LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

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Labour Left Briefing

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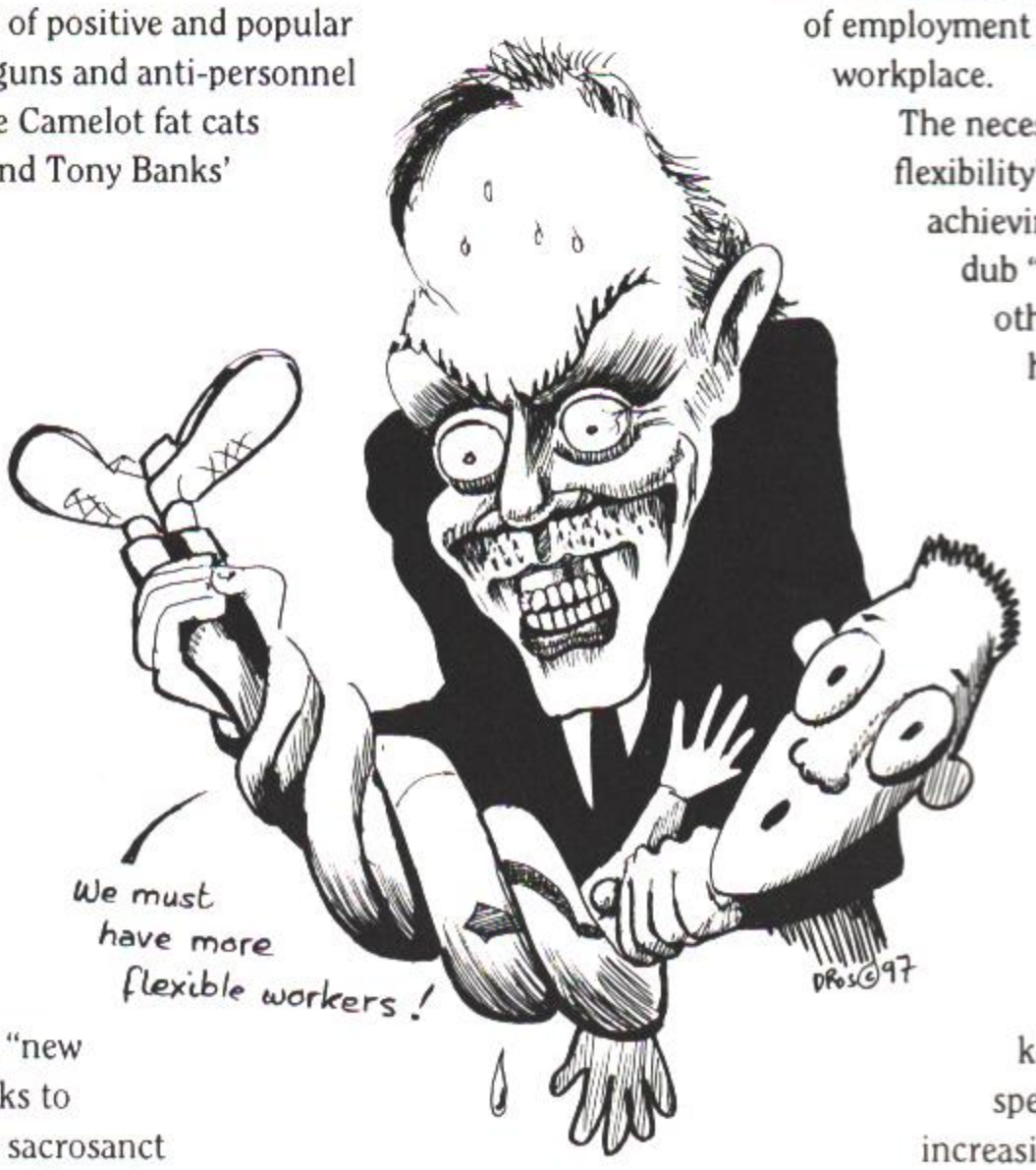
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Blair's Thatcherite gospel

THE BLAIR GOVERNMENT is currently basking in favourable media coverage and enjoying an easy ride from a party and movement still frozen by new realism and stunned by the scale of their electoral success and the sheer relief of being rid of the Tories. In the current climate, criticism is often unwelcome. Understandably, Labour supporters want to believe the best of the leaders they have only recently elected. They want to believe that things are getting better. But the inescapable truth is that things will most certainly not get better if the Government continues on its present course.

Of course, there have been a number of positive and popular initiatives, including the bans on handguns and anti-personnel landmines, Chris Smith's assault on the Camelot fat cats (pity he had to back down in the end) and Tony Banks' attack on tobacco sponsorship of sports events. But on balance these moves, many of them primarily symbolic, do not outweigh the concerns raised by the review of NHS funding, with its threat of new charges for GP visits, pensioners' prescriptions, and non-medical hospital costs; the talk of privatisation of London Underground; the threat to deport 50,000 "illegal immigrants"; or disquieting noises about single mothers.



The core character of the Blair government was revealed in its recent "triumph" in Amsterdam. What did the "new approach" to Europe amount to? Thanks to Blair and Cook British borders are now sacrosanct in perpetuity and Europe's defence eternally tied to NATO. What precisely is new, or desirable, about this combination of island chauvinism and old fashioned Atlanticist subordination to the United States?

Worse yet, these knee-jerk reactionary preferences were combined with a ruthless insistence on maintaining the tight fiscal and monetary targets for the creation and subsequent policing of the single currency. It was not Helmut Kohl but Tony Blair who insisted that the new commitment to "putting employment top of Europe's agenda" would be unfunded. Blair, Brown and Cook left the French socialists isolated. In so doing, they spurned a historic opportunity: the chance to build a new social democratic block in Europe capable of challenging neo-liberal dominance. There can be little doubt now that Blair and Brown intend to push on to the single currency, softening up the electorate with nationalistic rhetoric and gestures.

At the Heads of Government meeting in Amsterdam, as at the European socialists conclave at Malmo, Blair's message was sternly Thatcherite: "labour flexibility" — not full employment or a renewed welfare state or rights in the workplace or environmental sustainability — is the gospel the new Government seems determined to promulgate at home and abroad. Depending on their audience, Blair and Brown interpret the gospel as a new emphasis on training and skills. However, in a job market where the balance of supply and demand remains overwhelmingly favourable to employers, and in the absence of new resources for education (not to mention the desperate measures now required to salvage the FE sector), this emphasis will remain purely rhetorical. At the core of "labour flexibility" are "competitive" (i.e., low) labour costs, and this means poverty pay, weak trade unions, insecurity of employment and management tyranny in the workplace.

The necessary complement to "labour flexibility" and one of the key means of achieving it is what Blair and his allies dub "welfare reform". This was the other virtue preached by Blair to his European counterparts. Increasingly it is becoming obvious that this means dragooning the poor into the workforce on terms dictated by the employers. Frank Field likes to claim the moral high ground for his attacks on "idleness and dishonesty", but the reality is that "welfare reform" in this context is a cost-cutting exercise, driven by fiscal conservatism. It is a strategy for keeping down government spending while at the same time increasing the "competitiveness" of the workforce. Reporting from Amsterdam, the BBC's Robin Oakley told viewers it was just like Mrs Thatcher's day. No wonder.

Across Europe, people are rejecting neo-liberalism in favour of moves towards full employment and strong social welfare. Britain is not and will not be an exception to that trend. As Labour voters find that their aspirations are incompatible with the core economic policies of the Government, they will look for explanations for — and alternatives to — their disillusionment.

Much will then depend on the confidence of the left. Will Socialist Campaign Group MPs — in alliance with other sections of the PLP — lead the parliamentary fight against New Thatcherism? Will left Labour Party members join with activists outside the Party to fight for social and environmental justice? Will socialist activists force trade union leaders to use their authority in the interests of the working class? Whether the Labour Government can be won back on course to meet the aspirations of its supporters depends not on which of the above groups acts in isolation but on whether, for once, we can work together — and force our new Government to listen and learn before it's too late.

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Go slows can really bite

A rail driver on the Connex London to Brighton route reports on the union work-to-rule and makes some suggestions to John Prescott.

TRAIN DRIVERS in the privatised Connex South Central have banned rest-day and overtime working since 13th June. Over 300 trains a day (about a quarter of all trains) are being cancelled as a result.

Connex, a subsidiary of French multi-national CGEA, has a seven year franchise to run trains from London Victoria and London Bridge to South London, Surrey and Sussex.

The 700 ASLEF drivers voted 94% for the action in a ballot pursuing a 37-hour week claim. This followed the drivers' rejection of a restructuring package, recommended by management and ASLEF, for a 37-hour week — but only by defining some duties as being up to 11 hours long.

But the dispute is over more than this claim. South Central management has been hostile to drivers since winning the franchise a year ago. In November a local ASLEF representative was sacked. Drivers held an unofficial rest-day ban in protest. It fizzled out over Christmas when ASLEF backed away from holding a ballot making the action official. Other drivers' representatives have been targeted with disciplinary charges — two are awaiting hearings that could result in dismissal. Management is now much tougher on sickness and lateness.

Management has been trying to persuade individual drivers to sign for the rejected restructuring package, while refusing talks with ASLEF about improving it. Then in June new turns of duty were imposed despite opposition from local drivers' representatives. Management has also sent the two drivers' Company Council reps, and the ASLEF President (a South Central driver), back to their depots to start driving again. They were last seen on a refresher course trying to remember how a train works, at the same time as South Central said they wanted talks with ASLEF.

The main man behind this "get tough" attitude is Human Resources Director Gary Smith, recruited from the coal industry, who claims to have been part of the Yorkshire Coal Board management at the time of the miners' strike. He hasn't yet learnt you can't stockpile train journeys. ASLEF wants talks on a 37-hour week and a promise that South Central sticks to proper negotiating procedures in future. Drivers want to go further than this: top management should be sacked, Connex's franchise removed and South Central returned to public ownership.

Oddly enough, managers are in a weaker position following privatisation than under British Rail: they pay penalties to Railtrack for cancelled and late trains and face fines from the rail regulator on top. They are unable to threaten mass sackings of drivers — as British Rail could.

Labour say they will be tougher on railway companies following fines imposed on South West Trains for cancellations. They can now prove this — Connex should have the franchise taken away for their failure to run a large part of their timetable. Labour MPs in South Central's area should take this up with the Government.

Oi! Dobson! No!

Helen Weatherley, UNISON nurse, gives some advice to the Health Minister for his review of NHS charges.

So, Frank Dobson has stuck his head above the parapet to suggest that NHS users might like to cough up the cash for GP appointments and hotel services during hospital stays. The arrows of criticism have sent him ducking back behind the shelter of his strategic review — talk about no stone being left unturned. However the whole scenario has highlighted some very worrying issues.

Although many condemned the proposals, others were more amenable; saying that the money to relieve the current financial crisis in the NHS has to come from somewhere, and this may have to be the solution. Blair claims that the Labour manifesto pledges must not be broken; hardly reassuring is it? The pledge that treatment will be free at point of need doesn't necessarily rule out the possibility of charging for hotel services (e.g. food, laundry) or even GP visits.

Labour trumpeted loudly that it would be the party to cut bureaucracy in the NHS and save £100 million (over 5 years), to be diverted into patient care. Firstly, to put this in context, £100 million isn't enough even to run two District General Hospitals for one year. Secondly, to introduce such charges would require troops of staff to administer the system — probably completely offsetting the income gained. It would only add to the red tape Labour seemed so keen to get rid of. Is it something to do with that colour?

The proposals would inevitably cost the NHS more in the long run. Charges certainly would stop people using services, particularly poorer sections of society whose health needs are greater. The consequence would be an even greater upturn in emergency admissions than we are seeing at present, not to mention the cost in human suffering — all for want of good and timely intervention.

Of greater concern though is what may lie behind these proposals. How far will the review go? Floating an inevitably unpopular idea on the public could mean that the proposals will be slightly less draconian but welcomed in comparison.

This could set the tone for more cuts and private funding proposals to work within the convergence criteria for the Single European Currency.

Undoubtedly Labour was left well and truly in the financial mire by the Tories. However it has made the rod for its own back by refusing to consider progressive taxation. It is the only solution to the problems the NHS faces and one which would be more palatable to most people than a piecemeal service where patients have to check their purses before phoning for a GP appointment.

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Lone parents' right to choose

Annie Oliver (Information Worker) and Sue Cohen (Co-ordinator) of the Single Parent Action Network (SPAN) want lone parents to be supported not targeted.

THE LABOUR Government wants to "encourage" lone parents into seeking work or training. This is only a small part of the Government's overhaul of the welfare state and whole 'Welfare to Work' package. Understandably lone parents and organisations that represent them are worried about New Labour's proposals.

Although support for lone parents is welcomed it has to be real support. Yes, many lone parents want to work, to end the dependency, to contribute, but it *must* be recognised that it is a perfectly legitimate choice to be at home and look after children if you feel it's appropriate for your family's well-being. Are we going to be in the situation where if we don't work our benefits will be cut? The Government hasn't re-instated the Tories' cuts to benefits which force lone parents further into poverty. These new proposals feel more like "targeting" than "supporting". We know how it feels to be targeted. We've had enough of it and the more optimistic among us thought it might end when Labour got in.

We are worried about any element of compulsion, about exactly what jobs are going to be available (the growth areas in the labour market are cleaning, hotels, childcare), about not having a minimum wage, about decent affordable childcare — increases in school clubs run by the voluntary sector just aren't enough. We are worried that part-time work to fit in with school hours won't take us off income support at all and certainly not off family credit and that we will be frowned upon if we choose to do that incredibly valuable job of purely raising our children.

We want a level playing field, to be able to choose what we want to do to start with, and secondly that if we do train, to know that we'll be supported financially and with childcare, and that when we work we won't immediately lose every benefit eg housing benefit, council tax relief, prescription charges. We want to know that it will be worth it to train and to work. Childcare facilities including after school clubs need adequate funding. Supporting lone parents will not be cheap.

These proposals need more careful thought. Women must be respected whether they choose to look after their children or work outside of the home. Training needs to cater for lone parents, to be within school times and terms, to offer financial assistance where materials, travel, childcare, subsistence need to be paid for. Lone parents need support, advice, empowerment. The last eight years, in particular, of never ending discrimination and harassment have taken their toll.

If the Government is working towards one nation, then it should treat all families as equal, and commit itself to ending discrimination against one parent families. This was agreed by the United Nations in the International Year of the Family. SPAN has already written to the Prime Minister asking him if he will support this decision.

●SPAN is a multi-racial group of single parents working to improve the lives of one parent families in the UK and Europe. Single parent members of SPAN take pride in our children and in our role as parents. We feel that by uniting together we can change discriminatory policies and attitudes which reduce one parent families to poverty and isolation. For further information contact SPAN at Millpond, Baptist Street, Easton, Bristol, BS5 OYJ, Tel: 0117-951 4231.



PHOTO: PAUL OLIVER

SPAN members and their children.

"Once the youngest child is in the second term of full time school, lone parents will be offered advice by a proactive employment service to develop a package of job search, training and after school care to help them off benefit."

Under the heading of *We will get the unemployed from welfare to work* our manifesto made no mention of cuts in benefits to force lone parents into work — work that, as yet, doesn't exist. The above was the policy on which we all stood at the general election — a policy I was, and am, proud to endorse.

At every one of the more than 20 election meetings I spoke at I talked with enthusiasm of this Party's concern for single parents quoting from Harriet Harman's *Opportunities for Lone Mothers* (October 1996): "Only 41% of British lone mothers are in work" — I understand the figure in France is 82% — and "One of the main obstacles in the way of women going back to work is finding affordable good quality child care."

Most single parents (particularly mothers) are faced with a daily dilemma — when in work they worry they are not with their children, when not in work they have the daily struggle to make ends meet and the damaging impact on their children. For women who have achieved qualifications there is the added anxiety of not being acceptable to employers if out of the job market for too long, therefore wasting hard won qualifications and experience.

My hope is that our Government will keep its election pledges to single parents, giving them and their children hope for the future, not adding to their difficulties. This will eventually save on benefits which can in time be used to enhance the young lives so badly neglected by the Tory Government.

Ann Cryer MP

Mowlam: seek dialogue!

As the marching season begins in the Six Counties Brian Campbell (the editor of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*) argues that the new Labour Government could take a positive initiative.

THERE AREN'T many places where a community festival would be described as "provocative". But that was the reaction from Ulster Unionist MP Ken Maginnis to news that the residents of the Garvaghy Road in Portadown were planning to hold a street festival on 6th July, the day that an Orange march is due to go through their community. It conjures up a bizarre scenario: bowler-hatted, sash-wearing Orangemen determined to march from Drumcree church through a community in which they are not welcome and complaining that children's street parties are causing trouble.

In the year since the turmoil produced by last year's Drumcree stand-off when the British Government capitulated to loyalist violence, the Orange Order has steadfastly refused to hold meetings with nationalist residents. The result has been that once again isolated nationalist communities are facing violence and intimidation as the price for standing up for the right to be consulted.

It has been a remarkable year for the people of the Garvaghy Road. They have grown together as a community and become a truly radical force through their battle to retain dignity in the face of tremendous pressure. Nationalists in Portadown have for generations been expected to "know their place". Triumphalist parades have been one aspect of their second-class citizenship which they have been expected to tolerate. But these parades have been regular flashpoints for violence. It is not surprising that nationalists are determined to reach an accommodation which would lay the ground rules for all parades.

It is also not surprising that the Orange Order has turned its face against any negotiation. They insist that their right to march is inalienable. Their attitude is that this is our state and we will march where we want.

The determination of nationalists to resolve the problem through negotiations was strengthened two months ago when a Catholic man, Robert Hamill, was beaten to death by loyalists in the centre of Portadown. Members of his family who were with him at the time have accused the RUC of standing by and doing nothing. The killing heightened anger amid claims that the days of equality are still a long way off.

The community also asserted their radicalism when they elected two of their residents association spokespeople in council elections last month. Breandan MacCionnaith, who topped the poll, is the spokesperson whom the Orange Order has refused to meet because he served a sentence in the 1970s for hijacking a car. He now has the legitimacy of being an elected representative, but the Orange Order still refuses to meet him.

