OPEN review of how parties are financed was an essential step in even making this issue manageable. But it only buys limited time and space. Every ministerial announcement which affects business interests will be greeted with Tory cries of "Have you met them?", "How much have they donated?" Of course, it will be cynical, of course the Tories have been bunged up to the eyebrows by corporate contributions. But it will push us onto the back foot.

How much simpler it was when Labour could say, without shame, embarrassment or ambiguity: "Yes, we are funded by the labour movement" and "yes, we are funded by our own members' subscriptions...and we are proud of it".

Some now harbour the belief that the silver lining in this saga is that state funding for political parties will save the day. I love their naivety. Picture the scene of constituency surgeries and MPs — besieged by pensioners without pensions, students without grants, jobseekers without jobs, the homeless, the unwell stranded on waiting lists — then asking "do you mind if we fund ourselves first?" This is suicide-run politics and most MPs would not touch it with a barge-pole.

But it is not the security of MPs which matters. It is who will represent the interests of working people. No answers will be found in the satellite sectarianism of the SWP, nor in anyone who would disconnect themselves from the trade union movement itself. But it is a good time for the left within the labour movement to re-state its interest in building (and backing) a Labour Party which will challenge capital, in the interests of working people, their communities and the environment they live in.

It is a good time to pick up the red flag rather than the chequered one.

Advertisement

A message from William Shakespeare to New Labour:

"So distribution should undo excess and each man have enough"

— King Lear, Act IV, Scene i.

Fly the Red Flag



Which way for the UNISON left?

When the *Sunday Times* wrote of "hard left infiltration" Rodney Bickerstaffe announced an investigation into the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic Unison. Tony Dale, Manchester Unison Branch executive member, reports.

AT THIS year's Labour Party Conference the Party's leadership relied on Old Labour methods of persuading union delegations to vote against their own union's policies. The vote to scrap Trident was only defeated because the UNISON delegation voted against its own union policy. Tony Blair and the Millbank Tendency depend on the acquiescence of sections of the labour movement like UNISON who go along with policies which are not their union's policies.

UNISON is the biggest public sector union and one of the main affiliates to the Labour Party. It could play a pivotal role in influencing labour movement reaction to the Blair Government. Were UNISON to start campaigning for its own policies, the political situation in the Labour Party could be quickly transformed. In the light of this the gathering of UNISON left activists in Sheffield on 25th October may be a significant step forward.

During Labour's debate on Clause IV the left inside UNISON won an important victory when the union's affiliated political voice, the Affiliated Political Fund, decided to vote against the proposed changes. Since then the APF left has been less successful, culminating with UNISON voting to back *Partnership into Power*. During the *PiP* debate at conference, UNISON's intervention was marked by a speaker waving a glue stick and scissors in the air while attacking the compositing process — a televised example of turkeys voting for Christmas.

UNISON Labour Left (ULL) has been in existence for a couple of years and the Sheffield conference represents a move to a more organised level at a time when the need for the Labour left in UNISON to organise has never been greater.

UNISON has another "broad left" organisation: the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON (CFDU). The ULL meeting is likely to be smaller than the CFDU annual general meeting to be held in London on 6th December. UNISON Labour Left must consider whether left activists in UNISON should just focus on building the CFDU.

The CFDU concentrates on organising the hard left on issues such as pay and cuts. Earlier this year proposals to introduce single status between manual and white collar local government workers fell far short of what was needed and opened possibilities for the employers to attack terms and conditions. The CFDU helped organise an important fringe meeting at UNISON conference and was an important part of a campaign to argue for a No vote in the ballot. Without the CFDU any No vote campaign would have been much weaker.

While it can play a useful role, it is hampered by a sectarian attitude to the Labour Party. There has been little interest shown by the CFDU in the APF.

The hostility of many CFDU activists to Labour is understandable: UNISON members have experienced the soft Tory policies of local Labour councils first hand and health workers are now at the receiving end of Labour's failure to deliver the necessary resources for the NHS. UNISON left activists, whatever their attitude to Labour, will need to work together to try to win better pay and resources for the public services.

The CFDU is still an important forum for the left. It does have its weaknesses, the main blindspots being work in the APF and how to effectively direct UNISON's existing policies against the Blair Government. This gap needs to be filled if the left is to be effective and this is the role which can be played by UNISON Labour Left.

The union's leadership is now making noises about launching a witch-hunt against the left in the union. The *Sunday Times* on 26th October had a front page article on the "infiltration" of hundreds of UNISON branches by "hard left extremists". At a recent UNISON National Executive meeting Rodney Bickerstaffe announced there was to be an investigation into the CFDU. The charge appears to be that they produced material on the single status deal!

This comes at a time when there are a number of disciplinary investigations against left branches and activists.

The report on the investigation into the CFDU is due to go to the NEC on 10th December. One of the four CFDU supporters on the NEC is among the activists in Leeds facing disciplinary action. The leadership is trying to claim there are financial irregularities with the "syphoning off of hundreds of thousands of pounds".

In the next period UNISON's leadership is likely to get a rougher ride as UNISON members' expectations of a better deal under Labour come to nothing. The alleged financial irregularities are a smokescreen: the union leadership want to attack the left and undermine the autonomy of branches before dissent grows.

In response to the threatened clampdown a broad campaign to defend the democratic rights of members and branches to organise is needed. Already sections of the NEC not associated with the CFDU have spoken out to oppose any witch-hunt. A broad alliance needs to be constructed to include the influential group of branch and regional officials around the *Morning Star*. Using the threatened action as purely an advertising opportunity for the CFDU would be courting disaster.

Support sacked Liverpool dockers

Lobby the TGWU General Executive Council

from 7am, Monday 1st December

Transport House, Palace Street London SW1 (Victoria tube)

LLB page 20

Dockers: planning for mass action

Chris Knight, London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers, analyses the options facing the Liverpool dockers and their supporters.

LATE IN October, TGWU General Secretary Bill Morris unilaterally imposed a postal ballot on 329 sacked dockers. The verdict was a two-thirds majority rejecting the employers' offer of £28,000 severance.

In the light of this result, the Merseyside Port Shop Stewards hoped that MPs would acknowledge the dispute's renewed legitimacy and pressure the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) to concede reinstatement. Tentative plans for large scale mass action in Britain around the new year were provisionally held back. As part of a diplomatic offensive, there were approaches to sympathetic trade union officials and Labour MPs, including a lobby of Parliament and meeting with Campaign Group MPs on 5th November.

The results were disappointing. Despite weeks of advance planning and publicity, shockingly few Campaign Group MPs attended the meeting at which the Liverpool stewards powerfully presented their case. Meanwhile, Bill Morris still shamelessly ignores the outcome of his own ballot, while Tony Blair has shown no sign of relenting on his policy of strengthening the Thatcher legacy of anti-union legislation and repression against working class victims of management abuse.

Supporters in London are discussing with the Liverpool stewards the possibility of re-activating some of our earlier provisional plans. Such a move would involve outright rejection of New Labour and abandoning diplomacy in favour of national and international mass action to bring the MDHC to its knees.

One idea is for an event of prominent symbolic as well as practical significance, focusing not only on the company's trading operations but on a highly visible target in a daring occupation or other action which would gain world-wide media coverage. The target, ideally, would symbolise all that is worst about the Blair Government and its spending priorities. The event in Britain could be scheduled to herald or coincide with the next dockers' international day of action.

In Britain, "Reclaim the Streets" would be invited to assist, as would supporters of "Reclaim" across Europe. In building advance publicity, we would draw on the journalists, comedians, musicians, campaigning organisations and political groups who have supported the dispute in the past. Broadly-based planning meetings would be held around the country, with representatives from all supporters invited.



PHOTO: ED HALL

Dockers' demo, Liverpool, 27/9/97.

The London Support Group would make special efforts to secure participation by Labour MPs and other supporters of the Labour Party. Our objective would be to work alongside them in seeking an end to the electoral fraud by means of which our movement and people have been denied a Labour Government despite having voted overwhelmingly for one on 1st May, 1997. A key demand, in this context, would be that our leaders and rulers respect the outcome of properly conducted ballots, whether inside our unions or to decide how we are governed as a people.

The media blockade has been partially broken, with unprecedented numbers now aware of the dispute. The ballot victory has legitimised the dockers' struggle in the eyes of some who may previously have had doubts. For a broad constituency, the dockers' struggle has become a living symbol of what used to be a powerful trade union and labour movement. It is widely felt that if the dockers go down, trade unionism itself may become a thing of the past.