As the tension mounts and 6th July approaches, a number of civil rights groups from Ireland, Britain and the United States will act as monitors on the Garvaghy Road. They will be joined by representatives from religious groups who witnessed the events of last year when the residents were batoned off the road in order to allow the Orange march to proceed. Also present will be the massed ranks of the media. The eyes of the world will be on Drumcree. In other nationalist areas, most notably the Lower Ormeau Road in Belfast — which was put under a 24 hour curfew to facilitate an Orange march — and in nationalist villages like Dunloy and Bellaghy, attention will also be focused on Drumcree. It will be the test of whether Orange rule will once again triumph.

It is also a test of the new Secretary of State, Mo Mowlam. She is engaged in a form of shuttle diplomacy, visiting residents' groups and Orangemen and urging compromise. But so far she has not urged that the two sides meet. While it is obvious to all objective observers and to anyone involved in conflict resolution that there must be some form of talks or mediation if a solution is to be found, Mowlam seems to be clinging to the forlorn hope that a compromise can be reached without any sort of contact between the two sides. It is the first real test of her ability in the job. She arrived with the public image of someone ready to carry out her function with energy. It remains to be seen if that energy will translate into positive action.

As the loyalist marching season gets underway, the solution to the difficulties which now seem certain to arise must be through dialogue. Political activists should make this clear to Mo Mowlam while also standing in solidarity with those communities who are calling for their right to be consulted over provocative marches through their areas.

Hats off to Helen and Dave

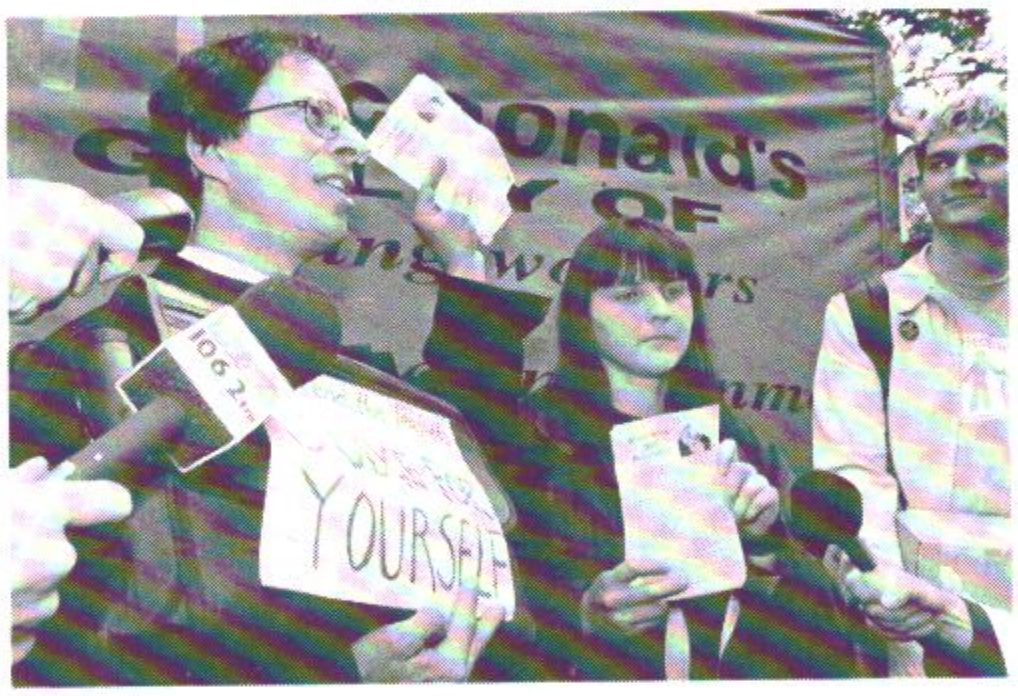


PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

"...the firm has finally silenced its most persistent critics." So announced the-ever-so-anti-establishment *Guardian* newspaper following McDonald's 'victory' in the High Court. In fact London Greenpeace activists were immediately on the streets leafleting. Dave Morris and Helen Steel have shown great courage in the face of the full might of the union busting burger bandits. Show your support - send donations to the McLibel campaign, 5 Caledonian Road, London, NW1 9DX.

LLB page 6

Realising the peace dividend

Why should the poor, sick, homeless and school children suffer while we continue to spend billions on arms, asks Frank Allaun (Labour MP for Salford East 1955-1983 and President of Labour Action for Peace).

THE NEW Government has started with some good moves and a few shockers. By far the worst is continuing with the Tories' defence programme, costing nearly £22 billion a year. A review is now starting — and not before time. Unfortunately Defence chief George Robertson, holds that "it must not be Treasury led" which means it must not aim at cutting the arms bill.

Tony Blair has successfully pressed three other governments to join in spending £42 billion on the Eurofighter 2000 — certainly a gross under-estimate which does not include annual costs for fuel, maintenance, staffing and crew training.

What the hell is this colossal expenditure for? Who threatens the country's "security"? Certainly not the Russians. Their production has fallen by more than 50% since 1990. Their military has been drastically cut back. Invading Britain is the last thing they think of.

If Tony Blair believes that the massive arms programme is popular, public opinion polls show it is not. Nor do Labour MPs want it. A recent poll published in the *Observer* shows that 80% of them say our arms spending should be cut. Amongst the new Labour MPs this view is even more strongly held - by more than 90%. The public and their MPs would leap with joy if spending went on better things.



Frank Allaun

The arms barons' one excuse is that, if the Eurofighter contract goes ahead, it will save thousands of jobs. You can almost see the tears in the eyes of the directors of GEC, Rolls Royce, Aerospace, Vickers and the rest. They are weeping all the way to the bank.

It's the peace, trade union and labour movement which understands the need to protect employment. The resolution carried overwhelmingly for six consecutive years by Labour Conference (until last year) called for the reduction of British defence spending to the average of the other Western European NATO countries, as a proportion of GDP, and for the redirection of the savings to economic and social priorities and job creation. It reaffirms that the setting up of a Defence Diversification Agency is essential and urgent. The unions are naturally and especially emphatic about this. It would release a peace dividend of no less than £6 billion a year. This is the forgotten factor. Not a single front bench speaker has mentioned it since the election. Speaking from experience I know that most engineers would prefer to be turning out parts for tractors rather than parts for tanks.

Last year the resolution was not even discussed. Why? Because the leadership knew it would again be carried. It is vital there should be at least a dozen resolutions or amendments from CLPs and unions on the agenda this year. This is not an impossible demand. Indeed the Government can be made to respond to public opinion and pressure. Remember the Dunblane shooting tragedy and how mass feeling and agitation led to the ban on handguns. Also how the outcry against landmines led to government legislation.

"Above all is the need to review nuclear weapons". Robertson says Britain will retain its nuclear deterrent. He recognises that "the world has changed dramatically in the last 10 years. Since the end of the cold war the security risks to the UK and our Allies have changed fundamentally". Absolutely. Then why is Trident to be ignored in the review?

I conclude by drawing attention to the difference between the teams dealing with Foreign Affairs and Defence. It is clear that the Cabinet Ministers concerned were given some choice of their lieutenants. First you have Robin Cook, one of the best brains in the Cabinet, selecting as his team Derek Fatchett, Tony Lloyd, Douglas Henderson and Baroness Symons, who have all expressed some sympathy for the peace dividend in the past. Whereas in the Defence Ministry the ministers are led by George Robertson and his supporters are Lord John Gilbert, Dr. John Reid and John Spellar, all hard-line right-wingers. ❑

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Stop the arm-twisting

Ann Black, a member of Labour Reform Steering Committee, argues that the best way to change *LiP* is to move that decisions are deferred.

AS THE DUST settles on the new political landscape, *Labour into Power* continues to generate more heat than light. Amid the leaks, the spin and the wishful thinking, what lies behind the language of partnership is still not clear. Party structures must enable ideas to filter up from the grassroots, and encourage wide-ranging debate. The new Clause IV states that "the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe". Members owe a duty to support the Party if, and only if, they enjoy the right to full participation within it.

Conference does not meet these needs for most members. Choreography is intense, and few ordinary delegates break through the cordon. However, its proceedings are public. *Labour into Power* claims that Conference would retain sovereignty, but if all views are filtered through the National Policy Forum, much of the process would go underground and would Conference really be allowed to choose a minority report, against the leadership's preference?

Before more power is handed to the Forum, it must become elected by and accountable to the Party, it must earn the trust of the membership, and constituencies and affiliates must keep the right to send resolutions to Conference. Evolutionary change, rather than Year Zero, is the only sensible approach. Similarly the trade unions and the Party grew up together and breaking the link would do immense damage.

Disturbingly, *Labour into Power* takes an uncritical view of referenda. *The Road to the Manifesto* was splendid public relations, but it was hardly consultation. Members could vote No, and be held personally responsible for losing the election, or Yes, and be described by the spin-doctors as "uncompromising New Labour". Not a choice that mature adults should be forced to make.

However, the devil will be in the detail, in an NEC Action Plan published shortly before Conference, with little opportunity for amendment. This is not acceptable. Labour Reform supports enhanced democracy and is contributing to the discussion. But for change to succeed it must carry majority support within the movement. This means proper debate on every element of the Plan, and deferring final decisions until 1998.

Some seek delay in order to sink the project lock, stock and barrel. This is not the Labour Reform position. And in the past the left has not blocked but initiated Party modernisation. Election of the leader by the PLP alone was fiercely defended by MPs, until the left broadened the franchise and opened the way to one-member-one-vote. The system preferred by Labour's old right has just given the Tories a leader with no mandate beyond Westminster and, we hope, many extra years in opposition.

Finally, *Labour into Power* envisages a gentler, fluffier party, attractive to mainstream members, particularly women, who are turned off by knockabout argument and men behaving loudly. Yet it is being driven through with crude political arm-twisting, and avoiding any debate which might produce the "wrong" answers. This mix of machismo and paranoia is not the way to inaugurate the New Millennium.

- Labour Reform can be contacted at PO Box 5219, Birmingham, B13 8DY, or email labref@ecotrend.cix.co.uk

Get Lefty on the Council

Cllr. Christine Shawcroft, chair of CLPD, says it's now time for socialists to become councillors and get organised nationally.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT is of vital importance for the left. We can't build a mass socialist Labour Party if working class people's main point of contact with the Party is their Labour Council putting huge rises on the rents, closing their children's nursery and their granny's day centre.

We have to rebuild the local government left. Since the collapse of the local government left in 1985, we've tended to have a few left councillors but they've been isolated and unable to influence policy. Many have become demoralised and resigned. The work of left councillors must be organised and co-ordinated so they feel part of a movement.

Now we have a Labour Government there is much more point in trying to make something of local government. There are some favourable indications of changes in policies. Of course the Manifesto commitments do not go far enough. We need an influx of left Councillors to campaign for more money for local government.

One of the CLPD's model resolutions to Conference on the *LiP* proposals suggests an affiliated society of Labour Councillors, rather than them having their own section on the NEC. Although a gesture to Labour Reform, it could provide us with the organisation and structure we need to co-ordinate left councillors.

We have to draw up our bottom line principles. I would suggest:

- the defence of jobs and services — no compulsory redundancies, no 'son of CCT'
- no privatisation of housing, and a rent freeze until housing costs cease to be such a large proportion of working class families' budgets
- a minimum wage of no less than the TUC recommended figure

We have to build socialist Labour Councils to pave the way for a socialist Labour Government.



Christine Shawcroft

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LiP: let battle commence

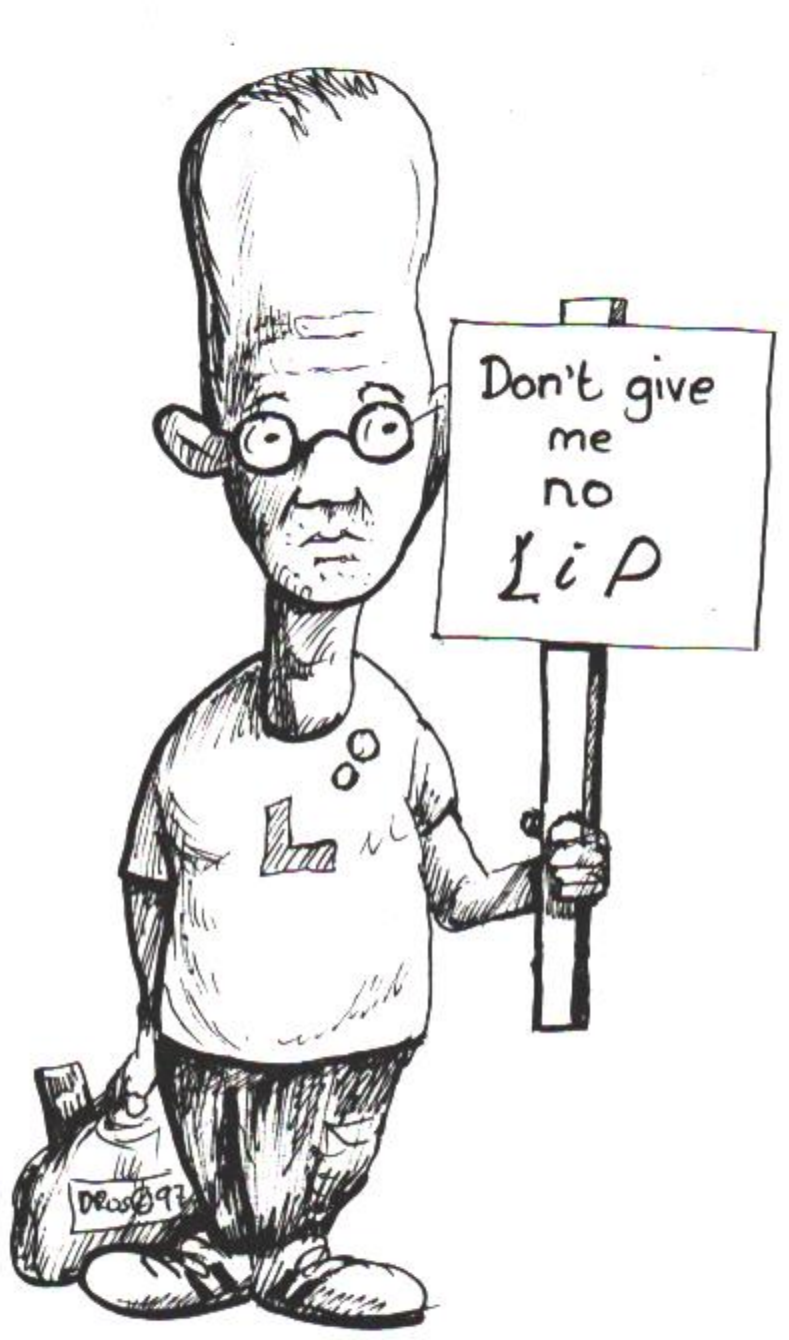
Will McMahon, Secretary of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups reveals that following CLP and union discussions the success of Blair's *Labour Into Power* is very much in the balance.

THE RESULT of the battle to defend Party democracy is by no means a forgone conclusion. The Millbank Tendency is meeting stiff resistance and some of its positions are being overrun. *LiP* has not been going according to plan in the unions. While USDAW and the UNISON Affiliated Political Fund rolled over, the Communications Workers Union voted by 95% to reject *LiP*.

The MSF conference appears to have ended up voting both ways and it will be up to the delegation to sort it out. Meanwhile, delegates at the GMB conference received a statement from their national executive explaining that there was "a crisis of accountability" inherent in the *LiP* proposals and that the GMBU demanded the right for both unions and CLPs to put motions to Labour Party Conference. The motivation behind the statement, which was passed unanimously after all other motions were withdrawn, was that three regions had supported resolutions to either reject or defer *LiP*. There was a real chance that the GMB leadership might lose the vote.

Undoubtedly there is still space for the trade union leaderships to wriggle out of commitments. For example all bets could be called off by the late introduction of yet another new set of proposals by Blair or by way of constitutional amendments.

The Greater London Labour Party has rejected *LiP*. What happens now in the CLPs will be crucial. Many CLPs have been persuaded by different sets of arguments to vote against the proposals. Some believe that the decision should be deferred because there has not been enough time for debate. Others want to defend the right of CLPs to send motions to Conference. Some will vote against the whole package. Should we argue for deferral or rejection? I think that activists across the country must judge which resolution will win locally to put a spoke in the wheels of the Millbank Tendency.



When the Conference Resolutions Book is published in July it is by no means certain that there will be a majority of CLPs in favour of *LiP*. Votes to defend Party democracy will only count if Conference delegates with a "defer" position are lobbied effectively in the run up to Conference to (a) stick by their own resolution, and (b) if that is lost then to vote for a resolution which will significantly block a part of the reform (e.g. the right of CLPs to send resolutions for voting to Conference or to vote against *LiP* as a whole).

Comrades must work to ensure that Conference delegates are strong enough not to buckle under the exhortation of senior MPs at the new pre-Conference regional meetings where Party managers twist arms and appeal to delegates to "trust Tony". Last year at one such meeting Harriet Harman advised new delegates that one motion should be rejected because it was not Party policy! *Labour into Power* is certainly not a Labour policy. ❑



The paper they grin and Blair

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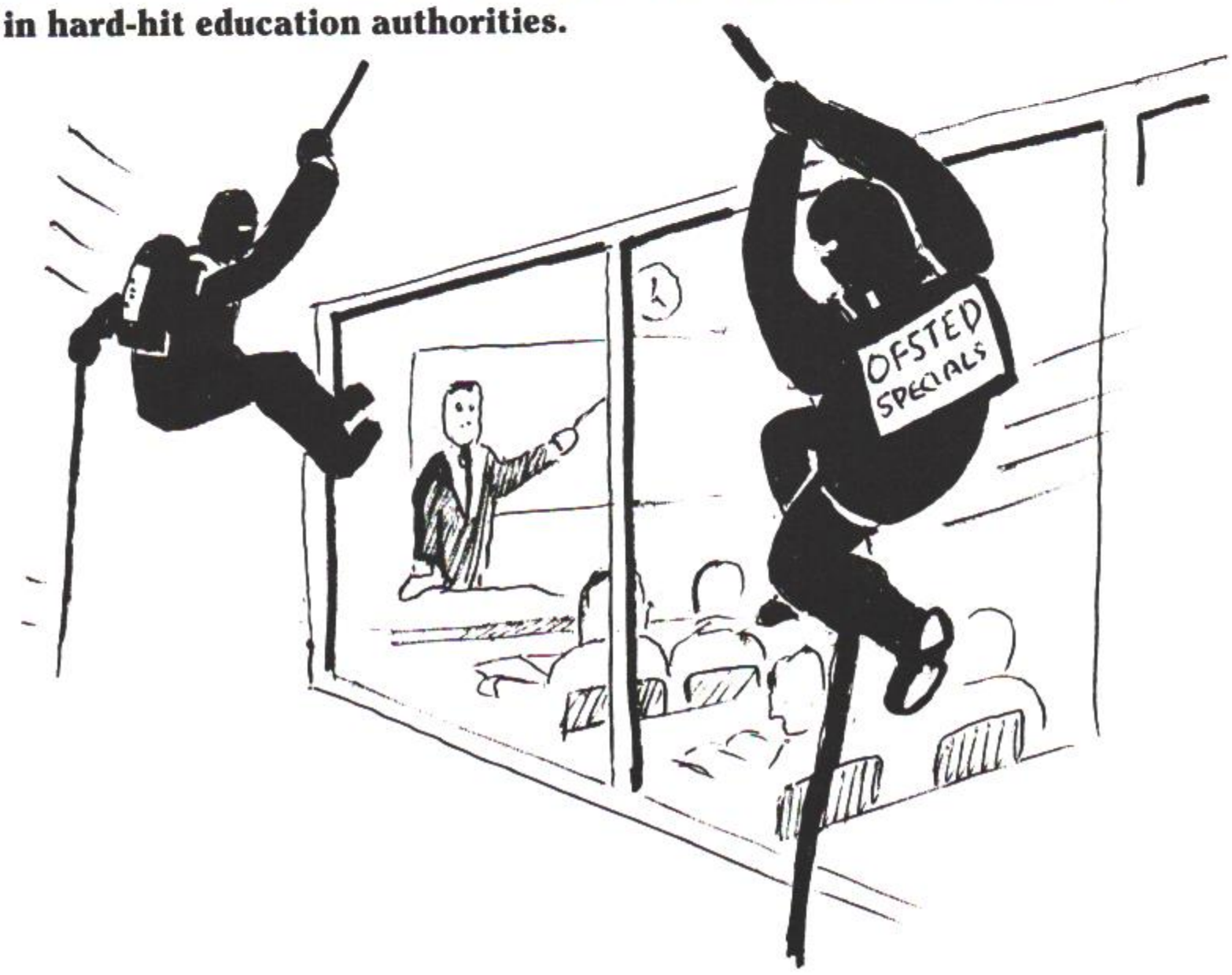
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End the blame game

Mark Lushington, Divisional Secretary, Hackney Teachers Association, argues that team-building should replace scape-goating in hard-hit education authorities.



IMAGINE AN inner city education authority in 1997. The GCSE examination results of its students for A-G grades are above the national average, although the population is socially and economically deprived by every reliable index. It is multi-lingual and multi-cultural, shelters many refugees and, accordingly, its schools have many mid-year entrants, whose lack of educational experience distorts those schools' tests results. This same education authority also has an excellent nursery and early years programme, which is beginning to work successfully with council, community and private nurseries, as recommended by the New Labour manifesto and endorsed by OFSTED inspection results. For years, this borough has suffered from a lack of services and transfer payments, following the break-up of the ILEA, and yet has improved its GCSE results, year on year. since that time.

Now, if you will, imagine another inner city education authority in 1997. This one is riven by internal party political disputes, many driven by educational policy differences and led by a Chief Executive, who seeks to improve matters by "restructuring" the LEA by reducing the power and scope of the Director of Education and cutting education support services, without consultation with governors, headteachers or teachers' representatives. It is "named and blamed" by the new Secretary of State for Education, who is sending in an OFSTED inspection team for a special review of the LEA. Meanwhile there is a deluge of media gossip about what has "gone wrong at any stage in the last seven years since Hackney assumed control of education" (*Guardian Education*, 17th June). This includes some self-justification from a controversial ex-Director of Education, who is taking the Council to an industrial tribunal for large sums of money, over and above what he has already received for taking early retirement. This same director was intimately involved in two, highly publicised disputes concerning Kingsmead and Hackney Downs schools, splattered across the national media.

As you may have guessed, both education authorities are one: Hackney. Making sense of these contradictory pictures will be one of the jobs of the new central government review teams. Hopefully this will mean replacing a blame culture with a team culture and supporting the quality of teaching and learning and raising children's achievements by increased funding.

However, the record so far of the New Labour Government is not reassuring: the "naming and blaming" of 18 schools — two in Hackney — is widely resented by parents and teachers and is already having a negative impact on recruitment and retention of teachers, thus potentially worsening teaching and learning conditions in schools.

Certainly, there are professional issues to address: Hackney has cut the money delegated to schools by 1% over each of the last three years; the national training budget was reduced from £241m to £214m last year, and Local Management of Schools has a built-in tendency to make schools in difficulty spiral downwards, in its imitation of a competitive marketplace. But our most serious concern is the blame culture in education, initiated by the last government and spread by OFSTED's negative snapshot model of inspection. This has now led to calls for "incompetent" teachers to be "culled", to borrow a morally squalid term from deer hunting — and the interviewer from Greater London Radio who called me last week. As I have frequently reminded our ex-Director of Education, Gus John, the Hackney Teachers Association (HTA) signed a Capability Agreement over three years ago, which is both fair and calls for "reasonable" time to improve against professional targets. The other signatory to the agreement, of course, was Gus John.

The HTA now has excellent relationships with officers of the LEA and most headteachers and governors. Our education policies of increased advisory teacher support and a Hackney Education Forum to discuss educational matters, are receiving widespread acknowledgement as part of the way forward.

If politicians can be weaned from their unhealthy diet of soundbites and photo-opportunities outside "the worst school in Britain this week" and permanently exclude Chris Woodhead and the OFSTED process, then we can move away from blame culture and go on to help raise children's achievements.

LLB page 10

Something's rotten in the state of the Party!



Celia Foote

Party members met in Leeds on 7th June to discuss lack of democracy and honesty in the Party. Celia Foote, Leeds North East CLP, reports.

SCORES OF letters of support sent to Leeds North East CLP since its suspension detailed injustices in other parties, prompting our members to call a meeting to discuss these abuses to democracy. Party members have experienced: take-overs of Local Government Committees (LGCs) and Labour Groups by regional officials, councillors threatened with expulsion unless they obey officials' instructions in council votes, MPs who vote to have their own CLPs suspended in order to ensure their own reselection, and blatant racism by Party officials.

In one instance members were advised that membership verification would involve producing passports. Would you want to be a member of a club that did this? Neither did they. Many just left the Party and the sitting (white) MP felt easier about reselection. One LGC has been suspended for ten years on the whim of officials, without process, justification or appeal. Above all, there is secrecy: people are not told why they are suspended, what inquiries discover, what is reported to the NEC or what it, in turn, decides.

Democracy, accountability, and justice have long been rare within the Party machinery. By this spring it seemed they had become endangered species. By the end of Conference 1997 they may well be extinct within the Party if the *Labour Into Power* proposals are passed: instead of officials acting outside the rules, the rules themselves will be changed to remove any defence against arbitrary action. Behind the weasel language of "stakeholding" and "partnership" lurk measures to transfer all power for policy making, organisational matters and finance to the leadership. Activists will be replaced by Mandleson's Millbank mafia's marketing, and dependence on trade unions will disappear under state funding of political parties.

The leadership has backed off from its original plan to break both the power of Constituency Parties and the link with trade unions in one go, in favour of divide and rule: this year they come for the CLPs, next year for the trade unions. Trade unions who refuse to defend CLPs this year do so at their own peril.

The meeting in Leeds established DCLP, a campaign to fight abuse and defend constitutionality in the Labour Party. We want: ●a democratic Constitution; ●clear rules constraining the power of paid officials; ●investigatory and disciplinary procedures which are clear in purpose, scope and process, run honestly and impartially; ●Party Officers and officials who obey the letter and spirit of the rules; ●no abuse of the Party machinery to serve a faction rather than the whole Party. ●Please send us accounts of interference, coercion and authoritarianism against individuals or sections of the Party . A meeting in early September will organise for Annual Conference. Contact: Celia Foote, 24 St Martins Drive, Leeds, LS7 3LR. 0113-262 4667.

The inquiry into Leeds North East CLP, suspended since the end of January, opened in June. Constituency members fear the usual stitch-up. Two of the three members of the inquiry team are Eric Wilson and David Gardner, and it is serviced by Tony Slatcher. All three paid officials are the subject of allegations of wrongdoing by CLP members, so they will be investigating themselves! Reasons given by officials to the NEC to justify individual suspensions include, for example, that Mike Davies, vice chair, attacked the NEC on regional television. The truth is that Mike went on TV and defended the CLP only after the suspensions had been announced. He did not even mention the NEC. Still, one cannot expect mere facts to impede the Party machine...

Uxbridge overruled

Head office interference has demoralised the local Party, complains Cllr Peter Ryerson, Uxbridge CLP.

SIX DAYS after the general election, the re-elected Conservative MP died, so there will be a by-election. Many Uxbridge Labour Party members assumed we would have the same candidate, and were put out to discover the whole selection process would have to be gone through afresh. However, that's democracy — or so we thought.

The selection process has been rushed, and possibly not in accordance with Party rules. Meetings were held at very short notice to draw up shortlists and then invite possible candidates to speak at nomination meetings. In spite of the rush, sixteen nominations were made, half of them for the "sitting candidate", the rest spread among five other hopefuls. The nominated candidates were then invited to Walworth Road, where they were "interviewed" by the by-election sub-committee of the NEC. Two candidates were agreed to go forward to the selection meeting on 21st June. The local candidate, who is Deputy Leader of Hillingdon Council, is not on the list despite getting half the nominations. The two candidates who are on the selection shortlist have two nominations each — no explanation.

As a member who took part in the nomination process, I feel deeply aggrieved that I am given no reason — and there is no right of appeal — for my nomination being rejected. The local Conservatives are beside themselves with delight, and one leading Tory member said, "You've handed it to us on a plate."

It is interesting that the Chair of the by-election sub-committee, Richard Rosser, is a member of the Uxbridge Constituency, and the person nominated by his branch is on the shortlist.

A question of trust

"It's true that by-elections may have special pressures and sometimes require special measures, but this is still the general election honeymoon period. Apart from how it treats Party members and local democracy, what does it say to the electors about loyalty, consistency and building bonds of trust with the British people? And what about all those spare leaflets and posters which could have been re-used and will now have to be trashed?"

Ann Black, Labour Reform Group

Campaign Group: what next?

Just after the election the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups met to ask "What do we do now?" and to provide a socialist strategy for Labour. Bryn Griffiths takes a critical look at what was achieved and asks some difficult questions.

ALAN SIMPSON got it spot on when he said Labour's huge majority has resulted in a "hope explosion outside Parliament". Labour's vote has brought with it huge expectations from its supporters. New Labour sought to dampen down these expectations before the election but the sheer size of our majority ignited the hope explosion.

But can socialists harness people's expectations to revitalize the Labour left? The combination of economic circumstances, Blair's economic policies and the European Monetary Union will bring the Labour Government into conflict with its own supporters. Judging by the debate on health, Blair looks set to dash a lot of expectations.

The backlash if public spending and welfare benefits are attacked could create a wider audience for left policies. But a plunge in support for Blair will not necessarily result in an upsurge for the left — unless we act decisively.

To make progress we must present alternative policies in ways visible both inside and outside Parliament. Alan Simpson made a good start on an alternative policy framework when he said that we must articulate a "pro-European agenda in opposition to the monetarist policies of European Monetary Union". This focuses on the origin of public spending cuts, laying the ground for an internationalist response.

Since Alan Simpson spoke on 31st May, Blair has effectively sided with Kohl against Jospin. European socialists were surprised to find themselves subject to a Thatcherite lecture from the newly elected Blair after he had sought an audience with the high priestess of Euro-scepticism — Thatcher herself.

Our alternative must be the creation of a Europe-wide defence of social provision, an approach that has been strengthened by the election of the French Socialist Party on a wave of opposition to the European Monetary Union convergence criteria.

In addition to promoting a viable policy we need to be visible — to date the Socialist Campaign Group has not developed a convincing strategy to raise its profile.

The Network Conference stated that the Socialist Campaign Group should continue. Such an approach must be right. But the SCG must be constantly alive to the possibility of working with labour movement campaigns in and outside of the Party.

Recent experience suggests that the broadest coalitions can be built around specific issues such as the defence of Clause IV rather than accommodating to the Hain or Short wing of the Party. Broad alliances must be built with those prepared to oppose Blair's policies in the Party.

Ken Livingstone reported the encouraging news that five new MPs had joined the group. The real question is what will the Socialist Campaign Group do now?

For a left voice to be visible within Parliament it is essential that at some point left MPs vote against the New Labour whip. The issues must be chosen carefully but a failure to oppose would cut the Labour left off from developments outside Parliament. The left outside Parliament does not have enough authority to be seen to provide an alternative and if only few or no MPs opposed cuts in social provision a movement against cuts in the welfare state would have little weight within the "official" labour movement. This would leave the Labour left sharing Labour's unpopularity alongside Blair.

The risks involved in opposing Blair within Parliament are enormous. The danger is a "Nellist scenario" repeating itself writ large, with left MPs losing the whip and eventually their status as Labour candidates. To avoid this, we would have to take the campaign in support of the left MPs into the unions. Such a strategy could rebuild the left within the Party based on — and closely linked to — the strength of the unions. The Labour left would find itself at last giving a lead to the movement outside Parliament.

The first question for left MPs is "How can we oppose Blair in Westminster? How should left MPs make links with public opposition?" The issues should be chosen with caution to provide the best possible focus within the unions. The aim must be to maximise support — not to create martyrs.

The stakes for the Labour left are high. If we fail to articulate a policy alternative in a visible fashion, our critics in the Socialist Labour Party may be right to proclaim the end of the Labour left. Is the Labour left up to it?

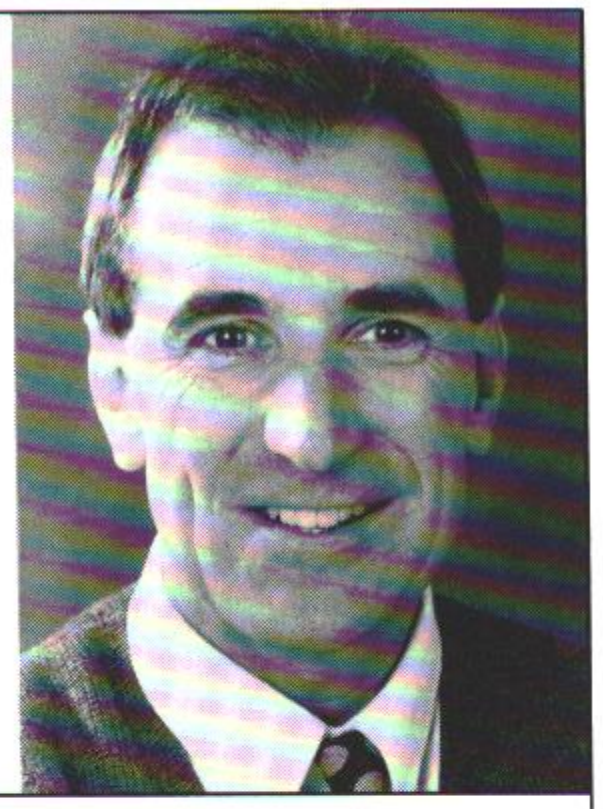


PHOTO: STEVE FRENCH

Campaign Group Labour Party Conference rally.

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the Alan Simpson column



The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

THE AMSTERDAM alternative summit: a crazy, incongruous weekend, riddled with contradictions and high excitement. But first, a couple of facts to put the record straight. It was bizarre, watching the British news broadcasts and hearing the event described as 'rioting' amongst the 20-30,000 people who turned up. Other countries — France, Germany and the Netherlands itself — openly acknowledge that over 50,000 people marched around Amsterdam. All were in opposition to the mass unemployment, job insecurity and social exclusion demanded by the Maastricht Treaty.

Dutch TV acknowledged that the rally had been good humoured and well organised. Even the main conflict — 2,000 Italians held on Amsterdam Central station — was fairly openly explained. But you couldn't miss the buzz of excitement in the air.

The British marchers were in high spirits. Whether they had come from Jarrow, Preston or anywhere along the way, the mood and the message was bubbling: "we want a People's Europe...of jobs, decent wages, housing, pensions and healthcare...and "no we don't want to steal it from the French, the Germans, the Spanish or the Greeks."

Marchers from 30 different countries, on 18 different "legs" converged on Amsterdam; the first pro-European, pan-European march for citizens' rights that I have seen. All rejected the recessionary, deflationary policies which Maastricht demands. All were asking for policies in the interests of people rather than corporations. All demanded that "listening" governments should listen to their people, not their financial institutions.

Two "alternative" conferences ran in parallel with the rally. They trawled on wonderful ideas and mobilisations in different countries. But they also brought questions. Why, when big unions across Europe supported the march, did the British TUC turn its back and urge non-support along the way? Why wouldn't Europe's leaders come out and meet them? Where was the breadth of Party support for the alternative sessions? If the official Summit understood that jobs were now the central issue in Europe, why would no leader spell out how these would be delivered and how they would be paid for?