The fate of the *Neptune Jade* — unable to unload its UK cargo at four ports in the Pacific — has served as a lesson to all shipping companies as to the costs of colluding in the scabbing operations of the MDHC. Internationally, the support movement has never been stronger. Meanwhile, in this country, it seems likely that disillusionment with New Labour will set in over the coming months, throwing into prominence the Liverpool dockers as the principal focus of alternative class leadership and growing resistance.

A major event, exceeding in scale our April 12th Social Justice march, would not detract from local actions, fund-raising or other day-by-day support for the dispute. All experience shows that when a large-scale action is being planned, this has the reverse effect — producing an atmosphere of collectivity and anticipation which boosts local confidence and makes grass-roots activity easier. The support groups and their many friends and allies, from media celebrities to shop-floor activists, need to be brought together so that we can become aware of our strength.

Behind the MDHC stands the City of London and the pro-business administration of Tony Blair. Given the nature of this enemy, we must think big. Provided our plans are sufficiently serious, even the threat of impending mass action could force the company and its backers to re-think. In any event, we have no other cards left to play.

With an immense and still-growing fund of national and international support, the dockers are well positioned to secure an historic victory for our whole movement — the real party of organised labour. ❑

Civil Service round up

David Pope, PTC DETR Transport London Branch Chair, reviews trade union activity in the Civil Service.

Members of the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC) and the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) in Customs and Excise at Gatwick airport are striking in a long running row over shift rosters. Members voted for a day's action after management imposed a loss of rest days from the current roster.

The strike follows a two day action twelve months ago. Union officials said that management's action was the latest in a long series of detrimental changes to the annual hours worked contract.

Anger is growing in the Civil Service at the threat to jobs and conditions posed by the Government's use of the Private Finance Initiatives. Messengers at the Home Office HQ struck for four days at the start of November. Messengers have already been subject to two efficiency reviews. The announcement of a third (to be conducted by a private company brought in to manage the service) followed by a PFI project was the last straw.

The PTC recruited 16 members in the messenger grades after deciding on a strike ballot. All 70 members participated in the strike — bar two on long term sick leave.

Members of PTC and CPSA in the Department of National Savings took part in a one-hour stoppage last month in protest at plans to transfer them to a private company under PFI. Members voted also not to volunteer to co-operate with visits from companies bidding for the contract.

The current PFI plans would mean companies taking over the whole National Savings operation, affecting over 4,000 staff. Bidders include familiar names such as EDS, Siemens and ICL.

Ministers in the Department of Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) have decided to transfer their Procurement Prequalifications Systems Division (PPSD) to the private sector from 1st April 1998. PPSD is responsible for the maintenance and operation of the registers of approved building firms used by Government Departments and local authorities.

DETR has stated that the transfer will be a public sector/private sector partnership rather than privatisation. PTC officials have ridiculed this: as the public sector half of this partnership seems likely to consist of DETR retaining ownership of the registers and both staff and operations will transfer to the private sector, this is a privatisation. DETR has admitted to the trade unions that the Government's spending limits are one of their motivations. Transferring PPSD will help the Department stay within budget.

PTC stated that no serious considerations had been given to other options for the future of PPSD, such as executive agency status or removal of the Treasury bar on charging for its services. Union officials have reminded DETR of the commitment by Secretary of State John Prescott to a new and better Department and valuing the work of public servants.

In the event of privatisation proceeding, PTC will be demanding guarantees on severance terms, pension rights, conditions and trade union representation.

Best Value — for big business?

Liz Davies, Islington Councillor, has had a sneak preview of the Government's plans for local authority services and gave this New Labour horror show a definite thumbs down.

THE Government proposes to replace Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) in local government with its own Best Value scheme by April 2000. Until then, the Tories' CCT legislation will continue to apply. Both trade unions and local authorities have been looking forward to Best Value, which they expect to be fairer and less onerous than CCT. In fact, early indications are that Best Value will be even more far-reaching in its impact than CCT. From April 2000, local authorities will be expected to test each aspect of the services they deliver against the benchmarks established by Best Value — and against putative private sector performance.

Even after 18 years in power, the Tories had stopped well short of the compulsory privatisation of every local government service. When the Tories suggested a year ago that social services and social workers should be privatised the idea was met by howls of protest and the proposal was quietly dropped. However, under the New Labour Government, every local government service, including child protection social workers, old peoples' homes, housing management, etc will have to be tested against the private sector.

The exact mechanism of Best Value is not yet clear. The Government's gloss on this is that "Best Value" means something different from "cheapest price". Although the criteria for Best Value have not yet been published, the indications are that non-price considerations will be given minimal weight. It seems certain that in any case where the private sector offers to deliver the same quality service at a cheaper cost, local authorities will be required to privatise.

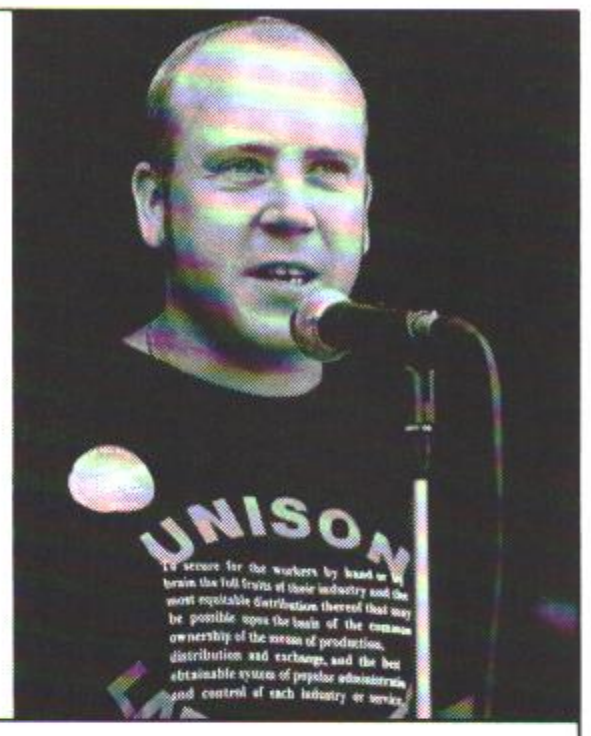
The scheme abounds with buzz-words ("leading change", "performance culture") and mechanisms for monitoring services: performance indicators, customer surveys, etc. The results of constant market-testing are familiar to anyone involved in local government. Those staff currently providing the service are constantly under pressure to justify their existence and ensure that they remain funded for another year; as a consequence, they develop a short-term attitude. So long as their monitoring results are OK, they concentrate on delivering the service at the cheapest possible cost. There is no room for innovative methods of service-delivery and little good-will or long-term commitment.

The whole dynamic of Best Value is towards private-sector delivery of services, described as "partnership". In the Government's model for local democracy, councillors' principal role seems to be to award contracts, not to control directly and be

LLB page 22

the Geoff Martin column

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



● So, now we know. If you want to get the ear of this Government bung a grand into the Labour "One Thousand Club" and you can't go wrong. Forget about all the millions that the unions invested in keeping the Labour flame alive during the tough years — that won't even get you past the iron gates at the end of Downing Street. When the Government lectures us about the need for "Best Value" in the public services I think the unions should apply the same test to every pound we invest in the Labour Party.

The truth is that it's our members' money that ends up being used to pay the wages of the spin doctors who brief the media in favour of a minimum wage around three quid an hour and in favour of a clampdown on nurses' pay. It's got to stop. We should be pumping our money into campaigns within the Party designed to secure our objectives, not mindlessly lobbing bundles of fivers through the doors of Millbank Tower.

● The pathetic climbdown over tobacco sponsorship of motor racing shows what this policy of compassion with a hard edge is all about. The fag companies and Formula One get the compassion and the pensioners, the single mums and the low paid get the hard edge of the boot in the teeth. The other thing that the whole fiasco shows conclusively is that despite all the hype this is a government that caves in to pressure. The trade unions should learn that lesson and learn it well, particularly when it comes to the public sector pay round for next year.

Former student leader Jack Straw just won't let up on the evils of ganja. Doesn't he understand that if Charlie Whelan is running the UK economy you need to be on drugs.

● I read about another great former student leader Lorna Fitzsimons moaning that she wasn't getting enough sex since she became an MP. I would have thought she was too busy shafting the next generation of students over tuition fees to worry about rumpy-pumpy.