CORPORATE Europe had already written the script for the official summit — more deregulation, the completion of the single market, greater labour market flexibility and competitiveness — but public Europe was moving rapidly in a different direction. Marchers, MPs and trade unionists from France pointed out that 800,000 jobs was not just a slogan from Lionel Jospin. It was a commitment that French people would hold him to. Chancellor Kohl may want non-interventionist policies but German marchers and workers wanted jobs. The common platform occupied by French and Belgian Renault workers also made it clear that there was no mood for allowing multinationals to play fast and loose with their location of production.

This was a more confident, assertive and internationalist mood than I have come across for some time. Green and environmental campaigners joined with trade unionists to spell out some of the practical ways in which jobs could come by setting a new ethical agenda which European counties would have to work to. Small and local businesses may welcome it but global corporations, locked in to a race to drive wages and conditions to the bottom of the barrel, will go spare.

Thank goodness for some clarity about conflicting interests in today's political economy. Thank goodness for the hope and irreverence of those who brought their ideas (and tired feet) to the streets of Amsterdam.

As the British marchers made their way through the various stages of their long march through Britain, towards the Amsterdam summit, they faced a contradictory response. Every town, city, trades council, collection of churches and local community, welcomed them with open arms.

But the press and the labour movement (whose rights they were championing) remained largely silent. In one important way, so too were Europe's leaders. None was willing to acknowledge that it is the Maastricht single currency which stands in the way of the jobs agenda demanded by a People's Europe. Only the marchers seemed willing to speak the truth about the Emperor's new currency. Only our leaders still retreat from admitting its nakedness.

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Going down the tube

An RMT Activist looks at Labour's dodgy plans for the future of London Underground.

AS I WRITE this, there are nefarious goings-on in a hotel in South Kensington where a seminar is taking place to discuss the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) on London Underground. This is not a gathering of transport experts, academics and politicians. It is a gathering of high-flying bankers and business people, the vultures whose interest in transport is limited to selective asset-stripping.

The seminar was organised months ago, even before the date of the May election was known. Presumably, the financiers understood that, no matter who formed the next government, there would be guaranteed rich pickings on the Underground.

John Prescott is not hiding the fact that he has long been an advocate of private financing of public transport. He has always taken credit for the original idea of PFI, which the Labour Party endorsed. As far back as 1994, Frank Dobson (then shadow Transport Secretary) addressed the RMT's Annual General Meeting, taking place during the prolonged signal workers' dispute. He could not find time in his address to give unconditional support to the signal workers. However, he was able to extol the virtues of the Northern Line rolling stock project, where GEC-Alsthom is building and maintaining new trains and leasing them back to London Underground Ltd. (LUL) for the next 30 years — at an exorbitant price!

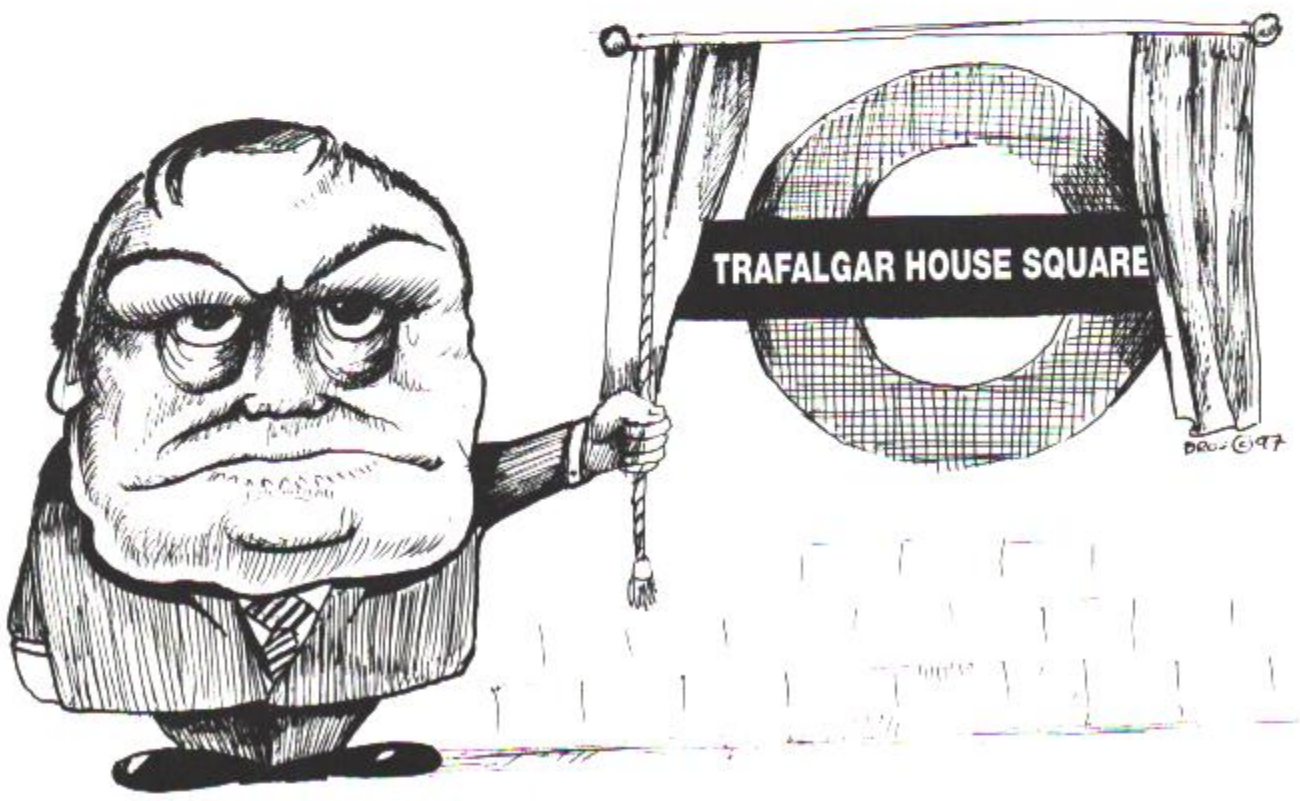
The Labour Party has now modified PFI to PPP (public/private partnership). Addressing the RMT Women's Conference in March, Gwyneth Dunwoody explained the crucial difference: under PPP the assets would remain in the public sphere. So, for example, the new Jubilee Line trains would still be owned by LUL, but they would be maintained and serviced privately by GEC's staff.

It would take too long to explain how inefficient and impractical this project is proving to be. That's their problem. What concerns RMT members is that these GEC maintenance workers will have lower pay and worse conditions and pension arrangements than their LUL counterparts, as TUPE arrangements will not apply to a new depot.

The public may not know that over the past five years much of London Underground has been quietly privatised. Catering, cleaning, advertising, building, security, parts of the infrastructure and rolling stock maintenance, some engineering and clerical functions, for a start. Nothing, we are told, is sacred, even ticket sales. Presumably, this fits in well with PPP, as it does not apparently compromise ownership of assets! However, even Gwyneth's paltry interpretation of Labour's intentions looks good compared to the *Panorama* revelations, which tell us that Labour is considering giving the private sector controlling interest in public transport.

The debate on "where will the money come from?" has overshadowed the issue of accountability. Take the Jubilee Line extension as an example. The project was given the green light, ahead of more favoured options such as Crossrail and the Hackney-Chelsea link, because the private sector was prepared to cough up. Olympia and York was prepared to back the project to link up with the Canary Wharf/Docklands yuppy property development. Toronto based millionaires had more to say about the development of London's transport network than did Londoners and commuters, who are now picking up the bill after Olympia and York's demise — vital repair work has been indefinitely postponed because of the JLE overspend.

The RMT has always had policy against PFI and its variants; its AGM will undoubtedly discuss these latest developments. However, the unions have been demoralised by the failure to stop the wholesale privatisation of BR. It was convenient to be able to blame the Tories. It's looking increasingly unlikely that they will be able to exercise the pressure on the Government to give us what we need: a Labour Government with the political will to find ways to raise and use public money for the underground and to establish a London-wide authority which would take back control of the Underground network.



We need free trade unions to defend the welfare state!

Conference

Saturday 19th July

Liverpool University Students' Union
Haigh Building, Maryland Street,
Liverpool

Speakers: Jimmy Nolan (Liverpool Dockers), Women of the Waterfront, Bob Crowe (RMT), Hillingdon Strikers, Michael Hindley MEP

Contact: Liverpool City UNISON, 4th floor, Produce Exchange, 8 Victoria Street,Liverpool L2 6QJ. Tel: 0151-236 1944, Fax: 0151-258 1247.

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Rocking the world: dockers plan new action

"WE'RE ON the verge of something big", says Liverpool dockers' leader Jimmy Nolan, returning from Montreal. "For once, we're in a position to hit the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company where it hurts", adds their international secretary

Chris Knight and Dot Gibson (London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers).

Terry Teague, "so we don't want our T&G leadership cutting across us with some shoddy deal just now".

Despite deepening financial stress affecting the 500 strikers, the Liverpool stewards have never been so confident. Leaders of the most powerful dockers' unions from five continents, meeting in Montreal, have resolved to hit shipping consortia and port employers across the globe in an unprecedented act of international trade union solidarity. Defying their own union leadership and also the bureaucratised International Transport Federation (whose President David Cockroft refused to attend or even send a representative), the meeting was convened by Montreal's dockers specifically to support Liverpool.

Precise dates have not been released, but the impact of their historic decisions will be felt soon this summer, when a synchronised 24-hour stoppage hits ports around the world. This will be followed by rolling international action specifically targeting the movements of ACL, CANMAR and other giant container vessels as they attempt to unload at affected ports.



PHOTO: ED HALL

"Workers of the world unite." Dockers march, 12th April.

This was the second such international dockworkers' conference, building on the astonishing success of the first, held last year in Liverpool. The credentials of the 54 delegates in Montreal were impressive. The General Secretary of the National Council of Portworkers of Japan, representing 35 ports, promised decisive action from his country. The 53 other delegates included leaders of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Association, the International Longshoremen's Association and other American giants whose recent solidarity actions have caused havoc along the United States East and West coasts. Marvin Mfundisi, vice-president of the South African T&GWU (in charge of dockers) promised action, as did Vladimir Vasiliev, President of the all-Russian Dockworkers' Union representing 23 ports in Russia and the Baltic.

A highlight of the conference was a special caucus of dockers' leaders from across Europe. In addition to stalwarts well- known from previous meetings, the General Secretary of the federation of all Spain's dockers' unions — Julian Garcia Gonzalez, representing 32 ports — was able to pledge support. For the first time also, Dutch dockworkers from the powerful FNV union in Amsterdam were represented.

Political discussion at the conference centred round Britain's new Labour Government. The conference sent a letter to Tony Blair urging him in the name of social justice to "right the wrong" done to the 500 dockers and their families. Julian Garcia Gonzales drew parallels with the Socialist government in Spain, which up to its election had strong links with the dockers' unions but which is now impotent in face of international shipping consortia who dictate policy to an elected government.

On the suggestion of Montreal dockers' leader Michel Murray, delegates broke off to watch Ken Loach's film on the Liverpool dispute. "At the end", reports Terry Teague, "there was deathly quiet around the room. They all knew they had to do something. The decision was taken — nothing short of physical action would suffice!".

It was decided that the next conference would be back in Liverpool. "It will be a celebration of our reinstatement", says Terry Teague, "and a signal to start the fightback the world over!" ❑

Victory for Thorpe and Brady

Pat Brady and Geraldine Thorpe, two senior lecturers at London Guildhall University who, with two others, were sacked last year on grounds of redundancy, have been reinstated.

The two were represented in their appeals to the Board of Governors by CAFAS (the Council for Academic Freedom and Academic Standards) with the support of NATFHE. CAFAS has waged a concerted campaign on behalf of the Guildhall Four, leafleting students, organising petitions and obtaining the support of eminent academics and MPs.

One central issue was whether any university can use so-called "redundancy" to cover what is in reality a general cost-cutting exercise. Protests against the sackings were also fuelled by the knowledge that Thorpe and Brady happen to be trade union activists and veteran campaigners for academic freedom who had previously been disciplined for writing letters to the newspapers.

The Guildhall Four have received widespread support. NATFHE at LGU took strike action last year, and continued with other forms of industrial action, including a ban on marking. NATFHE national conference declared: "Conference condemns the dismissal of the London Guildhall Four as probably illegal and requests Head Office to...secure the immediate rescinding of the dismissals". The AUT also passed a motion of support at its national conference.

• For more information contact Colwyn Williamson at cafas@swansea.ac.uk.

1997 Trade Union

Small signs for political trade unionism

June saw many trade unions holding their first conference under a Labour Government for 18 years. Tony Dale, Manchester UNISON, reports on what the unions want to see from Labour.

OBVIOUSLY the Blair Government is enjoying a honeymoon and conferences have been careful to avoid statements or motions which could be deemed too critical of the new Government and yet they have all consistently passed policies beyond Blair's agenda.

Nearly all the unions have called for a minimum wage of £4.42 per hour and have restated their commitment to full employment. Nearly every conference has passed motions calling for pensions to be linked to rises in wages.

The conferences have called for no more privatisation. Numerous motions have been passed demanding the bringing back into public ownership of the privatised utilities. There has been widespread support for ASLEF's conference call for a "fully integrated publicly owned and publicly accountable railway system".

The public sector unions have all called for a swift end to CCT and are suspicious about Labour's plans to introduce a "best value" scheme to replace it. Opposition to Private Finance Initiatives has been combined with disquiet over Labour continuing with tight restrictions on public sector spending.

All the conferences have been united in calling for increased trade union rights. While there have been calls for the repeal of all Tory anti-union laws the unions are concentrating efforts on getting the early implementation of the promises over union recognition and 'check off'. Conference after conference has expressed opposition to the existing convergence criteria for the European single currency. The GMB, TGWU and UNISON have all called for entry into EMU to be at least delayed. The unions want to see jobs and good public services at the heart of Europe and not the present priority of reducing public sector borrowing.

The unions have been discussing the *Labour into Power (LiP)* proposals. The Communication Workers Union (CWU) has opposed the proposals. UNISON's Affiliated Political Fund decided not to oppose them — a serious setback. Most other unions fall between these two positions. Many express reservations over *LiP* but avoid outright opposition. Decisions will be left until the final proposals are announced. The MSF conference reflected this confusion by supporting both the existing structures and welcoming the *LiP* consultation paper!

Despite the lack of clarity there is enough support for the sovereignty of Party Conference and enough reservations for the unions to have a mandate to oppose the final proposals. Even UNISON's disappointing decision includes the desire for "Annual Conference to remain the sovereign policy and decision making body". The battle for the union votes is far from over.

The problem remains union leaderships' unwillingness to defy Tony Blair openly. The 'modernisers' success so far has relied on the acquiescence of the unions. UNISON, GMB, TGWU, RMT, MSF, CWU, TSSA, GPMU and USDAW all have places on Labour's NEC - yet Dennis Skinner failed to get a seconder when he proposed a manifesto pledge of a minimum wage of at least £4 per hour.

If the unions used their power in the Party they could have a dramatic impact. The policies passed by recent conferences could lay the basis for campaigns for the basic policies we need. Nobody expects loud condemnations of Tony Blair but if unions started to campaign effectively for their existing policies they might just find they have more friends throughout the labour movement than they sometimes suspect.

PTC leaders turned over

THE ANNUAL conference of the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC) held at Bournemouth in May reacted with acclaim to the news that employees at GCHQ could again join trade unions. Delegates were less pleased to hear that the Government is looking for a no-strike agreement — a watering down of previous Labour commitments to restore all trade union rights at GCHQ. The President refused a request for an emergency statement from the NEC.

Conference called for the restoration of national pay bargaining, equal pay claims for women members and equal survivor benefits for same sex and unmarried partners under the Civil Service pension scheme. Delegates agreed to oppose Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) and EMU (under the Maastricht criteria).

The main debate was on the proposed merger with the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA). This was the first opportunity for Conference to debate the draft rules, seen by many as an attempt to concentrate powers in the hands of the NEC. Many amendments were carried, despite NEC opposition.

Delegates agreed that Conference and NEC elections should be annual (rather than biennial as proposed) and rejected proposals that major rule and policy changes agreed by Conference should be submitted to membership ballot.

Many amendments - some similar to those agreed by PTC conference - were carried at CPSA conference the following week. There are fears that the two NECs will pay no more than lip service towards negotiating amendments demanded.

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Conference reports

University staff vote to fight

Dr Steve Reicher reports on the AUT conference.

AT ITS RECENT Conference in Scarborough, delegates of the Association of University Teachers (AUT) resolved to prioritise a campaign against job losses. During a debate, which sprang from management plans to sack staff at Nottingham, delegate after delegate got up to reveal similar plans in their own universities. A conference which, to that point, had been one of the dullest in memory, came alive. A sense of despondency gave way to collective anger. An emergency motion was proposed from the floor which called for a national campaign against job losses including a national demonstration and support for local industrial action where appropriate. The motion was passed overwhelmingly.

AUT now has a mandate to mount a militant campaign to match up to the present crisis in universities — but no thanks to its leadership. The national executive had failed to spot the crisis and to present any campaigning alternative. The national president, who chaired the debate, consistently misjudged the mood of conference. Repeatedly he sought to curtail discussion only to be spontaneously overruled by delegates. It remains to be seen whether such a leadership is capable of implementing the policy passed by conference. Certainly, the success of the campaign depends critically on the determination of local activists.

One further point is worth stressing. Conference recognised that, in many cases, the specific decision to cut jobs can be put down to the macho managerialism of specific university administrations. However, the overall crisis cannot be dissociated from Government underfunding. It was agreed to call for an urgent meeting with David Blunkett in order to bring home the effects of Tory cash limits. It is not only in the schools that the years of Conservative neglect are now causing a crisis under Labour. Labour activists should be challenging this Government to address the crisis at all levels of education.



PHOTO: ED HALL

UNISON conference sadly voted to support the NEC's sell out of the Hillingdon strikers. But the struggle continues. Send donations to Hillingdon Strikers Support campaign, c/o 27 Townsend Way, Northwood, Middlesex, HA6 1TG. Photo: Hillingdon workers picket Pall Mall.

MSF looks both ways

The major decision facing the MSF conference this year was its attitude to a proposed merger with IPMS, a civil service union. IPMS had voted to defer the decision for further consideration and MSF conference passed a motion welcoming continuing discussions and the creation of a new union. But it reserved the right for a future conference to amend any new proposals and to take the final decision. It also made changes to the current proposals that strengthen the proposed new union's internal democracy and accountability.

The decision on *Labour into Power* was more confused. While welcoming the document and its proposals, amendments were accepted which entirely negated the main document, basically calling for no changes in the current structures! Unfortunately this looking-both-ways result leaves the union's delegation to Party Conference free to do as it likes and, on previous experience, they will support the leadership.

As always, some good policies — on the minimum wage, the welfare state, opposing anti-trade union legislation and much more — were passed. But the main problem is the continuing stranglehold of the right-wing bureaucracy and the weakening of the left. A discussion within the Campaign for a Democratic Union at the end of conference pinpointed the main tasks as rebuilding the left and bringing in new forces.

CWU rejects Blairism

This year's conference in Jersey overwhelmingly opposed the policies of the New Labour modernisers set out in the *Labour into Power* document — a slap in the face to its firmly Blairite leadership. The only speaker supporting the document was the Acting Joint General Secretary Derek Hodgson. His rather ludicrous appeal not to pre-empt the debate fell on deaf ears.

On past form, however, the union's NEC will now work hard to reinterpret conference policy somehow so as not to contradict *Labour into Power* when it mandates its delegation to Party Conference this year.

What was clear from the debate was that speakers were all members who had worked hard in the General Election and were not now willing to hand over power to the control of unaccountable Policy Forums. The message to the Party leadership from Jersey was clear: "It's our Party — and it's staying that way". ❑

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Trade union notebook

MSF activist Glenn Sutherland, sacked from National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux's head office after 19 years as a printer, was reinstated after 5 months by a majority decision of NACAB's Council. Ostensibly dismissed for unauthorised photocopying (of union material) he was chair of the MSF group and won unprecedented backing from his members, who held three national one-day official strikes in his support. Over 30 new members were recruited, the group has been revitalised by the actions, MSF strengthened organisationally, and the management style was totally rejected.

Ian McCartney, Trade and Industry Minister has called the Tories legislation banning check-off "unnecessary, burdensome and meddling". He says "individual employees do not want or need it. Employers face significant costs to comply with it. I know that employers and unions are facing the worrying prospect of a further round of reauthorisations this summer. I recognise the urgency of the issue... It is a priority for me as well. I hope to make an announcement very soon about our plans for repeal." Sounds encouraging — let's make sure he delivers!

Thousands of Sheffield Council employees walked out on strike on 28th May, shutting down whole departments of Sheffield City Council. The walkout was sparked by the Council issuing the first ever compulsory redundancy notice to a non-teaching member of staff. Several of the Council unions have a long-standing policy of walking out if a redundancy notice is issued and the response to the strike call has been fantastic.

A rally on the Town Hall steps at lunch time on 28th May was well attended, positive and noisy. The redundancy notice that caused the strike was issued to a Finance Officer at Ann's Grove School. This school is due to make a £12,000 surplus this year, yet the school's head is proposing that governors volunteer to cover the work of the "redundant" UNISON member. The seven UNISON members at the school have all voted for an escalating programme of strike action against the redundancy,starting after half- term.

UNISON members from across the Council continued their strike on 29th May and met at 11am in the City Hall to determine what further action to take. It was agreed to return to work and to request a ballot of the whole membership for a rolling programme of escalating action.

Meanwhile UNISON is re-balloting Council workers in four departments for strike action against up to 67 compulsory redundancies. In addition 148 compulsory redundancies are threatened for later in the year, as part of a package of cuts by the Labour Council. These include over 700 job losses, the "outsourcing" of finance and IT services and the total closure of the Department of Employment and Economic Development.

Due to a serious financial balls-up by management at the University of Luton in the last two years, exacerbated by other financial cutbacks, the University has made 16 non-academic and 33 academic staff compulsorily redundant. Both UNISON and NATFHE are holding strike ballots.

UNISON conference enthusiastically welcomed Labour's election victory. It also mapped out a positive policy agenda for the Labour Government. UNISON wants to see the early implementation of promises on: tackling youth and long term unemployment; a minimum wage and check-off. It also agreed priority should be given to education and health.

UNISON passed many policies which go beyond the present thinking of Blair and Brown. Conference restated the union's positions on a minimum wage on the formula of half male median earnings (at present £4.42), full employment, and pensions to be linked to wages and prices. Motions were passed opposing privatisation, CCT and Public Finance Initiatives and calling for the public ownership of the privatised utilities.

UNISON will oppose a single currency based on the Maastricht convergence criteria. This was combined with calling for the European trade unions to build a European wide campaign against the attacks on public services, the welfare state and workers' living standards.

At the local government sector meeting, Jon Rogers, Lambeth UNISON, successfully moved that the union should campaign for a 35 hour week. This was despite the opposition of UNISON's National Local Government Committee. This service group conference also passed a motion criticising the lack of detailed consultation during the negotiations on Single Status.

Conference was not all good news. Attempts to censure the union leadership for withdrawing official backing for the Hillingdon strikers were defeated on a card vote by 645,000 to 458,000.

There were also continuing worrying signs about the state of democracy in UNISON where the number of investigations and possible disciplinary action against activists are increasing.



PHOTO: ED HALL

Southwark college strikers lobby Labour Party HQ.

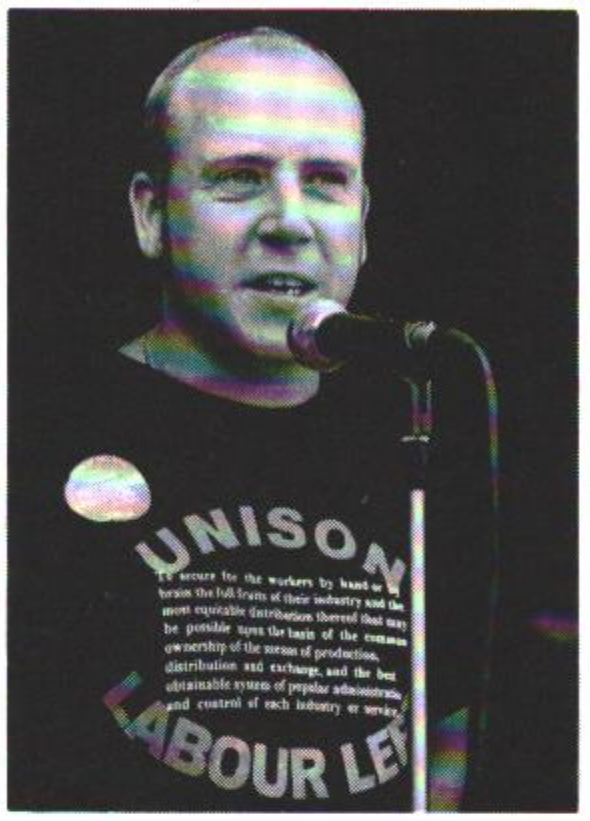
Southwark College strike

NATFHE members at Southwark College have been on strike for nearly three months in opposition to compulsory redundancies. NATFHE called a national demonstration in support on Saturday 21st June. The union has made many attempts to achieve a negotiated settlement to this dispute, but the employer is insisting on imposing compulsory redundancies and putting part time staff on agency status. The Principal at Southwark College clearly does not view the election of a Labour Government as heralding any changes in industrial relations in education!

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the Geoff Martin column

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



● You wouldn't expect me to kick off this column with anything other than a celebration of the most significant political event in modern socialist history — the appointment of Tony Banks as Minister of Sport. Within days of this revolutionary breakthrough the establishment — i.e. Liverpool and Man United — were on their knees as the internationalists of Chelsea FC, under the strategic control of the mighty Ruud Gullitt, lifted the F.A. Cup in front of the massed ranks of the downtrodden under the scorching Wembley sunshine. Of course, with Wembley being the piss-flooded Khazi that it is I could hardly see a thing from the small red plastic square that I'd queued for hours to acquire but it didn't matter.

● Eager to celebrate our first major trophy for more than a quarter of a century we hot-footed it down to the Fulham Road to our spiritual home only to find that the cops had closed all the pubs and turned the area around Stamford Bridge into a no-go zone. Apparently, the prospect of seeing Chelsea fans enjoying themselves after 26 years had proved too much for West London's finest. The clear message to the boys and girls in the clip on ties from Ruud, Zola and the rest of the crew is that they'd better get used to it.

● For a bunch of people who claim to be "modernisers" Blair and his crew are displaying some amazingly Victorian tendencies. Leaving aside all the stuff about single mothers and teaching school kids about the Empire, the New Labour Government has ditched an outgoing Tory plan to do something about the archaic licensing laws in this country. A scheme was in the pipeline to allow pubs to open until midnight on Fridays and Saturdays but this has been spiked by the Holy Joes, the Millbank Fundamentalists and the rest of the mumbo-jumbo merchants who drive New Labour policy. Of course, if TB wants a bit of a shant with his mate Bill he just steams off to a posh restaurant down by Tower Bridge where he can down £99 bottles of bubbly without having to worry about last orders. Sounds to me like grounds for adding the sex, drink and rock and roll brief to Banksies' portfolio.

● Picking up the Rock and Roll theme with a vengeance I can confirm exclusively in the pages of *LLB* that my new band has at last begun rehearsing. If you're ever passing a dodgy old railway arch behind Clapham Junction station and you hear the sound of wheezy thirty-somethings trying to keep up the pace on some old Clash numbers please stick your head round the door and shout a bit of encouragement. At the moment the band is operating under the working title of The Wildcat Strikes but at the time of writing we are drummerless and having to break all our own rules by playing along to a drum machine. Any drummers who think that they might be able to hack the pace and put up with the inevitable abuse should contact *LLB*. This is not a joke!

● I caught a band called Three Colours Red in action down at the Essential Music Festival in Brighton last month and if you get a chance to see them you should grab it. Their new album Pure also secures the GM rating. Take my advice and give it a listen.

The other highlight at Essential was Zion Train who did a storming dub-style cover of the old Ruts classic *Babylon's Burning* which was very, very special. Onwards to Glastonbury where Zion Train will be whipping it up in the Workers Beer Company tent. Full report on the West Country expedition next month. Mad for it!

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

Ravensbourne College strike

UNISON MEMBERS at Ravensbourne College of Design and Communication, Chislehurst have been involved in a series of three day strikes against plans to "market test" cleaning, caretaking, grounds and buildings maintenance, and the college shop! This follows negotiations which started back in February where the union made great concessions and met all the target financial savings set by management. Although a small (and badly paid) group of staff, the people targeted by this exercise have, between them, over 250 years' service to the College. Pickets have been maintained from 6 a.m. each morning, despite incredibly heavy-handed tactics from management and from the police.

The majority of students have stayed away from college and many who went in told pickets that they were in support but felt pressured by end-of-year work. Several NATFHE members respected the picket line. The strikers visited UNISON Annual Conference and were given a standing ovation. Management have now been forced to reopen negotiations.

● Visit the picket line (details on 0181-464 3333 ext.3273). The nearest BR station is Elmstead Woods.

● Fax the College's Director, Professor Robin Baker (0181-325 8320).

● Email messages of support to j.mckay@rave.ac.uk

● Send donations to "Bromley Unison", c/o John McKay, Chair, Bromley UNISON, Civic Centre, Bromley, Kent BR1 3UH. ❑

"Maintaining the torment"

Last year a right-wing populist strongman became President of Nicaragua. Mike Phipps looks at the first six months of the Aleman government and the Sandinista response.

A SECRET GOVERNMENT strategy document leaked recently argued that the government faced many problems, not least its lack of effective control of the army, police and judiciary. To retain power, it would have to purge the executive branch and concluded that the government had to "procure the weakening and even the rupture of the links between the FSLN and its bases of support. The first requires a social package: provide property titles to the poor, give out materials and credit, pardon or subsidise debts, support leaders. Secondly, the economic and financial oxygen that these groups receive from an array of NGOs, the majority of them close to the FSLN, should be cut. These first measures will bring tension ... An image of tranquillity should be projected in the media. With peace on the surface we will be able to maintain the torment underneath."

How do Aleman's first six months match up to this? The gap between intentions and achievement is revealing. 35% of the value of Nicaragua's exports goes on interest payments on the international debt, so it looks as if any "social package" may have to wait. This has led to the resignation of the Minister of the Economy, Francisco Lainez, who believes the government's IMF-dictated austerity policies "will result in a new social crisis."

Aleman looks likely to accede to IMF demands for more privatisation and deregulation. A controversial new tax reform has upset business and agriculture. Such actions are a prerequsite for winning crucial loans for the government. An estimated $480 million is needed immediately to guarantee the normal functioning of the economy in 1997. "Economic reactivation" was the centrepiece of Aleman's election campaign. Agricultural credit is vital economically and to drive a wedge between the productive sector and the Sandinistas. The limited measures announced so far came far too late to have a significant impact on this year's harvest.

Aleman's problems are compounded by a lack of control over the state apparatus. The army remains independent and the national assembly has voted through a greater than requested budget allocation for higher education.

A top priority for Aleman is the resolution of the property issue, a major concern of the new US Ambassador, specifically land and houses of former dictator Somoza confiscated by the Sandinistas and redistributed to 200,000 families. Many of Aleman's financial backers — Somoza supporters who fled during the 1979 Revolution — want the allocation of titles and compensation reopened. Talks on this between the government and the Sandinistas broke down, the regime resorting unilaterally to ruthless evictions, sparking national protests by the farmers' organisation UNAG.

To consolidate power and undermine allegiance to the Sandinistas, Aleman aims to develop a Somoza-style system of personalised patronage, reflected in his policy towards the public sector — a combination of politicisation and retrenchment. Three thousand job losses, mainly in health, were announced recently. Earlier this year, a policy of dismissals was instituted throughout the state sector — right down to school principal level — with career professionals being replaced by Aleman placemen.

Government confrontation of popular organisations has provoked stoppages and protests. Plans to create a new arch-conservative Ministry of the Family drew condemnation from 150 women's organisations, with a 2,000-strong protest march on the national assembly. Nicaragua now has the highest number of teenage pregnancies in Latin America and there are fears that Aleman's moral agenda will violate reproductive rights and the right to live without violence.

One of Aleman's first pledges was to exert tight control over the 1,000 NGOs operating in Nicaragua, which bring in over $60 million in aid annually, key to restricting NGOs sympathetic to the Sandinistas and offsetting cuts in the state's social sector. He proposes all aid is authorised by the government and NGOs be fined for failing to meet government norms.

But public opposition and the very real threat that the larger international agencies might withdraw completely have already produced big concessions. A demonstration to the national assembly forced withdrawal of the key proposal requiring government approval of all foreign donations.

Despite the strongman style, the government has made little headway in carrying out its blueprint. It has resorted to gesture politics — antagonising Cuba by including in its delegation to the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva a man jailed for running guns to anti-Castro terrorists, and banning street children from selling or begging at Managua's traffic lights.

The Sandinistas must unite the widespread opposition the new government is provoking. Yet their response has been mixed. While the popular organisations it leads have protested to defend their own interests, many criticise the FSLN for failing to offer a unifying strategy. Some accuse it of putting its own business interests first. The result is a great deal of anti-government rhetoric but a shortage of co-ordinated action against the regime.

On 11th June, the United Carpet Industries Labour Union brought out 20,000 workers in Lahore, closing all 130 workplaces in the city. Red flags flew outside occupied factories and above the four union "strike camps". A demonstration was held in temperatures of 40 degrees. The Lahore strikers are giving hope to Pakistan's 80,000 carpet workers. After 30 years without striking, workers are now demanding not only substantial wage rises but the implementation of labour laws in the industry, retirement pay, increases to protect their health and safety and an end to child labour. The average wage, Rs1600 ($40) a month, has not changed for three years while prices have risen more than 200%. Labouring long hours without protection, carpet workers' health suffers: chemicals used in the washing process burn the skin and cutting room dust goes straight into the lungs.
●Please send messages of support to: Ittchad Carpet Industries Labour Union, 40 Abbott Road, Lahore, Pakistan. Fax ++9242 7239128. Email: edu@found.edunet.sdnpk.undp.org.

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The Korean General Strike and the world-wide web

Paul Field interviewed Myoung-Joon Kim, film critic, political activist, Chief Producer of Labor News Productions and adviser to the Social Information Networking Group.



Myoung-Joon Kim (standing) at the offices of **Labor News Productions**, *Seoul.*

Q: What role did Labor News Productions perform in the recent general strike ?

A: During this strike, that symbolically represented workers' fightback against neo-liberalism, technologies that usually serve capitalist ideologies were used by activists for the empowerment of working people. Electronic communication and video were widely and effectively employed. LNP made two video reports on the strike, both immediately distributed throughout the nation using the network of democratic unions. Our newsreels combined reportage, analysis, local reports by each region, speeches by workers and citizens and music videos. Actual footage of struggle, that never appeared on mainstream TV, was captured by many un-named camera-persons. Working people used these videos as tools for information and discussion. They were also screened in other countries such as USA, Japan, Germany, France, Brazil and England. In addition, the videos were immediately placed on the Internet strike HomePage run by SING (http://kpd.sing-kr.org/strike) and were seen by a large foreign audience.

Q: How does the state in South Korea attempt to control the flow of information ?

A: Under the current laws, any person who is in the business of producing Korean movies or of importing foreign movies must register with the head of the Ministry of Culture and Sports or face two years imprisonment. They must also be a corporate entity in possession of capital in excess of a standard amount determined by Presidential Order, and must deposit that amount with a bank. Before a movie is shown in theatres it must be submitted to and approved by the Public Performances Ethics Committee. Any person who fails to gain approval but still shows the movies in public can be imprisoned for two years.

Similarly, anyone who produces or imports video products for sale, distribution, lending or supply for viewing and listening must also receive approval from the Public Performance Ethics Committee beforehand, and failure to do so can result in three years imprisonment. Currently, the police are investigating LNP on the basis of the video law. They want to attack us using the notorious national security law, but it's not easy for them to make use of this so they may make use of the video law instead.