● So in the teeth of opposition from the London Labour Party, the South East Region of the TUC and the individual trade unions we're going to have an elected Mayor for London forced on us. Apparently this is a result of extensive consultation (the *Evening Standard*, Richard Branson and the CBI). The views of the unions and the Party rank and file are always handy for firing up the Millbank boilers. Anyone who thinks that an elected Mayor is a good idea should check out the pitiful antics of that tosser Jeffrey Archer. There's no way that a gun amnesty will ever be successful in this country while he's prancing about on the national stage.

Anyway, it looks like the Mayor's going to be foisted upon us one way or another. I'll be doing everything I can to mobilise trade union votes behind Ken Livingstone but if he's ruled out of the race because he's an MP and the various wings of the Party in London are looking for someone to unite behind, I'll be happy to play whatever role is appropriate.

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

accountable for services provided to the public.

The Government is inviting local authorities to compete for the privilege of piloting Best Value schemes. In Islington, six schemes have been proposed as pilots. Two are already up and running: leisure services has been transferred to a private company, and refuse collection/street sweeping is being transferred to a Joint Venture owned 80% by a private company and 20% by the Council.

The plans to privatise refuse collection/street sweeping in particular have been opposed both by the trade unions and by the general public. The public knows perfectly well that a private company with a ten-year contract will be less accountable than the members of the Council (who have to seek election every four years).

On top of this, the Government insists on retaining the power to cap "excessive" local authority budgets and has done nothing to ease the complex legal and financial restrictions imposed by the Tories. The much-heralded "phased release of capital receipts" has been so phased that, certainly in Islington, it has hardly made a dent in the backlog of Council housing repairs.

For the last ten years, Labour councils across the country have been forced to make cuts in services and jobs. We told the public again and again that it was not our fault; the Tories had left us no alternative. Now, in Islington, we have been informed by senior officers that we will have to continue to cut our spending by some 5% every year for the next decade — a process that will be accompanied by sweeping privatisation.

Best Value seems another shoddy attempt to make a virtue out of an alleged financial necessity. Labour councillors must tell the Government now that what local authorities need is restoration of democratic powers and a fair share of resources, not another dose of Tory austerity, and another bonanza for the private sector cowboys.

Local Government pay

UNISON, the biggest town hall union, is consulting branches on a pay claim of 5% or £500 for 1998. Lethargy from national level is intended to ensure that there is no enthusiasm for the claim, and therefore little opposition to the paltry straightforward percentage claim that is likely to be offered.

UNISON officials have also tried to bury a Conference decision to submit a claim for improved conditions — including the 35 hour week and improved maternity and parental leave — by recommending to branches that they should not support proposals to improve conditions of service in 1998 because the employers won't agree!

Chile's less than democratic transition

Why is Frank Field seeking advice from Chilean ministers about "welfare reform"? Sue Lukes, Islington North CLP, decided to ask the Chileans.

CHILEANS pay a compulsory 7.5% of their wages to the ISAPRES health businesses that make millions for their shareholders but often fail to provide the attention customers need.

Schools are now set up on a shared finance basis: parents can pay more to enrol their children in better schools. The normal monthly fee for one child in a "better" school represents between 12 and 40% of the minimum wage.

One in three children live in extreme poverty: Chile ranks as the ninth worst country in the world for income distribution.

The current Frei Government still works within the constitutional framework set up by the dictator Pinochet, who remains ensconced as head of armed forces until 1998, when he will take up a special place in the senate, along with others selected by the military to form a block on human rights initiatives.

Under the two elected "civilian governments" that followed the dictatorship, torture has continued to be practised by the security services and is well documented. Sixty-five people have been killed in supposed "confrontations", and about a hundred men and sixteen women remain as political prisoners, subject to military courts (in addition to being tried in civilian courts for the same "offences"), where they are tried by one person, regardless of the severity of the charge, tortured to get confessions, often denied access to lawyers, and kept in special high security jails. Meanwhile the small number of military men who have served sentences for the crimes of the dictatorship have done so in a specially built luxury prison.

Chilean political prisoners have resisted with hunger strikes and protests (the most recent, by women, started on 23rd October). In December 1996, four of them were rescued by comrades. One, Patricio Ortiz Montenegro fled to Switzerland, where he is now claiming asylum. Patricio's father was arrested by Pinochet just after the coup. His brother was shot trying to escape from prison in 1992 (an attempt in which Patricio was wounded). Now, the many organisations supporting Chilean political prisoners are mounting a worldwide campaign to support his application.

- Write to the Swiss Embassy at 16, Montague Place, London W1. More details about the campaign from: Organizacion de Defensa Popular (ODEP), http://www.letelier.com/odep.htm, e-mail odep@reuna.cl, address Catedral 1029 suite 508, Santiago, Republica de Chile, Phone/fax: 56-2 695-2013
- This article is based on material provided by the Family and Friends of Political Prisoners Network: C.P. 22009, Ottawa, Ontario, K1V 0W2 Canada, Tel: (001 613) 731-2421, fax: (001 613) 731-5651, http://www.letelier.com/presos.html, email presos@letelier.com

Abortion in South Africa

Six months after one of the world's most liberal abortion laws was passed, progress is being made in delivering essential services to South African women. Leonora Lloyd, vice-president London Region MSF, reports.

WHEN THE LAW was enacted last February, facilities were not widely available and attitudes had not changed. Campaigners were worried that the widespread use of the "conscience clause" would mean that many women — particularly the poor — would still have no access to safe, legal abortion.

However, six months on, statistics show that, while there are significant differences between areas, 12,000 legal abortions have been provided. Most women requesting abortions are over 18, and two-thirds are taking place in the first trimester.

The success of the new legislation is shown by the fact that in Eastern Cape, for example, the number of women reporting to doctors with incomplete (illegal) abortions has dropped dramatically, from 18 to 4 per week.

There is still a long way to go to overcome traditional attitudes on the part of both women and medical staff, to improve services and access and to ensure that all women know their rights. Sex education and knowledge about reproduction is still at a low level, particularly among the African majority. One of the most progressive features of the new law is that midwives can perform early abortions, underlining what the British National Abortion Campaign has always maintained: early abortion is a simple, safe procedure. South African hospitals are calling for speedier training for midwives and for provision of designated facilities. At the moment, RU486, a non-surgical method of abortion, is not available.

The area with the highest rate of legal abortion is Gauteng Province, which includes Johannesburg and Soweto. Soweto has the Southern hemisphere's largest hospital, Baragwanath, which used to deal with some 400 illegal abortions a month. Provision is still inadequate, resulting in long waiting lists. Only half the requests for termination are met.

This is also the area with the most determined opposition — at one hospital an armed demonstrator threatened a nurse. The province's leading health ministers and officers have been summoned to appear in the Pretoria High Court to face a challenge lodged by three organisations claiming that the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act is unconstitutional.

South African health care providers have a long way to go before the "choice" in the Act is translated into real choice for all women. But in a short time they have made enormous strides in improving women's health.

LLB page 24

Iraq: New Labour fails test

What happened to the ethical foreign policy? Tony Benn MP savages New Labour's old imperialism.

PRESIDENT CLINTON's deadly threats to renew bombing against Iraq — backed by New Labour — pose terrible dangers in the Middle East and worldwide.

The press has been full of the usual war propaganda as if to prepare us for the inevitability of conflict. We are told that Saddam is a hideous dictator — and so he is — but they do not remind us that he was backed to the hilt by US and Britain during the Iran/Iraq war when we armed him too.

They tell us he can make chemical weapons — but not that Britain used chemical weapons against Iraq in one of our colonial wars in the 1920s. President Clinton claims to speak for the international community — but the Security Council opposes further bombing and the United States has not paid its contributions to the UN.

New Labour's support for this is a sad reminder that, with few exceptions, all British governments have slavishly followed US foreign policy since World War II, despite our supposed commitment to co-operation with Europe. The French are completely opposed to what is planned, as are the Chinese and Russians, all permanent members of the Security Council.

We are continually reminded of world-wide breaches of human rights and the importance of charging war criminals but there has been little coverage of the half million Iraqi children under five who have died as a result of the sanctions — surely a war crime itself. We are reminded that Iraq invaded Kuwait but nothing was done when Turkey invaded Cyprus or Northern Iraq, nor when Israel — which has its own nuclear weapons — invaded Southern Lebanon, parts of which it still occupies.

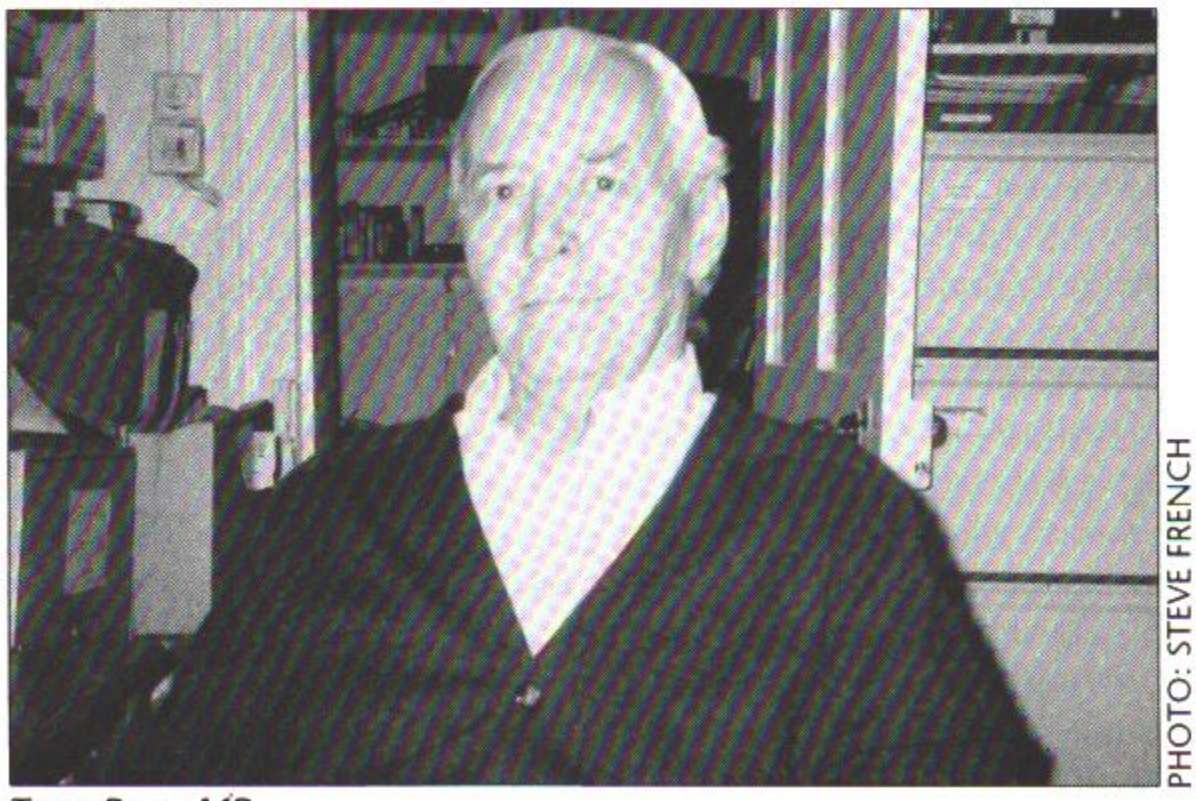


PHOTO: STEVE FRENCH

Tony Benn MP

Madeleine Albright's visit to drum up support in the Arab world was a catastrophic failure for Washington. If air strikes do take place the consequences will be very grave. Fundamentalist Islamic movements will grow in influence, as in Algeria and Egypt, partly due to US policy towards the Arab world — including the bombing of Libya. There will be more death and destruction. We will be told that this is the only way to deal with Saddam Hussein but the fact is that the Americans actually need him there because if he were to go and Iraq disintegrated, that would increase instability in the area. Indeed, sanctions have strengthened him since he can claim that he alone has stood up against American power.

Yet the people who would suffer most have no power to get rid of Saddam. If we want a relaxation of that brutal regime, the best thing would be to lift the sanctions and try to normalise relations. If bombing does start, I hope the British labour and peace movements come out clearly in opposition. This would win support from those who have seen through US policy of dominating the world with its military strength, its pursuit of its global interests and its continuing blockade of Cuba.

What the world needs now is a major transfer of resources from war to peace, from the arms trade to economic development and a reform of the United Nations to free it from the domination of the United States, which is planning to use NATO as its main instrument of policy to replace the UN itself. We hear a lot about the need for an ethical foreign policy — a phrase that has a hollow ring when seen against this background of gunboat diplomacy, a reminder of Victorian imperialism, when Britain ruled the world and imposed its will across the globe.

Britain's response to these war threats is a real test for New Labour. We are told repeatedly that we cannot exceed the former Tory Government's public expenditure limits. There is plenty of money for military purposes, but not enough for the health service, education or pensions, students, lone parents or legal aid. On 1st May, people voted for a real change. It is very discouraging that we are still following the policies of a government which the British people rejected so overwhelmingly on that historic day. ❑

Oakland witch-hunt

Last month *LLB* reported on how dockers in the USA, Canada and Japan were refusing to unload a ship called the *Neptune Jade* in solidarity with the Liverpool dockers. Now the bosses at Oakland docks have got lawyers to demand of employees answers to a chilling series of questions. These include:

- identify all persons, associations, and organizations known to you who participated in one or more of the demonstrations at Oakland.
- identify all labor organizations in which you are or have been a member.
- identify all political organizations in which you are or have been a member.

A leader of the Oakland longshoremen, Robert Irminger, now faces a contempt of court action as longshoremen broke a court injunction by boycotting the *Neptune Jade*.

- Messages of support should be sent to ILWU Local 10, 400 North Point Street, San Francisco, USA.

Mowlam's dilemma

Brian Campbell, editor of Sinn Fein's *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, examines the obstacles to further progress in the Irish peace process.

IN mid-November, after sixty days, the first phase of all-party talks at Stormont came to an end. It was the classic first round of negotiations in which positions and demands are stated. The serious business began on 17th November with talks' chair George Mitchell visiting each party to try to tease out areas of agreement.

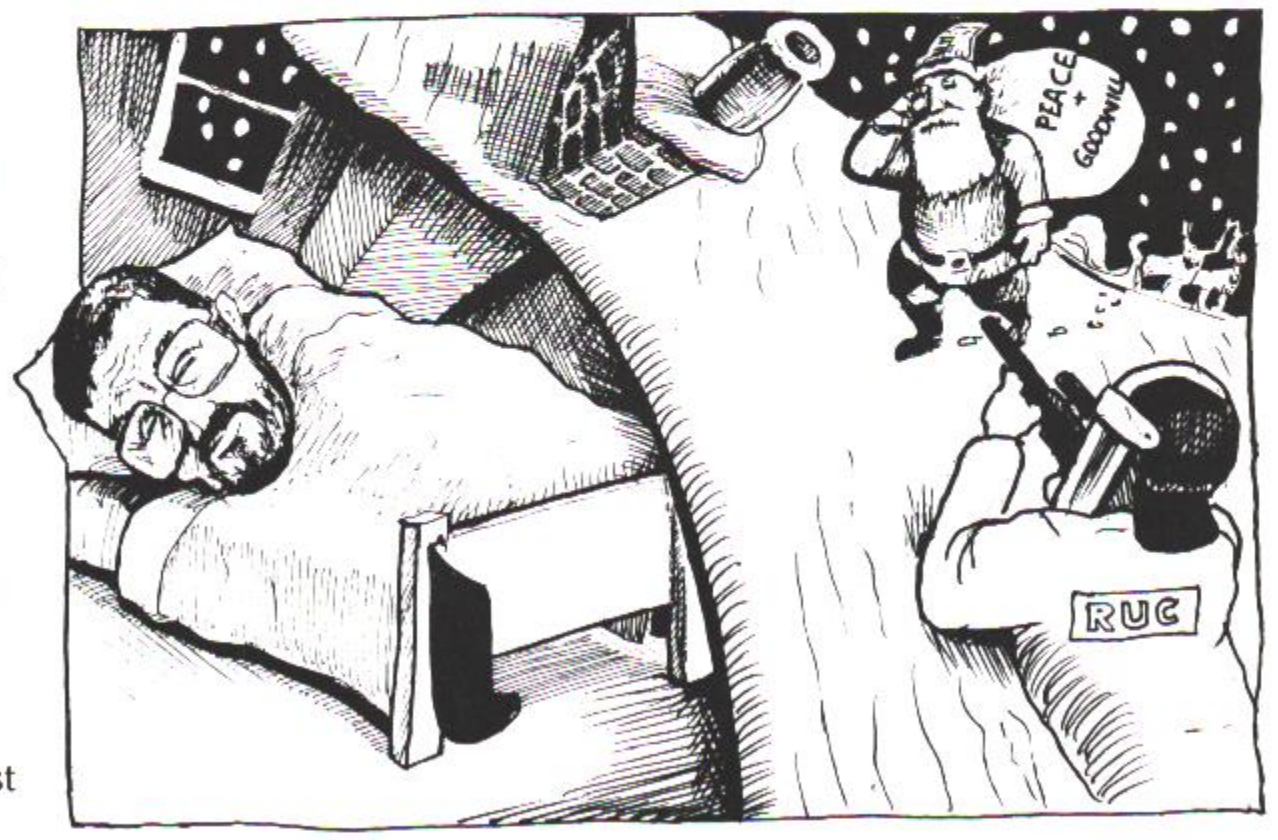
While most parties made detailed submissions running to dozens of pages on a wide range of issues, the Ulster Unionists adopted a weary but wary approach designed to present a hardline image. Their submission on North-South links ran to just three sentences. Their senior figures have often been absent and they have steadfastly refused to talk to Sinn Fein. Instead, as the talks move into bilateral and trilateral meetings, Unionists are insisting that the only way to make progress is between themselves, the SDLP and the two governments.