When it comes to Internet and electronic communications, censorship is rather subtle, because this medium is new and its technology makes it difficult to censor. But some of the people who wrote in the electronic bulletin board have been arrested by the police using the national security law. Also, the government has formed a censorship committee on electronic communication.

Q: You are an adviser to the Social Information Networking Group (SING) that produced the excellent general strike Internet website. Can you describe in more detail the contribution made by such groups?

A: The Telecommunication Taskgroup for General Strike (TTGS) was made up of volunteers from many progressive communication groups, including SING. TTGS transferred urgent reports on the spot and regularly published news through the bulletin board system and the Internet. It used a mailing list to communicate between groups and individuals in Korea and all over the world, and constructed a WWW HomePage, that played a great role in arousing world-wide support. There was also the Blackribbon and Signature Campaign on the bulletin board and the Internet to protest against the amended labour law. TTGS also prepared on-line discussions about the amendments between leaders of the governing party and the trade unions.

Q: As a long-standing political activist, how do you assess the balance of class forces since the January general strike?

A: Thanks to the general strike, the political power of the workers has become stronger than ever. But, as there is no political representation, such as a workers party, labour party, or any other progressive or left party, workers lack any institutionalised political power and are simply left with a rather big national union and a collection of very small political groups who want to form a party. So, in the near future, especially during the presidential election in December, Korean progressive activists and workers must form some kind of political organising structure which will lead to the formation of a party. There are some arguments about strategy but all agree we need our own political representation and can never rely on the existing conservative parties.

Q: What are the priorities and challenges facing the Korean Confederation of Trade Unions in the future?

A: In my personal opinion, the priorities are: 1) establishing political representation for labour; 2) strengthening internal democratic structures of the unions to involve rank and file workers in decision-making; 3) developing a counter-strategy against new management policies based on increased competition and globalisation; 4) organising the millions of non-union factory workers; 5) developing solidarity with foreign trade unions — indispensable at this time of globalisation. In order to achieve these priorities, a modern communication strategy must play a key role. ❑

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Economists against EMU

An open letter from more than 300 European economists to European heads of governments was published in several European papers on 12th June 1997. In these extracts, the economists outline their objections to a single currency.

EUROPE IS contending at the moment with high unemployment, poverty, social marginalisation and ecological deterioration. The current design of Europe's economy does not provide adequate prospects of reining in these problems. The member states' national policies are clearly insufficient. The key question is whether the current plans for further European integration, and in particular for the EMU, will bring us closer to solutions...

This is a missed opportunity. A single European currency could be very advantageous and help to find the way to full employment with good quality jobs and social security. This and other relevant objectives could be reached through a common budgetary and fiscal policy favouring sustainable economic growth, and through the convergence towards high labour standards on wages, working time and work conditions. But this EMU is not a starting point for a modern European welfare state; instead it institutionalises the dismantling of the public sector in the member states and reduces the manoeuvring room for active social and fiscal policy...

According to the Maastricht Treaty, the member states must fulfil five convergence criteria in order to take part in the Euro. Along with requirements in the areas of long-term interest rates, inflation and national debt, another norm is that a state's budget deficit may not be higher than 3% of its Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Almost none of the member states now meets this requirement. Without regard to economic conditions, they have been put under great pressure to pass the EMU test: many among you have experience by now with the draconian austerity programmes that must be put in place in order to do so. What is remarkable is that this norm, which is doing so much social harm, has absolutely no economic basis...The reasoning behind these

From Brussels: a message of hope

Andrew Coates, Ipswich CLP, sees a new start for the left in the European Convention for Full Employment.

THE EUROPEAN Parliament is a glass and concrete megalith sticking out in an ordinary Brussels district. On 22nd and 23rd May the plush building looked even stranger to nearly a thousand delegates from trade unions, the unemployed and the marginalised from all over the continent. At the initiative of a group of MEPs, from Socialist, Labour, Green and Communist parties, the Parliament was opened up to two days of discussion on the question of employment. Thanks to excellent work by MEPs Ken Coates, Hugh Kerr and Stan Newens, among others, and their staff, scores of British participants were able to attend.

In Europe today, despite the enormous riches of the majority of its countries, there are over 20 million people officially out of work. As the Brussels Declaration issued at the end of the conference, declared, "Too many governments of Europe are prioritising monetary union at the cost of employment and cohesion." The dole queue is growing as public spending is reduced and labour is made more "flexible" — so it's easier to hire-and-fire. The task, the Convention asserted, is to get full employment back on the agenda. The left has to develop creative types of employment to meet social needs, from the environment to health. Given the reality of the integrated Euro-economy and institutional structures, no country, or left government — as Stuart Holland has argued in the summer issue of *European Labour Forum* — can do this in isolation.

Workshops at the Conference debated ideas such as Holland's plans for a European Investment Fund. Shorter working time — a major demand of many European left parties — was debated. A society of democratic equality was proposed to replace the "insecurity and social exclusion" faced by increasing numbers.

There are fundamental differences among European countries' unemployment systems. Most of Europe has insurance-based schemes, which only cover certain categories, and can terminate all benefit after a year or so. If you think the Jobseekers' Allowance is bad you should know that in France the expression *chomeur en fin de droits* (unemployed at the end of their rights) exists. Spain has large numbers not even covered by insurance. Soup kitchens and a measure of outdoor relief are the fate of many Mediterranean workless.

Yet there is a "convergence" of problems. As Europe does become more inter-related, it seems as if the worst features of each state predominate. Tony Blair's Government plans to coerce people into a shrinking labour market, badly thought-out training schemes, and workfare, and already there are many potential imitators abroad.

In contrast to the British Government's negative approach, speakers advanced plans for real job creation, an Employment Charter, union rights, improving women's working position, decent housing, and a strong public sector.

A notable amendment to the final resolution stressed the need for rights not for existing "citizens" of Europe, but for "all inhabitants". Christophe Acuiton from the Euro-March emphasised the need for continued united Euro-wide initiatives from trade unions, the unemployed and progressive social movements. That there was such unity between a wide section of the left, union movement, and unemployed, was itself a major step in promoting the Convention's "message of hope". This was a new start for the European left, symbolised by the work done by such leading Convention figures as Ken Coates and Frieder Otto Wolf to draw so many together.

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PHOTO: ED HALL

The British leg of the EuroMarch on the Amsterdam summit.

convergence criteria is drawn from monetarist doctrines that are not accepted by the majority of economists. According to these doctrines, reduction of budget deficits leads to lower inflation, and lower inflation automatically leads to more growth and employment. Recent economic research by renowned economists such as Akerlof, Dickens and Perry (1996), Barro (1995), Bruno (1995), Sarel (1996) and Stanners (1995) shows that this assertion cannot be verified empirically.

Even if you manage to bring budget deficits under 3% in 1998, you will still not have qualified for the Euro. As long as your national debt is above 60% of GDP and is not falling as quickly as is required, you will have to implement still more austerity programmes. This will certainly be the case if economic growth continues to be slow, which is not inconceivable given the ongoing spiral of austerity. The pressure on your budgets will remain high for still another reason as well: the Stability Pact that you adopted in Dublin forces participating EMU countries to reduce their budget deficits still further in the direction of balanced budgets. In short, in the years to come all member states will simultaneously have to adjust their national budgets further. Current and future recessions will be exacerbated...

Since Maastricht and Dublin included no restrictions on competitive fiscal policy, tax rates and revenues will be pushed downwards. This virtually rules out the possibility of member states reducing their deficits through additional tax revenues... The fiscal battles among member states are becoming steadily fiercer, and the consequences are already visible in the form of increasingly great income inequality, forced privatisations and social deprivation. We also foresee in the coming years growing competition in the area of ecologically harmful infrastructure projects (for example, hundreds of millions of Euros will be spent to build new or expand existing airports)...

The policy to be expected from the European Central Bank (ECB) will worsen the deflationary pressure that results from this merry-go-round of austerity. The ECB is in fact obliged to aim at price stability, and will work one-sidedly to watch over the hard Euro...As the only significant European body making socio-economic policy, the ECB will encounter scarcely any meaningful opposition...As George Soros recently remarked, the economy is too important to leave in the hands of central bankers!

Exchange rate adjustments will of course become impossible once the Euro is in place. And because interest rates will soon be roughly the same everywhere, and the mobility of labour across European frontiers is (still) slight, and financial transfers have not been provided for, the countries in the EMU will soon have only one instrument left at their disposal in order to cushion economic shocks: government expenditures. But as we have just seen, even that instrument has been taken out of governments' hands by the Stability Pact. This means that labour will be handed the bill for economic recessions, in the form of rising unemployment, falling wages, and still greater flexibilisation.

We call on you to reconsider this EMU project. Not that we ask you to put an end to European co-operation; on the contrary. A common currency and monetary policy could offer considerable advantages. But this EMU is governed by timeless criteria and dogmas. Wise economic policy must not be replaced by rigid rules, but must be determined essentially by circumstances.

This is also a question of democracy: the framework of the EMU is wrongly discharging you and your colleagues from your precious democratic duty to take responsibility for your political choices. Under the current conditions, this EMU offers no perspective whatsoever of an adequate response to environmental problems, of improvement in the lot of Europe's 20 million unemployed and 50 million poor or for the defence and extension of the welfare state...We are firmly convinced that the greatest danger for Europe lies in the design of this EMU, which has already led millions of Europeans to identify Europe and the Euro with austerity policies and social suffering. It is high time that politicians realise: the peoples of Europe have the right to an economy that serves the interests of human beings.

- The open letter was co-ordinated by the Dutch economists Geert Reuten, Kees Vendrik and Robert Went, and was signed by 66 British economists.

Left victory in France

Andrew Coates, Ipswich CLP, analyses the prospects for France's new government.

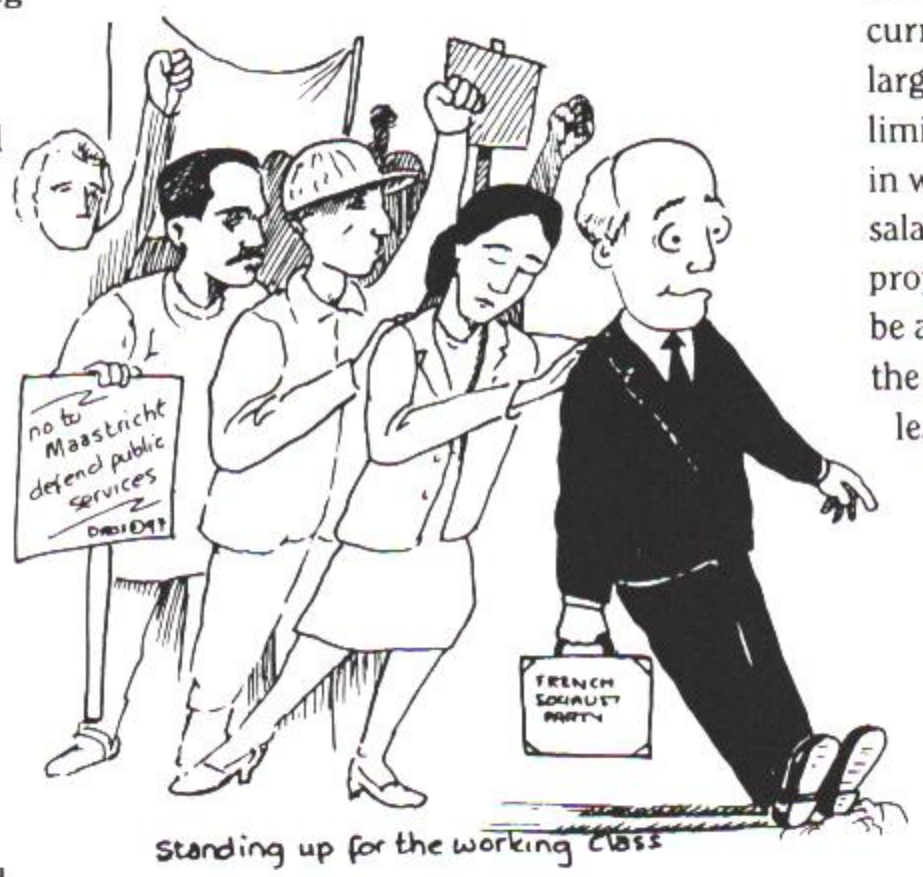
THE FRENCH Left won an astounding victory on 2nd June. The Socialists have shown that an alliance of the left, and not a turn to the "radical centre", can win votes in Europe. A 319 strong majority coalition in the National Assembly, made up of Socialists (PS), Communists (PCF), Left Radicals (MRG), Citizens Movement (MDC), and Green (Verts) is the result. Having nearly swept the board in 1993, the right was reduced this time to 256 seats, and the far right Front National (FN) secured only one deputy.

The French Socialists now stand in vivid contrast with New Labour. Downgrading spin-doctors and opinion polls, the PS listened to social movements. They addressed the issue of social justice and the concerns of those who participated in the 1995-6 mass revolts. The party put forward a record number of women candidates (though very few blacks or Arabs, and even fewer workers). Their programme took a critical stand on the Euro convergence and on privatisation. The creation of 700,000 jobs for young people was proposed, and the union demand for a 35 hour week without loss of pay was adopted. The Socialists were able to sustain an alliance with the Communists, and the anti-Maastricht Movement des Citoyens, led by former Foreign Minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement.

The historian Emmanual Todd explained the result of the first round of the elections simply: "When a President of the Republic is elected on one programme and applies another, keeps in place an unpopular Prime Minister, and dissolves the National Assembly against the spirit of the Constitution, it's normal that the electors aren't happy."

Although Chirac was forced to retreat on plans to break up the welfare state in the face of the social upheaval of 1995-6, he imposed fiscal austerity and proposed a further attempt at labour and welfare "reform". At the same time his close colleagues have been implicated in corruption. It is no coincidence that the National Front came top in Toulon where the official right-wing candidate was up to his neck in dubious financial deals.

Le Pen's party played a big role in destroying Chirac's chances. Unable to win himself, the far-right leader used his position as a "referee" to punish his enemies in Chirac's RPR and its partner, the UDF. In the last election over three quarters of the FN's voters transferred their support to the RPR/UDF in the second round. This time it was under half. The result may have played a part in Chirac's attempt to appeal to Eurosceptic sentiment by putting forward the anti-Maastricht Philippe Seguin as his preferred Prime Minister.



Standing up for the working class

The Wednesday after the election Prime Minister Jospin announced his "pluralist" Cabinet. The Communists are in government for the first time since the early 80s. Dominique Voynet, a left-wing Green (her party includes many 'New Left' activists), is now Minister for the Environment. Martine Aubry is Jospin's "number two", in charge of employment and social affairs. Aubry is on the modernising wing of the PS, though unlike her New Labour counterparts she has had genuine involvement with the workless and marginalised.

More significantly, Hubert Vedrine, a former Mitterrand aid and a key architect in the Maastricht negotiations, heads foreign affairs. This is the area where the President and PM have to work together, notably over Europe. There is no one in the cabinet from the PS's own left wing, the Gauche Socialiste, who are hostile to monetary union.

Lional Jospin faces many difficulties. The reaction of financial markets and the European partners became more important as power neared. When it became probable that he would win Jospin began to tone down his promises. "Conditions" on the single currency became subject to discussion, and largely a matter of the 3% budget deficit limit. The 35 hour week without a reduction in wages was modified to include restraint in salary demands over three years. The proposals for youth unemployment were to be adopted over three years. Opposition to the privatisation of France-Telecom became less categorical.

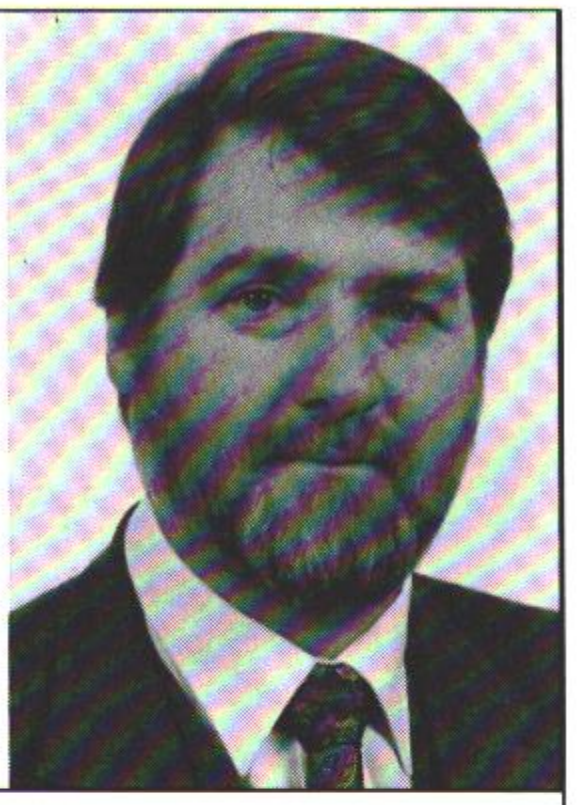
Jacques Delors expressed the hope that the PS's modernisation of French institutions and approach to European integration would prove that "adaptation to globalisation" was not incompatible with "social progress". The PS wishes to develop a non-monetarist alternative to Maastricht, but room for manoeuvre is narrow. Chirac, even with his party imploding, is not about to give Jospin a free hand. In Europe Gordon Brown has taken Thatcher's tattered mantle and free-marketeers are suspicious of expanded public services, not to mention the 35 hour week.

Many PS leaders may find it more comfortable to retreat to their familiar ministerial offices than to confront business and finance. How will the newly influential left of the Party, figures such as Bernard Thibault of the Gauche Socialiste, the Communists, and the MDC, react to the single currency? How can the PS challenge the power of the financial institutions and multinational companies that dominate Europe? Just after the election Louis Viannet, Secretary of the CGT union, stated that it was important that activists did not wait for change to come "from above" but started as of now to press demands from below.