If the Unionists continue to refuse to engage with Sinn Fein it could of course threaten the entire talks' process. Not only would the talks no longer be inclusive but the other participants are unlikely to countenance the effective exclusion of Sinn Fein. Certainly the SDLP is acutely conscious of how that would look in the wider nationalist community. They also realise that a deal without Sinn Fein would be useless.

David Trimble is aware that honest engagement with Sinn Fein and the other parties would be popular in large sections of Unionism (as opinion polls and statements from Church and business leaders have shown) but his power base is among the right-wing hardline grassroots. Any forward movement he has made has always had to be dressed up in the fighting talk of "defending the Union" and "confronting our enemies". His inevitable dealings with Sinn Fein in 1998 will no doubt be preceded by similar statements.

The most important place in which to look for movement is within the Labour Government. It holds jurisdiction in the Six Counties and is the most powerful player, though its public position is still that of the honest broker.

On the streets, as well as in the talks, that position is being exposed. There are growing demonstrations in nationalist areas at the continuing harassment of young people and the continuing refortification of British Army bases and lookout posts, particularly in border areas. In some areas patrolling has increased since the ceasefire. Mo Mowlam has talked of civil servants seeking to undermine the peace process and there can be little doubt that anti-peace elements exist in the military and RUC.



If Mowlam is serious about making the process work she will have to face down the securocrats. A similar situation arose in South Africa, where the securocrats within the old regime stood in the way of politics.

Mowlam should stop presenting her Government as some sort of neutral referee. On the streets in nationalist areas it is currently a very active (and malign) force in the peace process. In the talks themselves the British Government is also an active force. As the serious business begins that fact will be highlighted.

Picket Cardoso!

THIS MONTH sees the retrial of Jose Rainha, a national leader of the MST (Brazilian Landless Movement).

In a trial which an Amnesty International report demonstrates was clearly political, Jose was sentenced to 26 years and six months for instigating the murder of a farmer during a land occupation in 1989.

The MST is the largest social movement to have emerged in Latin America in the last twenty years. It was set up in 1984 by groups of rural workers fighting to gain access to land in a country where concentrations of land ownership are the second highest in the world. While 180 million hectares of arable land lie idle, five million rural families have no land at all.

The MST struggle has intensified in recent years, as thousands of rural workers have occupied idle land across the country as a means of survival as well as pressing the government to fulfil its promise of land reform. This has met with the rage of the landowners, who hire gunmen and off-duty policemen to evict rural workers.

These operations invariably result in the wounding and murder of rural workers, most recently in Eldorado dos Carajas last year where 19 were killed and sixty seriously wounded. None of those responsible has yet been brought to justice.

Here, the Friends of the MST have picketed the Brazilian Embassy and organised a speaking tour for the partner of Jose Rainha, Diolinda de Souza, an MST leader in her own right. In December, Brazilian President Cardoso is coming to Britain for talks with the Government and to receive awards from colleges in London and Oxford.

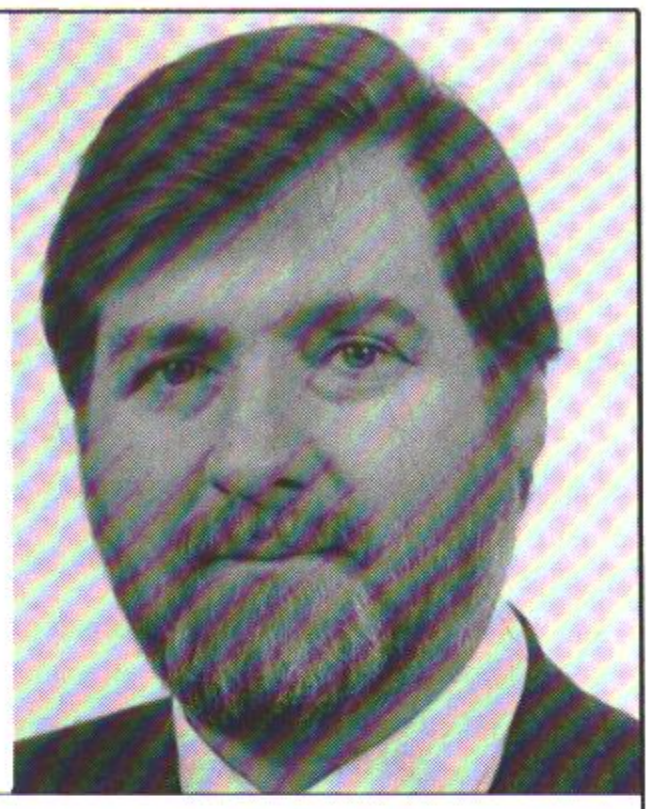
Cardoso's record on land reform is miserable, and most resettlements during his term of office have been thanks to the efforts of the MST. Cardoso has relaxed laws protecting the reservations of the indigenous population, allowing multi-national companies to burn and log the Amazon forest.

- The Friends of the MST are planning to organise demonstrations to coincide with Cardoso's visit. For details, phone 0181-374 1290 or 0181-964 2904.

LLB page 26

the Michael Hindley column

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



SOAP (the hilarious parody of soap operas in the early 1980s) used to start each episode with a run down of the absurd and baffling plot in which previously positions were completely reversed, and then the commentator intoned "Confused? well, you won't be after this next episode." The next episode predictably and intentionally left the viewer even more confused than before. And so, back to Single Currency. There are the most tremendous realignments going on in the British body politic which will be confirmed by PR, on which I can now comment. I am in favour, as I was the other month, when I could not comment on it.

Single Currency will be the issue which defines the political alignments of the next twenty years.

First New Labour. What Brown and Blair are offering is a new image for the corporatist liberal-democratic state, an alliance of big big business, the liberal intelligentsia and sections of the organised working class, e.g. Monks at the TUC. At the turn of the century, in a period very similar to the one we are living through now, that is capitalism on the verge of a new qualitative leap into internationalism (now called globalisation), an astute American, Ralph Easley, advocated a "National Civic Federation" (it has a nice ring, how long before the spin doctors try that one?). The enemies of this new coalition were "the Socialists among the labor people and the anarchists among the capitalists". Theodore Roosevelt latched onto this coalition. He was all for a bellicose foreign policy — "walk softly but carry a big stick !" he said. He couldn't promise to press the button in those days. Teddy also advocated the family, safer food and a better environment and said shrewdly "social reform is truly conservative" — a prototype New Labour Man.

This second-time-around new coalition believes that Single Currency will serve their interests. It will curb speculation (the anarchists among the capitalists), it will help large scale producers and traders by providing stability in exchange rates and it will curb militancy in the unions (the socialists) by the neat trick of wage rates and social welfare being controlled by an independent bank. Frankly, I think this will all come unstuck, but for the moment, that is by-the-by.

So where are the Tories in this brave new world? The old "one nation" lot are to all intents and purposes part of this coalition, though separate identity will be useful so that the prospects of a change can be offered at election times. PR will suit them also, rather than trying to win back the Conservative Party from the third grouping emerging.