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the Michael Hindley column

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



EVEN BEFORE the jubilation of New Labour's victory has died down, and with the ink scarcely dry on the reams of leader articles saying the only way ahead for Europe's left is to embrace the free-market and choose telegenic evangelists as leaders, the French go and elect — with a landslide matching our own — a definitely uncharismatic Old Labourite, Lionel Jospin, who says that the free market is a danger to civilisation. Is this simply a case of France's renowned cussedness, or (whisper who dares inside the lobotomised New Labour Party) could it be that there is support out there for more radical politics than spin doctors tell us?

"The French won't be able to deliver" a jaundiced Blairite told me, almost willing them to fail, just to show we were right in trimming our own aspirations to the bone. There is no doubt that France's last attempt at expansion in the early 1980s failed when a run on the franc halted their attempts at reflation in one country. Now they need allies to attempt their laudable aim to cut unemployment by cutting hours of work. The crucial question is: will New Labour be an ally or a brake on a European reflation so desperately needed?

The venue of the Socialist leaders' meeting the other week in Malmo, Sweden, was all too symbolic of the vacuity of New Realism. It was a former Saab automobile plant by a derelict dockyard converted into a conference centre; skilled engineering jobs had been replaced by part-time low paid workers staffing demonstration stands — and economic planning reduced to hoping to beat Manchester in hosting the next world tiddlywinks championship.

There was much talk of the future of the single European currency. I must confess to being embarrassingly close to being proven correct in my long held view that the Euro on the present timetable and criteria is not only undesirable but actually unworkable. But the left needs to put forward alternatives.

A REVIVAL of the "Hard ECU" as a parallel currency, is one way of keeping the issue going. If it works, people will use it, and if people use it, it will work. There is a need for a reserve currency — a standard against which different economies can be measured and evaluated.

The last time this was proposed was by John Major, but stealing Tory ideas has proven to be no embarrassment for the New Labour Party.

Personally I suggest just postponing the whole issue of a single currency and concentrating instead on creating jobs. That certainly means a real discussion on how to cope with what is obviously a much diminished need for labour in the world of advanced technology in traditional manufacturing. One obvious starting point is sharing out the available work, as Jospin is beginning to suggest, and as some enlightened Scandinavian countries have done for some time.

CLEARLY, the new technology contributes to profitability, and profits are rocketing, so how to share the profits and reinvest them is as vital as ever a debate. Which brings us to "stake holder society" — a PR wheeze that was in danger of catching on and had ordinary people asking just how their stake would be exercised — share options, co-operatives, democratic control over investment of pension funds, etc.

You can see why it was hastily dropped by the Blairites. So we could begin to discuss a European stake holder society. France could be swayed from its commitment to cutting hours if we do not develop a European reflation and jobs programme, for France cutting hours unilaterally without loss of wages would certainly make France "uncompetitive" against a Britain where market-forces are accepted and the minimum wage when it comes will be less than half the European decency level.

Rather than fiddling round with the timetable and fudging the criteria for Single Currency — as we may still yet end up doing — surely it is time to talk about a different kind of economic convergence. Clearly no country can reflate alone, but equally the French Socialists cannot be held back by the other Socialist leaders' timidity. To put it another way, Blair may have made his peace with the market economy but should the European labour movement?

The media, and elements in our Party, are already rubbishing Jospin as "unrealistic" when in fact the French Socialist government is giving a boost to the aspiration of millions of ordinary people whose opposition to a free market Europe is not based on xenophobia, but on the simple desire for work and to hold on to the social welfare labour has wrung from capital.

EuroMarch reaches Amsterdam.



PHOTO: PETE FIRMIN

France needs allies

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Money before principles

Nestlé is to have a stall for the second year running at Congress. Leonora Lloyd reports.

WHY SHOULD a company famous mostly for romance over coffee and sickly sweet chocolate be so keen to have a stand at a trade union get together? For the same reasons as Nuclear Fuels and the privatised, fat cat industries — to gain respectability and counter labour movement boycotts and propaganda.

In the case of Nestlé, it is their baby food selling practices in the Third World that are truly objectionable. For many years, Nestlé and other baby milk companies have been selling their products in third world countries where a majority of mothers are ill-equipped to use them and cannot afford to buy enough to feed their babies properly. As a result, millions have died from dehydration, malnutrition and infections. Women, losing the natural contraceptive benefits of breast-feeding, get pregnant again too quickly, leading to increased deaths from botched abortions and too many pregnancies. The whole sorry saga contrasts with the tale the baby milk companies try to tell of wholesome products and ethical practices.

When the companies advertise, they are supposed to stress the benefits of breast-feeding. These include building the baby's immune system; prevention of stomach infections; cheapness and on-tap convenience. But these statements are overlaid with images of happy, healthy fat babies, white-coated "health advisors", free gifts given to mothers in hospitals and so on. Breast-feeding is painted as old-fashioned, while bottle-feeding is modern and western. Instructions are not always in the local languages and when local laws forbid selling milk for very young babies, "follow-on" milks are advertised in such a way that mothers buy them for their small babies, with even greater risk to their lives and health.



PHOTO: STEVE FRENCH

Leonora Lloyd

Nestlé is the most relentless in breaking the code while claiming it has not. At one time, the boycott of Nestlé was agreed by the Church of England Synod, but it suspended this after being assured by the company that it was now obeying the internationally agreed Code of Practice. However, the Interagency Group on Breastfeeding Monitoring recently commissioned independent research. Women and health workers were interviewed in Thailand, Bangladesh, Poland and South Africa. As a result, the recently published *Cracking the Code* showed numerous violations by Nestle, Gerber, Milco, Nutricia and Wyeth, particularly in Poland. While countries like India (which recently prosecuted Nestlé) have had time to develop local laws to implement the Code, the ex-Stalinist states are wide open to these newer forms of exploitation and are vulnerable to companies seeking new markets as the Code starts to bite elsewhere.

The Women's TUC overwhelmingly condemned the proposals to have a stall at Congress, but John Monks continued to defend the decision on the grounds that Nestlé is a "good employer". In its annual report, MSF suggested that objectors visit the stall and remonstrate with the exhibitors — who are unlikely to be directors or even managers of the company! Concerned trade union women have already discussed rather stronger and more public action and a leaflet explaining the background for trade unionists is being prepared.

●What you can do: pass resolutions in your union urging that there is no Nestlé stall at the TUC Congress. Join Baby Milk Action (01223-464 420) and get a full list of Nestlé products — boycott them!

Victory for choice

Lynne Kelly was not the first woman whose partner took her to court attempting to prevent her having an abortion. Leonora Lloyd reports.

ALTHOUGH THIS was the first Scottish case, there have been a number of cases in England and others in Europe, a couple of which were taken to the European courts. In every case the man lost.

Lynne Kelly's ex-partner is a violent man who was convicted of assaulting her last year — something about which he lied in court, but the press exposed him. He openly declared that he had no intention of supporting the resulting child — and, indeed, he has another child, now aged three, whom he does not support.

Neither the church, despite the propaganda it had put out about abortion before the election, nor any anti-abortion organisation appear to have supported him and he dropped the case when he ran out of money. Although a Scottish tabloid paid him for his story, most of the press supported Lynne — reflecting public opinion. She had her abortion, saying afterwards: "I've no regrets."

Meanwhile, the much-hyped offer by Cardinal Thomas Winning to give money to pregnant women not to abort has been quietly forgotten. No woman is known to have come forward — although people did make donations!

Overall recent events have strengthened the pro-choice forces in Scotland and emphasised that public opinion is on their side.

Our money or his life?

Stefan Tobler of Brazil Network looks at the real media scandal behind the tabloids' exposé of a Brazilian Aids sufferer.

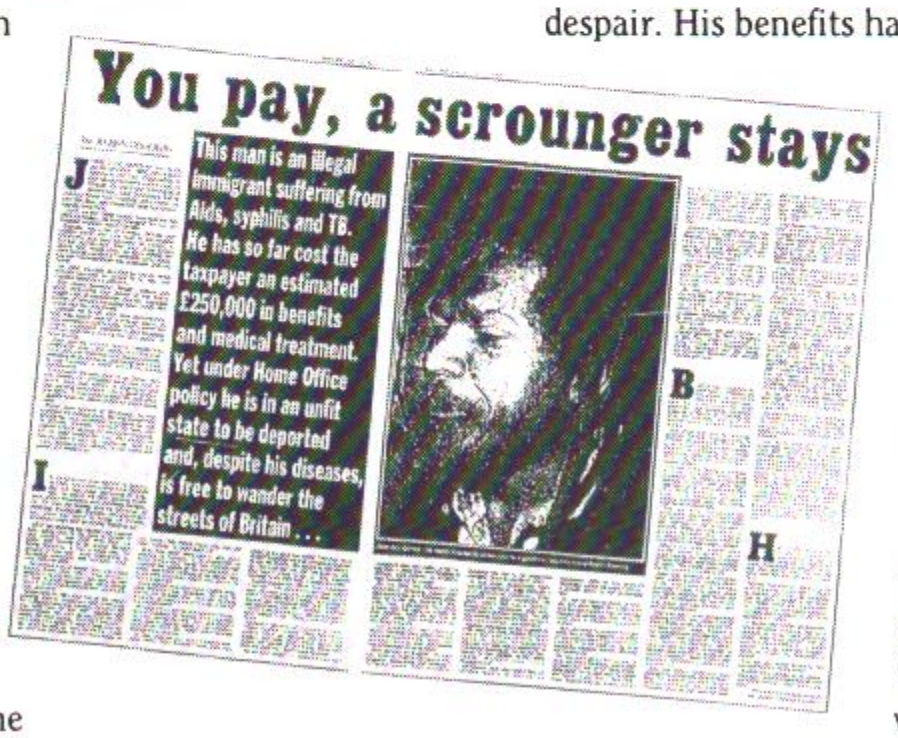
ON 14th April Jose Tadeu dos Santos, known as Piazza to his friends, was a Brazilian musician dying of AIDS in Mildmay Mission Hospital.

By 18th April Jose had become "an illiterate syphilitic", one of an army of "dead-beat infectious South Americans" (Norman Tebbit, *The Sun*) and a twisted version of his life had appeared in the *Evening Standard*, the *Daily Mail* and the *Sun* which showed him as an irresponsible, uneducated scrounger, living on benefits and grants that he frittered away on marijuana. The tabloids had found a model scapegoat: a black AIDS victim from the developing world who had been receiving British taxpayers' money.

The exposé first appeared in the *Evening Standard* with the headline "£250,000 scandal of Aids Man Britain Can't Expel". This article, by the journalist Jo-Ann Goodwin covered three pages and was reprinted in full in the next day's *Daily Mail*.

Although some readers thought the journalist sounded like an ignorant BNP member, Goodwin is in fact married to a black Brazilian, Gilmar Cruz da Silva, Piazza's closest friend. Through Gilmar she befriended and ingratiated herself with many Brazilians. She told them that she wanted to write something to help Piazza.

Not content with scapegoating Piazza in the national press, the article exposes Piazza to potential harassment by printing a photo of his house and telling us which borough it is in.


You pay, a scrounger stays

This man is an illegal immigrant suffering from Aids, syphilis and TB. He has so far cost the taxpayer an estimated £250,000 in benefits and medical treatment. Yet under Home Office policy he is in an unfit state to be deported and, despite his diseases, is free to wander the streets of Britain . . .

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Many people were angered by the article. "He is cultured," his friend Jose Pedroso wanted people to know. "It's not everyone who can play music as well as Piazza. The article gives the impression that he came to this country with the intention of living off the system. He is such a simple person, he didn't even know there was a system."

The whole episode has left Piazza in despair. His benefits have been stopped. There is now talk of deporting him back to Brazil, although in Brazil care for poor people with AIDS is far from satisfactory. His closest friend, Gilmar (Goodwin's husband), he can no longer trust. He knows too that as a result of the *Evening Standard* article a Brazilian TV station contacted his mother and told her that he is dying of AIDS, which he had always hidden from her. A real media scandal.

1966 and all that

Dave Farrar's Eye on Sport

• Dave Farrar is co-author of *From Arundel to Zimbabwe — a cricket follower's guide to British and International Cricket Grounds*, available from London League Publications, PO Box 10441, E14 OSB for £6.50 p&p.

THE COMBINATION of sport and politics can be a lethal cocktail or at least a cock-up tale. One of our abiding myths is that Harold Wilson won the 1966 general election on the back of England's 1966 World Cup win. A chronological impossibility since Wilson won in March and England in July. Wilson may have inspired Alf Ramsay's boys but I doubt it.

Do you remember the cricket team that were shot out by a chicken farmer in Zimbabwe just six months ago? They are now being lauded as the Aussie tamers. In the grim midwinter the underperforming sporting sides added to the underachieving Major Government; now *The Sun* trumpets British success at football, rugby and cricket! It reminds me of the Scottish press in the run-up to the 1974 World Cup. Their enthusiasm was described as "premature Jock elation" but they all finished with egg on their faces.

It has been suggested to me that this short-lived sporting success is Tony Blair's repayment for *The Sun*'s election endorsement. Now that the English boys are worth watching Old Rupe can bring in Pay Per View!

I was nearly (I said nearly) tempted to get up at 5 am to watch my home town Rugby League team, Salford, play in Adelaide in the World Club Championship. This is a competition so bizarre it's sure to be a collector's item. It consists of shuttling 22 teams between Europe and Australasia in a frantic three week period. It expects to lose £2 million, but as it underwritten by Mr Murdoch, and sponsored by Visa, who cares?

Getting back to Pay Per View, it's curious that the only sport (at least in the UK) where it has been tried is boxing — which is also the only sport where the action can be over in 10 seconds (and with Prince Hamed it usually is). Still, that leaves more time for the adverts. I think even Rupert Murdoch would fail if he tried to sell the Pilkington Cup Final as PPV, judging by the last two. Rupert might even have to pay people to watch it. Enjoy the feel good factor while you can. It won't last.

FIGHT RACISM

Lloyd Bent must stay

The case of Lloyd Bent, a Jamaican citizen imprisoned in Winson Green, Birmingham, under Britain's harsh immigration laws, received national publicity after he took part in a three week hunger strike along with fifteen other detainees. Lloyd feels that his action has helped publicise the continuing scandal of detentions and deportations.

Lloyd's hunger strike was to protest at his continued detention in poor conditions in a high security prison. Yet this is only the latest example of Lloyd's appalling treatment since he was detained, originally at Rochester prison in February 1997.

Lloyd has now been granted legal aid to commence proceedings for damages for assault and battery after an alleged incident that took place at Rochester Prison on the day he was being transferred to Winson Green Prison in Birmingham.

- For more information, contact: Lloyd Bent Must Stay Campaign, c/o NUT Office, Town Hall, Catford, SE6 4RU. Tel: 0181-690 1320. Fax: 0181-690 7925.

Lloyd Bent's wife Monica and their children lobby the Home Office.

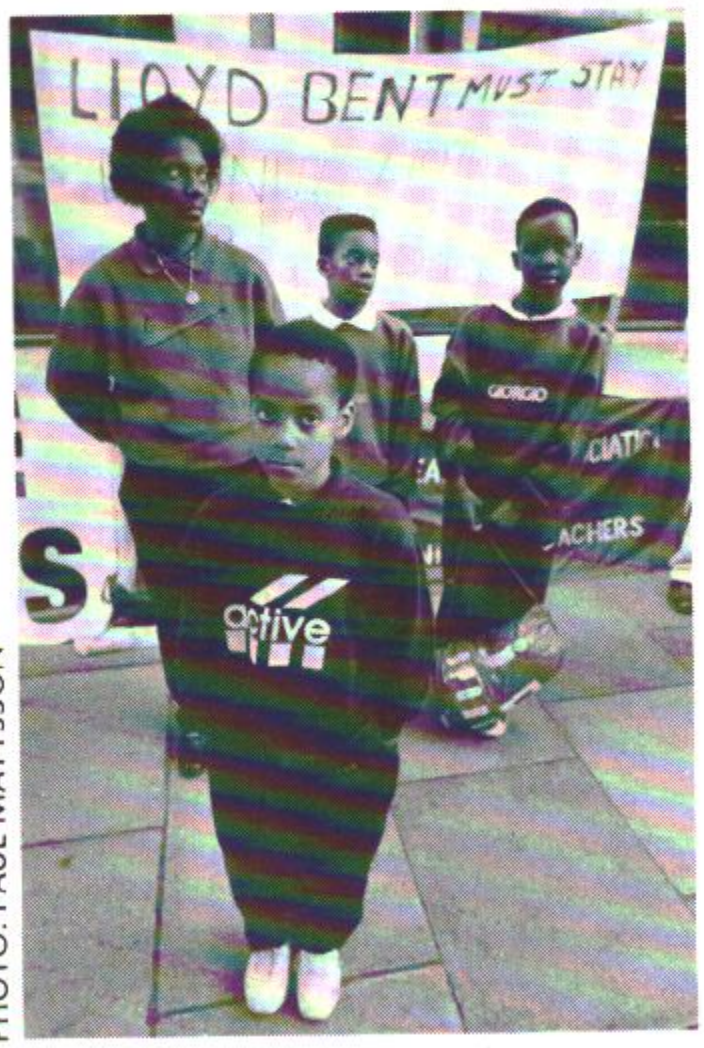


PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Abdul Onibyo alive

FOR SO LONG the fate of Abdul Onibiyo, deported back to Nigeria from Britain in October 1995, has been anxiously awaited by his family and supporters. After several unsuccessful attempts, Abdul fled Nigeria to a neighbouring country following imprisonment by the Abacha regime. Campaigners have urged the Home Office to allow him entry back into Britain urgently.

It is now clear that Abdul was handed over by British immigration officers into the custody of Nigerian officials at Lagos airport. It is also clear that while the Nigerian Government claimed it had never detained Abdul, and Ann Widdecombe and Michael Howard were making claims that Abdul was safe and well, he was suffering the unspeakable horror of detention in Nigeria. It was only the campaigning and eventual offer at the very last minute of "safe haven" from Guyana which saved Ade from sharing the same fate as his father.