THIS WILL be the populist "Little Englanders" — but to show they are an international phenomenon, I shall call them the Hague "Poujadistes". In 1950s France, Pierre Poujade campaigned for a radical cut in taxes appealing deliberately to the nationalistic, discontented and threatened small businessmen. Precisely the same constituency as those here now troubled by Single Currency and rule by Brussels directive. Hague recently made the same clever appeal as did Poujade to workers when he warned, rightly in my view, that Single Currency could lead to actual cuts in wages.
THE Lib-Dems will disappear, Captain Ashdown and his kind will go into the new centre coalition, with the radical element struggling happily on in splendid eccentricity. The Greens will find a place for their well-intentioned apolitical dreams.

Gordon Brown is actually putting into practice John Major's not-so-daft plan for a "hard ECU". Brown thinks if we can all use the Euro, it will gain momentum pragmatically; and if the Euro doesn't work — the anarchistic speculators could have destroyed it before the next British election anyway (this my own bet for the future of the Euro) but if they don't and the Euro doesn't catch on — then waiting to see will seem to have been wise in retrospect.

But who will speak for labour? Certainly not the Socialist Labour Party (SLP); it is lumbered with a policy of withdrawal from the European Union (EU). The EU will have changed in everything but name long before the SLP could conceivably gain enough power or influence to affect anything. Stand up the left, the ones who joined Labour, or voted Labour for a fundamental shift in the balance of wealth and power in favour of working people and their families. Single Currency under the present criteria is a plan to bring about a fundamental shift the other way. Unless there are positive policies against poverty, domestically and world-wide, we will see a rising tide of urban alienation in Europe as we have seen in the USA, and a rising tide of insurrectionary discontent against the Westernisation of the world which it will suit the spin doctors to describe as "fundamentalism".

Who will speak for Labour on the Euro?



No room for the Roma?

Jeremy Corbyn MP outlines the plight of the Roma refugees.

THE ROMA people of the Czech and Slovak republics, along with travellers throughout Central and Eastern Europe, were the first victims of the Nazi pogroms. They have suffered systematic discrimination since World War II.

In the Czech Republic unemployment stands at 5%. For the Roma people it is over 70%. This systematic discrimination extends to education, health and housing. The stigmatising of a whole community has encouraged racist and fascist groups. Since the arrival of the post communist government in 1990 there have been over a thousand attacks on the Roma people. Murders by skinhead racist gangs have taken place.

The population of travellers in the Slovak Republic is about 600,000. The sense of anger and isolation from society as a whole is a major factor in the small number seeking political asylum in Australia, Canada and Britain.

About 800 Roma people have sought safety in Britain. After a series of lurid press stories, and statements from the Home Office about systematic abuse of the asylum system, none has been granted refugee status so far. Indeed nobody has been granted asylum either from the Czech or Slovak Republics for at least seven years. There are now three hundred Roma asylum seekers being held in detention. The idea that this is a flood of people is ludicrous. It is true that a great strain has been placed on the Kent County Council Social Service budget. However the blame for this does not lie with the applicants themselves but with the Government for not repealing the appalling decision of the last Tory Government to remove benefits from asylum seekers.

There is a direct link between the failure of the media to recognise the plight of these people, the hysterical press reporting of the alleged "floods" and the attempt by fascists to march through Dover. All credit is due to the wonderful coalition of anti-racist and anti-fascist organisations who combined together to stop the obscenity of a fascist march.

Dover's best and worst

Sally Pollitt, Dover and Deal CLP, reports on the furore surrounding asylum seekers and the National Front's failed attempt to exploit it.

THE RECENT influx of Czech and Slovak asylum seekers into the Dover area has brought out the best and the worst in the local population. The best can be seen in the Asylum Seekers Support Group which has helped to integrate the refugees into the local communities and offered financial and emotional support. The worst has been the racist attitudes expressed in the local press, which has urged that these foreigners be packed up and sent home.

Some local politicians have done little to quell the situation by political education and have added to the controversy by repeated use of the word "bogus" when referring to asylum seekers, many of whom have been systematically persecuted in their homelands. Some of the women have been gang-raped and the men regularly beaten up by gangs of skinhead thugs. Their own governments do little to stop this persecution as they view the gypsies as a sub-species.

Because of the hysteria whipped up by the local media many of the families who have been living peacefully in the area for months are now scared to leave their homes for fear of attack. They flee from their own lands because of persecution to come to another country where they are also being persecuted. The culmination of this ill-informed hate campaign against the gypsy refugees was yet another invasion on the town of Dover — this time by opportunist National Front members, only days after Armistice Day, and with the aim of inflaming the situation further.

A counter-demonstration was quickly organised by Kent anti-fascists and a rally was arranged for Dover's Pencester Gardens. A massive police presence descended on the town centre and the seafront where the fascists planned to march. The obvious plan was to keep the two factions apart. However, halfway through the speeches in the park a mass exodus of anti-fascists made its way through the town and towards the promenade followed by some disorganised and disgruntled police officers.

Roads approaching the seafront were blocked. The demonstrators who managed to break through the cordons challenged the 30 or 40 fascists and the police decided the best course of action was to put the NF members back on their bus and send them home.

As an observer I felt that the National Front was largely unsuccessful in its aims. They were vastly out-numbered by the opposing demonstrators and they were not allowed to march through the town centre. Instead they were confined to the seafront where they went pretty much unnoticed by the local people on a wet and windy November morning. The police almost seemed to be on our side for a change and were mostly relaxed and even chatty — a vast improvement from other anti-racist demonstrations I have attended in the past.

A lot of the comments that have been made in the local press have concentrated on people's personal politics — the foreigners taking our jobs, our houses, our children's school places. As socialists we have a lot of work to do to convince people of the wider issues: that their own social problems can be solved only by the will of the Government and not by blaming refugees. But on Saturday I felt that at least we had won a small battle in a much larger war.

LLB page 28

Onibiyos reunited!

Ed Hall, Secretary, Onibiyo Family Anti-Deportation Campaign, hails a major victory for the anti-deportation movement.

ABDUL ONIBIYO, a UNISON member and water engineer in Lambeth, was deprived of his right of residence in Britain, despite living here for 20 years, because of a visit to Nigeria lasting over two years. Abdul was active in the Nigerian pro-democracy campaign following the military take-over in 1993.

UNISON was able to work with many other organisations in its campaign against the deportation of one of its own members. We realised that Abdul's case was not just about his own safety and survival. The future of his daughters, Toro and Yemi, his wife Joyce, and his son, Ade, was also at stake. Lambeth UNISON members became active in a widespread campaign for justice, directed and supported by a resolute family. Lola Onibiyo (who has British citizenship) had the active assistance of Rodney Bickerstaffe, Jeremy Corbyn MP, and David Haslam of the Churches Commission for Racial Justice. Joyce is now Vice Chair of the London Area of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns.



PHOTO: ED HALL

Jeremy Corbyn MP and Lola Onibiyo outside the appellates court.

The low point of the campaign was in the autumn of 1995 when Ade and Abdul were detained at Harmondsworth and Campsfield, and subsequently deported. Ade, due to the intervention of Bernie Grant MP, was able to go to Guyana but Abdul was sent to Lagos, subsequently imprisoned, and interrogated. On release he managed to leave Nigeria for another African country.

At this point the Onibiyo family had been broken up, and the prospects of their ever being reunited seemed dim. Even when Labour gained power in May 1997, the Home Office refused to allow re-entry and worse, continued moves to deport Joyce, Yemi and Toro. The heartbreaking part of the appeal process was that despite all the evidence the Home Office would not accept the Onibiyo's story.

Nonetheless, the Onibiyo campaign caught public attention and has now born fruit. Family solicitor, Rosemary Brennan, pursued the legal route to great effect. This ended with a three day hearing at the appellates court, and on 2nd October 1997 the appeals were successful and the family's evidence, including the risk of persecution in Nigeria, has at last been upheld. The deportation of Abdul and Ade has been recognised as wrong.

Following the court decision, Immigration Minister Mike O'Brien lifted the threat of deportation against Joyce, Toro and Yemi. Abdul was reunited with his wife and daughters on 19th November. Ade returned to Britain on the 21st.

This triumph shows that it is possible to combine to defeat racism, injustice and bureaucracy. The campaign helped expose the detention centres at Campsfield and Harmondsworth, the mindless imprisonment of innocent people and the Home Office's unjustified fear of immigration.

- Unfortunately, funds are still needed. The process of uniting the family has been costly. Send contributions to: The Onibiyo Family Anti Deportation Campaign, c/o Lambeth UNISON, 6a, Acre Lane, Brixton, London SW2 5SG.

Ozbay family must stay

THE OZBAY FAMILY has been resident in North London for the past three years. Huseyin, Hanin, Ali, Veli and Semih are Kurds and have fled persecution and torture in Turkey and Northern Cyprus. Now they are threatened with deportation from Britain. Ali, Veli and Semih have the support of the Compton School in Finchley, where the students and their teacher, Keith Parris, play key parts in the campaign. The whole family is under serious threat.

- Contact the Ozbay Campaign c/o St Mary's Church, Ashley Road, London N19 3AD, 0171-263 2380.

Timidity behind the rhetoric

Mike Phipps reviews Safety First *by Paul Anderson and Nyta Mann, published by Granta Books, £9.99 paperback.*

TEN FULL weeks before the May 1997 General Election, Tony Blair's aides told the media that the new Prime Minister would enter No.10 shortly after 1pm on May 2nd to facilitate live reports for lunchtime news bulletins. Such details are typical of this highly informative book by two journalists from a *New Statesman/Tribune* background. It also encapsulates the authors' dilemma, torn as they are between undisguised admiration and profound cynicism about New Labour.

The book is firstly a history of how Labour's policies have evolved. Especially good is the clear account of economic policy from Keynesianism to monetarist betrayal, through the Alternative Economic Strategy and the long march back to monetarism under Gordon Brown. This is also a book about the personalities who make up New Labour and their own evolution — or U-turns. One example is the young Frank Field who once complained, "The poor get poorer under Labour." Field of course is now Minister for Welfare Reform, preparing proposals that might truly fulfil this prophecy.

The authors are withering about Labour's unswerving bipartisan approach to foreign affairs. Former Shadow Foreign Secretary Jack Cunningham is singled out for his "dilatory work-rate" and "indolence, ignorance and slavish adherence to the British Government line on Bosnia."

But it's the right-wing defence team of George Robertson, John Reid, John (now Lord) Gilbert — "the most consistently unpleasant back-bench propagandist for NATO and nuclear arms" — and John Spellar, "chief fixer" for the right-wing electricians' union, who come in for the most scathing criticism. "If they weren't all bought up by the bloody CIA, they might as well have been," one Cabinet member is reported as saying. Defence is emblematic of the timidity behind the rhetoric of this government: the policy's a mess, cobbled together primarily to reassure Labour's opponents and the arms industry that things will go on much as before, despite the end of the Cold War and the changing relationship with the US. The Eurofighter, for example, ten years behind schedule and originally targeted at a country which no longer exists (the USSR), will still be built with at least £14 billion of British taxpayers' money.

There are insights into Blair's personal style too. Perhaps the most telling is his attitude to Labour's MEPs, now topical again following the recent suspension of four of them for speaking out against the leadership's underhand attempt to remove its opponents by changing the method for selecting candidates. The origin of this scheme lies partly in the modernisers' resentment over a 1995 *Guardian* advert by 32 MEPs against the ditching of Clause IV. But his frosty relationship with the entire Euro-Labour Group, even those who slavishly support him, indicates Blair's distrust for any public activity in the Party beyond his patronage and control.

Overall, the book's analysis — that New Labour will abandon any principle in the interests of electoral popularity — is rather superficial. The problem is far deeper: the current leadership is ideologically committed to an economic and political project that will inevitably bring it into conflict with the interest of the workers' movement. Still, at 456 pages, this is the most detailed and accessible guide to New Labour yet.

Serge forward!

Bob Arnott reviews The Ideas of Victor Serge, *edited by Susan Weissman, published by Critique Books.*

THIS TIMELY book is both a celebration of the life and work of Victor Serge (1890-1947) and a critical appreciation of his thought. As Susan Weissman argues in her introduction, Victor Serge was a uniquely experienced and talented member of the revolutionary generation that participated in the October revolution and its aftermath. Serge was an active revolutionary, a pamphleteer, historian, novelist, journalist, poet and biographer.

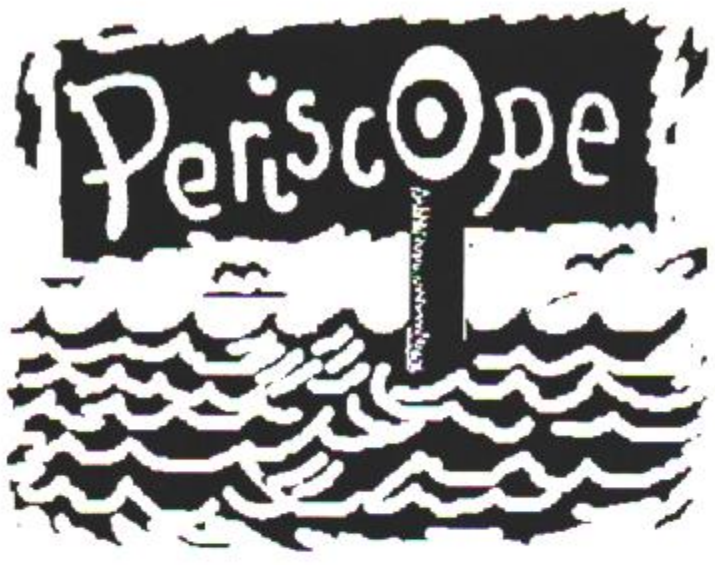
He was at once Russian, Belgian, French and Spanish; anarchist, syndicalist, Bolshevik, Left Oppositionist, prisoner and refugee. The one constant thread in Serge's life was his revolutionary Marxism, which included a commitment to human dignity, the rejection of privilege and a belief in the true democracy that is only possible under socialism.

It is easy for doctrinal bigots to point out inconsistencies in Serge's writings, but what comes through clearly is his undoubted honesty and commitment to the cause of human self-emancipation. As Daniel Singer notes, Serge may have been unorthodox by nature and often appeared as a heretic voice but he was never a renegade. This book recognises the breadth of contribution made by Serge. The first section comprises testimonials to Serge, including essays by his son and daughter, Vlady and Jeannine Kibalchich, plus a piece written by Wilebaldo Solano, a surviving POUMista. Literary criticism is the focus of the second section, providing articles on subjects such as The Novel of the Revolution and Proletarian Culture by authorities on Serge's work. The third section deals with Serge's politics, including sections on Anarchism, Leninism, Trotskyism, Socialism and Stalinism. The final section covers work by Serge himself and concludes with his essay *Thirty Years After the Russian Revolution.*

Hopefully this book will lead readers to investigate further the work of Serge himself. Serge's *The Case of Comrade Tulayev* is probably the most powerful and authentic novel of the purges in Russia. His *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* provides a unique insight into the left in the first half of the twentieth century. It is particularly appropriate that the work of Serge becomes talked about and accessible in the aftermath of the fall of Stalinism.

Serge's writings exhibit the emancipatory and democratic tradition that flowed from the Russian Revolution and serve as a reminder that Stalinism was not the only possible outcome. For new generations of socialists, Serge's work will provide insight against the backdrop of the horror of Stalinism and the sterility of the grouplets.

LLB page 30



A curious case of balance

On the Sunday following the week of **Blair**'s Formula One debacle, the *Observer* ran two prominent stories on its front page. One was by **Andy McSmith**, and it reported honestly on the political implications of the Prime Minister's economical approach to the truth. The other was by **Patrick Wintour** (aka **Mandelson**'s orifice) and purported to be an exclusive report of New Labour's plans to hit oil company profits with a massive £6 billion green tax — in three years time. In the days that followed, no other newspaper deigned to pick up this bogus story, a fairly transparent attempt by New Labour's spin-doctors to balance the damage done by the revelations about Blair's links with big business. Careful scrutiny of the Wintour piece revealed that its sole source was a telephone conversation with the Deputy Prime Minister in a hotel in Tokyo. There was no evidence that Wintour had asked Prescott the obvious question: when New Labour is afraid to take on fox-hunters, Formula One or supermarket chains, why on earth should anyone believe it will take on the oil companies, the most powerful lobby on earth?

We know why Wintour writes this rubbish (he's been drip-fed by Mandelson for so long he's forgotten how to investigate a real story). The real question is why *Observer* editor **Will Hutton** lets him get away with it.

Guardian goings on

The ***Guardian*** managed to miss completely the Government's announcement that it would not give parliamentary assistance to the anti-fox hunting bill. The story had led the BBC's news coverage on the previous evening and featured prominently in all the paper's rivals. A week later, it missed the first rumblings on the Formula One Affair. While other papers led with the revelations about Tessa Jowell's husband, the ***Guardian*** consigned them to the inside pages while plastering its front page with its umpteenth self-congratulatory headline about Neil Hamilton, who is now most definitely old news. However the diminishing ranks of real journalists hanging on for dear life as the one-time newspaper of conscience plunges downmarket faster than you can say Noel Gallagher are staging a fight back. While lobby correspondent Mike White peddles increasingly convoluted apologies for his friends in the Government, people like David Brindle, David Hencke, Larry Elliott and others are getting their teeth stuck in to the often scary realities behind the emollient spin-doctoring.

Better value?

Paul Corrigan, a professor of public policy at the University of North London, and long-time Labour Party hanger-on, has been enjoying a lucrative sideline of late. Corrigan is advising local authorities — both officers and elected members — on the preparation for Labour's Best Value scheme, the successor to CCT, details of which are due to be included in the next Queen's speech. Corrigan's wife is **Hilary Armstrong** MP, Minister for Local Government with responsibility for the drafting the Best Value legislation. Far be it from *LLB* to suggest that there is anything amiss in Corrigan's conduct, but with plenty of journalists on the lookout for New Labour sleaze stories, his wife would be well advised to tell her husband to stick to the day job.

Twigg watch

When it comes to full and frank disclosure, **Stephen Twigg** MP, that bright meteor in the starry firmament of New Labour, is proving himself an apt pupil of his master Mandelson. In the *Sunday Times* guide to the new Parliament (details for which are submitted by the MPs themselves), Twigg claims he was a member of Islington Council from 1990, and furthermore that he was deputy leader until 1996. In fact Twigg was first elected to the council in a by-election in July 1992. And his tenure as Deputy Leader lasted a grand total of ten weeks. He resigned when offered the well-paid — and much less onerous — post of General Secretary of the Fabian Society. Indeed, so delighted were the hitherto loyal Labour voters of Sussex Ward in North Islington at being used as a step-ladder in young Stephen's ascent to power and glory that they promptly replaced him with a Liberal Democrat in the by-election precipitated by Twigg's surprise defeat of Michael Portillo in Enfield Southgate. Meanwhile, as we go to press, Twigg's former protege, Islington Cllr. **James Winston** (Tony Blair's councillor until the move to Number 10), is under trial in a crown court on serious charges of defrauding two North London local authorities. Winston has apologised to Liz Davies for writing letters to the NEC and the *Guardian* denouncing her — and has revealed that Twigg wrote the letters for him.

Such hard choices

Since the general election, **Harriet Harman**'s DSS snoopers have visited some 250,000 claimants of Disability Living Allowance to weed out fraudsters. For the first four months of this "benefit integrity project" snoopers were checking on paraplegics, until Ministers decided that people without the use of arms or legs were probably genuinely unable to find work.

Don't hold your breath

Tony Blair's father-in-law has reportedly bought three 'Support the Liverpool Dockers' T-shirts for our leader's children. *LLB* is offering a large sum of money for the first photograph of the young Blairs wearing them.

The Wind Blows for Nuclear Jack

Good to see Nuclear **Jack Cunningham**, Minister of the Environment, standing up to an energy development by saying it is "massively intrusive" and objecting that it needs "substantial subsidy". You may think he was referring to the Sellafield monstrosity in his constituency, but no — he was objecting to the building of five windmills.

Still kneeling

The £100k a year salary doesn't stop **Neil Kinnock** standing up for what he believes in. At the height of the French lorry drivers' action, the European Transport Commissioner said, "We are not going to let this run and run. It already looks worse than the strike last year." No, Neil, it looked better.

What are friends for?

No one could ever say **Neil Kinnock** didn't look after his mates. Former student hack and ex-Kinnock staffer **Neil Stewart** did what most failed politicians did and set up a PR company charging participants £200 + VAT a head to attend a transport and jobs conference in Cardiff.To make the event a success, a high-profile speaker was needed. Who pops up? EU Transport Commissioner Neil Kinnock.

AOB

"The 'free' market does not distribute fairly or efficiently; it produces inequality and monopoly...the nineties will not see the continuing triumph of the market, but its failure." — *Tony Blair, 1987.*

"Anyone who argues that the Stalinist regime and the Bolsheviks of 1917 were two entirely different things is usually dismissed, yet there is at least one piece of evidence...which suggests this to be the case: one side had all the other side shot." — *Mark Steel,* Guardian.

"It is impossible to think of an issue which elected representatives are more entitled — indeed, duty bound — to discuss with their electorate than the voting system by which they are chosen." — *Ian Aitken, in the* Guardian *on the attempt to gag Labour MEPs.*

"Wednesday, October 8th: For years now I've gone to both party conferences but this year only to the Conservatives in Brighton. I have to give the Tories in Blackpool a miss" — *Austin Mitchell MP.*

"The Government is steadily moving closer towards adopting policies that are almost indistinguishable from the plans for long-term care and second pensions promoted by the Conservatives before the General Election." — *Daily Telegraph.*

Defend lone parent benefit!

One of the first significant revolts against the Labour Government has come over proposals to cut lone parent benefit. Leonora Lloyd, vice-President London Region MSF, reports.

THE GOVERNMENT is offering Britain's lone parents a new deal that will deepen the poverty trap for many of them. From next April, new lone parents will get lower rates of Income Support, Job Seekers' Allowance, Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. Those on IS, for example, will lose nearly £5 a week. In addition, their Child Benefit will be £5 less than that of existing claimants. And new claimants getting Family Credit — those on low wages — will lose some of their Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit. One of the last acts of the Tory Government was to freeze the rates of lone parent premium and lone parent benefit in April. So the value of these benefits will have already fallen for existing claimants.

Harriet Harman, Social Security Secretary, claims that these changes are part of the Welfare To Work programme, alongside giving lone parents special "advisors" and other help and "incentives" to get back to work. But what she is not giving are substantial increases in childcare nor is any government policy creating new real jobs. In fact, lone parents going to work could substantially increase their poverty after next April. Not only will they lose some of the benefits available to those on low pay, but also if they lose their new job after even a few days, they become new claimants subject to lower rates for all benefits.

So lone parents contemplating taking a new job would be well advised not to do so. In addition, the rate at which they will lose in-job benefits means that even if they keep their new job, they will be worse off than if they had stayed at the pre-April 1998 rates! Britain's 1.6 million lone parents already make up one of the largest groups in poverty in this country. 80 percent of them fall into the bottom 40 percent of income groups.

Audrey Wise has put down an Early Day Motion calling on the Government to consult with the Social Security Advisory Committee — which is asking for a full investigation into the "relative costs, incomes and expenditures of lone parent and two parent families on benefit and in work" — before going ahead with the Bill that will make the required changes.

It is no wonder that the EDM is getting support from many Labour MPs and that Harriet Harman was attacked at the weekly meeting of the Parliamentary Labour Party. When in opposition, Ms Harman, who could afford to pay for child care, attacked the Tory Government's proposals — in essence those she is now proposing herself. The Government constantly says that getting people back into work is the best way to overcome poverty and social deprivation: true if the work exists and is well-paid, but this policy is being rushed through while the Low Pay Commission has not even met, much less come up with any proposals that will improve women's lives; and true only if there are good child care arrangements throughout the years of dependency, not just pre-school.

It is cheering that the strongest opposition to New Labour's Old Tory policies has come in support of a group that has been so vilified and which is one of the most vulnerable in our society — exactly the people whom a Labour Government ought to be supporting, not attacking.

- Write to your MP asking her/him to support EDM 333. Contact the Campaign to Save Lone Parent Benefit (12 Chatham Row, Bath, Avon) for details of activities.

Model resolution

We believe that the decision to proceed with the last Government's proposal to withdraw lone parent benefits will lead to the further impoverishment of hundreds of thousands of single parents and their children. We also believe that policies to alleviate the hardship of lone parents, the majority of whom, according to the Department of Social Security, are living on less than £100 per week, are urgently needed.

We note that the estimated savings from cutting lone parent benefit are motivated by concern to stay within the excessively tight public spending plans of the last Tory Government and believe that, in any case, any such savings could be found by other means, and not by reducing the income of some of the poorest in society.

With concern at the unjust nature of this proposal, we call upon the Government not to proceed with the withdrawal of the Lone Parent Premium in Income Support and the Lone Parent Rate of Child Benefit and to redraft the Social Security Bill and associated regulations accordingly. We call upon our Members of Parliament to support this policy.

- This motion, from the Campaign to Save Lone Parent Benefit, is supported by Lynne Jones MP and Audrey Wise MP.

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