The injustice which has been done to the Onibiyo family, torn apart by the Tory Government, is unfathomable. The family's solicitor and MP Jeremy Corbyn have made urgent representations to Mike O'Brien Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Immigration and Nationality) to allow Abdul entry clearance. He is in need of urgent medical attention and there are major fears for his safety until he is back in this country.

This family must be given the chance to begin putting back together the pieces of their lives. Abdul is alive despite his horrific ordeal. The new Labour Government hold his fate in their hands and has the opportunity to right the wrongs which have been done to him by bringing Abdul back to England, to be re-united with his family.

Detainees attacked

A number of detainees held in Greenock prison in Scotland were subjected to a racist attack by a large number of armed convicted prisoners on 21st May 1997. None of the detainees suffered any serious injuries.

In 1995 Scotland's chief inspector of prisons Clive Fairweather, condemned the practice of keeping detainees in a criminal regime. He said that detainees "are subjected to a criminal subculture in which violence and drug abuse are common and from which they can expect racial taunts and intimidation." In his report in 1995, he made recommendations for the separation of detainees from convicted prisoners, but this was never acted on. Fax letters of protest to the Home Secretary Jack Straw (0171-273 3965) demanding the practice of holding detainees in penal establishments is ended immediately.

Fleeing from Angola

Pauline Necua Ndombele fled war-torn Angola in March 1996 with her two sons, then aged three and eight. Her husband had gone into hiding three years earlier soon after the birth of their younger son and she has not heard from him since. Pauline and her children were sheltered by the pastor of her husband's church for the next three years until he was able to help them make their escape to England. She asked for asylum as soon as she arrived in England but her request was turned down in August 1996. Although the civil war which has raged for many years is officially over and elections have been held, the fighting continues and in Pauline's province there are killings every day. She is appealing against the Home Office decision and hopes that she will be granted leave to stay, that her children will be allowed to grow up in safety in this country, and that she too can make a new life for herself here. Her appeal hearing is in November 1997.

- If you want to write to the Home Secretary to support Pauline's appeal and her Home Office Reference no is: N213066, her file is being dealt with by The Immigration and Nationality Directorate, Asylum Directorate, Team 9, Module 5, Home Office, Lunar House, Wellesley Road, Croydon CR9 2BY. For more details, contact "Pauline Must Stay" Campaign c/o Newfield Primary School, Longstone Avenue, London NW10 3UD, fax: 0181-961 8517.

The four cases on this page are being backed by the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns. Contact them at 22 Berners Street, Birmingham, B19 2DR to give your support.

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La lutte continue

Benoit Martin of the Payday Men's Network explains why the fight of the Sans-Papiers is not over yet.

CONTRARY TO press reports, the Sans-Papiers (undocumented immigrants and asylum seekers in France) have rejected the government's recent offer. On 10th June, the newly elected Parti Socialist (PS) announced they would grant leave to stay on a "case-by-case" basis and introduce a new immigration law in September. On 14th June, the National Co-ordination of Sans-Papiers met to discuss the offer. Delegates representing 21 collectives all over France passed a resolution demanding a widening of the regularisation criteria so that no one is excluded, renewable 10-year (not temporary) permits, Sans-Papiers participation in a Commission monitoring the regularisation process, a moratorium on deportations and release of those in jail. This was endorsed by a mass meeting of 1,300 Sans-Papiers that same day.

Although the government is responding to the movement, its proposal falls short of the Sans-Papiers' demand of "papers for all". Only 10,000-40,000 of the 250,000 Sans-Papiers may benefit from the Socialists' proposal. As Madjiguene Cisse, main spokeswoman of the National Co-ordination and of the St. Bernard Collective which has led the movement, warns: "When the Sans-Papiers turn up at police stations to get their papers, they may end up in handcuffs."

This is not the first time the Sans-Papiers have stood by their demands. In June last year, they rejected another case-by-case proposal with the famous occupation of the St. Bernard Church. The women Sans-Papieres led the occupation of over 300 Africans which lasted two months and mobilised huge popular support. The Sans-Papiers' determination to win may rest once again on women giving the movement the direction it needs.

The Sans-Papiers have called a national demonstration on 5th July. We are calling for support demonstrations here.

Momar Diop, a National Co-ordination delegate who has lived in France for 22 years, after being assaulted by police was sentenced to four months in prison and a 10-year ban from France on release. His appeal is on 7th July. Support his release and regularisation by faxing the Prefecture de Police de Bobigny - (33) 1 48 30 22 88; Prefecture de Police de Paris - (33) 1 40 51 75 82; Ministere de l'Interieur - (33) 1 43 59 89 50. Copy to National Co-ordination: (33) 1 46 07 16 19.

- For copies of *The Sans-Papiers: A Woman Draws the First Lessons* (post free), or to arrange a showing of *The Ballad of the Sans-Papiers*, a documentary video, contact Black Women for Wages for Housework or Payday men's network, PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU, tel: 0171-482 2496 fax: 0171-209 4761.



Sans-Papiers march, 22nd May, Paris.

New visa rules hit Colombians

Sue Lukes, Islington North CLP, reports on a major human rights scandal facing New Labour: Mario Calderon lived in London and worked there with the Colombian Committee For Human Rights in London to expose the brutal abuse of human rights in Colombia. Thousands of refugees have left, many seeking asylum here. Three quarters of a million have been forced into internal exile.

All the international human rights organisations attest to the extreme risks attached to any type of political involvement. Along with Algeria, Colombian trades unionists top the grisly league for the greatest number murdered last year. Thirty thousand have been murdered in the last ten years by paramilitary, official military and other groups. Four thousand of them were members of the opposition Union Patriotica.

Mario Calderon will not be writing to the British newspapers about it. He returned to Colombia and was working with an organisation called CINEP which exposed human rights abuses, including those associated with the activities of BP, the company now represented inside the Labour Government by Sir David Simon. Mario, Elsa Alvarado, his wife and her father were murdered on 19th May.

On 29th May, the Labour Government decided that the first immigration rule change they were to put into practice was to demand that Colombians get visas before being allowed to travel to Britain. If Mario's family want to take refuge they will not be welcome here.

The stated reason given by Mike O'Brien, the new Immigration Minister, is that too many Colombians are arriving. Given that murders like that of the Calderons are daily occurrences, and that we have a Foreign Secretary now publicly committed to human rights, this is not surprising. Colombian and other Latin American organisations here are furious. They protest that their refugees get classified as bogus, and their migrants get slandered as criminals. The imposition of visas will make it almost impossible for refugees to come to Britain, although the thriving community here know of many close relatives in serious danger. So much for human rights. The Colombian community in the UK is overwhelmingly working class, and people cannot afford the extra money needed for visas for relatives who want to visit. So much for the commitment to family and community.

Write now to MPs to get this retrograde policy reconsidered. The landslide that buried Michael Howard should also have buried his policies. This kind of human rights abuse has no place in a Labour Britain.

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From cynicism to engagement

Cynicism and Post-modernity
by Timothy Bewes, Verso, £14.00 paperback.

Does the election of Britain's first post-modern Prime Minister signal the end of the era of post-modernism? Mike Phipps hopes so.

WHAT ARE we — or future historians — to make of a respected journalist on a serious newspaper devoting an entire column to Tony Blair's decision — "iconoclasm" in the words of Martin Kettle — to allow Cabinet members to call each other by their first names? Is government really just a matter of symbolism rather than political substance? If so, is it any wonder that people are so cynical about politicians?

For newspapers like *The Guardian*, galloping depoliticisation has long been a feature. The ideology of post-modernism lends intellectual support to this approach. The fragmentary identity of the "decentered subject" in which one's choice of football team or style of dress is given the same significance as one's class, ethnic or gender identity is ideally suited to the requirements of consumerism. The rejection of universal values and of a world outlook sits well with the ironic hauteur of the would-be opinion-formers of the upmarket media.

Has this process spread to New Labour? Timothy Bewes evidently thinks so. Describing Tony Blair as more "post-modern" than any theoretician he argues that the leader's project is not simply a move to the right but a retreat from politics.

In his new book, *Cynicism and Post-modernity*, he writes: "In so far as a political agenda can be discerned amid the rhetorical emissions of New Labour, it would appear to consist in shrugging off politics, in transforming 'political' responsibility into an ethical imperative, and siting it therefore within an 'inclusive' realm of society and community. Political responsibility is abrogated to the individual, whereby it is stripped of its essentially political character. The 'Blair Revolution' is a programme not of structural change, but of change in the way that individuals live their lives and comprehend their relations with others. Socialism, for Tony Blair, has no particular economic or even political significance, but constitutes rather 'a moral purpose to life' — a set of values, he says, a belief in society."

Blair's Big Idea, argues Bewes, is that everything should simply be as it ought to be — a very static vision. In Blair's own words: "Teachers should be properly rewarded. But if they can't do the job, they should not be teaching at all. Heads should prove their leadership skills before they are considered for a head's post. Parents have duties. Children do homework. They shouldn't be playing truant. And where they are, it's not just the school's job to do something about it, but the parents' too."

What does this mean? Bewes comments: "Blair sees certain things out of shape which he means to put into shape — a process which by definition comprehends a strategy of resistance towards new shapes. 'We will put our education system right', avows Blair. 'No more dogma. No more arguments about structures.' Which is to say in effect, no more politics. Instead, 'a new deal in our classrooms', says Blair. 'We will be the champions of standards for the 21st century'. That children should do their homework, however, is about as political an objective as the declaration that grass should be green, or that dogs should bark. Similarly, the statement that teachers should be 'properly' paid, or that only suitable people be considered for a head's post, affirms nothing more than that 'things as they are' should be as they ought to be." Bewes is undoubtedly right about Blair's discourse. But now New Labour is in government and government is about policy, not just words. As the Clinton experience in the US shows, the policies behind the feelgood values — ending guaranteed welfare, free trade agreements which impoverish millions of Third World producers, backing repressive regimes — simply don't match the rhetoric.

Blair's first days already reveal a calculating small-mindedness in policy detail which belies the grandness of his vision. The responsibility of socialists is to transcend the cynicism felt towards the Blair perspective and engage his government with demands based on a mandate for radical change.



...and the grass shall be green!

The Tory Record

by the Commission for Assessing the Tory Record, Jon Carpenter Publishing, Spendlove Centre, Charlbury, OX7 3PQ, £1.99. Reviewed by Dan Carter

This useful pamphlet includes short articles by experts in a range of fields, from food quality to water privatisation, from care to crime. The Tory record is ripped apart in a factual and systematic manner in this weil-sourced booklet. To quote just one example, on chemical waste: "Rejecting the recommendations of a Welsh Select Committee not to site major incinerators in residential areas and the scientific evidence on the dangers to health, the Government is spending £10 million of taxpayers' money on a PR exercise to hoodwink the public into accepting the proposed plants by calling them 'recycling facilities' instead of 'incinerators' ".

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CORRESPONDENCE

Your letters are welcome but please keep them under 250 words. Send a PC floppy if possible or email llb@gn.apc.org.

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I am writing to say how pleased I was to see that you carried an obituary about my late friend and comrade Rod Fitch, and I know Rod's family was too. Your readers may wish to know that I am writing a book about the experiences of anti-fascist work in Brighton during the period that Rod was Chair of the committee. This covers many of the important national events of that period including Lewisham and various meetings and demonstrations in Brighton. Given the wide inclusion of disparate groups working against the fascists over nearly ten years it was inevitable that there were political differences about some of the tactics and I have no wish to hide these. However, the intention of the book, is to provide information and analysis for future anti-fascists.

If any of your comrades have material or information, in particular about the court cases, that they would like to be considered for inclusion in the book I would be delighted to hear from them.

Ann Jones (President, Brighton TUC 1980-83), Elmet, Yorkshire

* Please reply to Ann via *LLB*.

Your Labour links page is a truly outstanding job. The New York City Labour Party Supporters Club web page can be seen at http://gramercy.ios.com/~urbsoc/LabourInt/NewYork.htm

During the election the UK press described us as "champagne socialists". The truth is that most of us are far from glitterati. More like staunch "Old Labour" types (who feel we were driven out of the country by Thatcher) and who do our utmost to warn the occasional Labour grandee who drops in on us of the perils of following the Clinton model.

Chris Toulouse, New York

Tony Dale's article (Socialist Alternatives?, June *LLB*) just doesn't make sense. In comparing the electoral fortunes of the Labour Party with the SLP, the SP and the Scottish Socialist Alliance, he is clearly not comparing like with like. The Labour Party has existed for 97 years, is not a socialist party and is completely committed to electoral success at almost any cost. The three organisations he refers to, despite their many shortcomings, are socialist parties, have existed for a relatively short period of time and have aims much wider than electoral representation. The truth is that the overwhelming majority of the British electorate have very little understanding of, and therefore sympathy with, socialist ideas.

The Labour Party has been instrumental throughout its history, in wiping socialism off the political agenda. One problem is that Tony is equating the electoral success of the Labour Party with an advance, or at least a potential advance, for socialism. I would love to see the type of scenario that he is anticipating: the Labour leadership being put under tremendous pressure from the movement and this leading to, at least, some progressive reforms, if not a move in a socialist direction. However, my reading of history and my personal experience of the Labour Party suggests otherwise.

As for his prediction of Blair's demise at the hands of the movement, my response is, as my mum always used to say: "We'll just have to wait and see".

Paul Allender, Canterbury

Tony Dale's statistical analysis of the poor electoral performance of other socialist parties is pointless and certainly doesn't support his suggestion that there is no socialist alternative to the Labour Party.

Most socialist activity in the UK is rooted outside the Labour Party, with little campaigning against racism, fascism, imperialism and neo-liberalism within the Labour Party even at grassroots level. *Labour Left Briefing* is full of references to actions and solidarity campaigns largely disconnected from the Party. The McLibel Two is an example of a campaign that is challenging the very ethos of greed and exploitation which lies at the heart of the activities of all multinationals. Where is the momentum in the Labour Party to challenge the power of international capital?

There is limited space within New Labour for socialists to operate and for socialist values to thrive. If every socialist was to confine themselves to this space, there would be no process and no possibilities for achieving social transformation. While *Briefing* provides a valuable conduit for socialists to convey the message of social movements through the structures of the Labour Party, and thereby to influence policy, it does not follow that other socialist parties are irrelevant because they fail to win over the working class at elections.

Peter Frankental, London N4



Foxy friends?

When the **International Fur Trade Federation** places half page ads in *The Times* calling for the Government to support the proposed European Union International Agreement on the fur trade as a "break-through for animal welfare", surely its time to smell a (badly decomposing, inhumanely trapped) rat?

Moonlighting

There will still be jobs for the boys under New Labour. Leader of the House, **Ann Taylor**, has ruled out a ban on second jobs for MPs. They say it would create a political elite out of touch with the real world! Bet millionaire Labour Minister Geoffrey Robinson is well in touch with the workers in his constituency. Most MPs with outside earnings get them because they are MPs!

Who's the fraud

There have been a lot of — so far unfounded — attacks on **Sinn Fein** for benefiting from surprising increases in electoral registration in its key seats. This matches the silence surrounding the conviction of SDLP's Joe Hendron's agent, following his defeat of Gerry Adams, for electoral fraud. In fact, SF's successes could have more to do with the fact that they were mounting a "Register now" campaign as far back as September 1993. A briefing in *Republican News* explained register deadlines, supplementary registration, etc in a way akin to that now adopted by Labour's organisation department. Who learnt from whom, we wonder.

Blairite fuelling the nuclear industry

Some Blair babes are at a loss what to do now Labour has been elected. Not so **Peter Metcalfe**, former researcher to John Battle MP and, at 24, a driving force behind the now silent Young Labour. He is now Public Affairs Manager at British Nuclear Fuels!

AOB

"Taxation should rise progressively with income...what is needed is a programme of reform that ends the current situation where the top 10% own 80% of our wealth and 30% of income, even after tax. As Tawney remarked, "what some people call the problem of poverty, others call the problem of riches." — *Gordon Brown, Scotland: The Real Divide 1983.*

"It may be of comfort to him (Gerald Kaufman) to know that I had the word "socialist" written on my election address and it did not do me any harm." — *Chris Mullin MP.*

"This is a privatisation that will be thrown out at the ballot box" — *Andrew Smith MP, earlier this year on the Tories' plan to privatise London underground.*

"Our election success rested on a new partnership between Party and leadership. That partnership must be maintained and built on now we are in government" — the latest *New Labour New Britain.*

"Allegations of bribery and poll-rigging aimed at Mohammed Sarwar, the Labour MP for Glasgow Govan have, if anything, enhanced the stature of the Scottish politician in the community nationwide" — British Muslim magazine *Q-News.*

"Should it not be the case that the opposition should oppose and not decompose" — *Harry Barnes MP.*

Thinking the unspeakable

Labour's "no holds barred" review of the NHS foreshadows huge cuts, argues Harry Sloan.

IT'S MUCH worse than we thought, bleat Frank Dobson and his timid team of health ministers as they survey the wreckage of the NHS left by the Tories. This is a miserable excuse for the fact that Labour seems already to have abandoned even its limited promises on health services, and embarked instead on "thinking the unthinkable" and suggesting the indefensible.

The accounts of many trusts and health authorities appear as a sea of red ink, with 37 health authorities carrying forward debts of £3,186m and 111 trusts sharing debts of £3,123m from last year: for these and many others the picture for 1997-8 is even worse.

The Tory cash limits to which Gordon Brown signed up before the election threaten over the next two years to inflict the biggest-ever cuts in NHS spending.

Last year's cutbacks, imposed in a desperate effort to balance the books, are already taking a terrible toll. Waiting lists have soared for two successive quarters to an all-time high of 1.1 million while health authorities have been slashing contracts for elective (waiting list) treatment, and for out-patient appointments.

Hundreds of frontline acute hospital beds have been "temporarily" or permanently closed by cash-strapped trusts, creating conditions for a winter of chaos in Accident and Emergency units, with patients routinely waiting hours or even days on end on trolleys for lack of beds for emergency admissions.

Mental health services are under the cosh: in the second week of June there was not a single acute psychiatric bed available in London, leaving some trusts no choice but to spend vital cash sending patients to private beds, often miles away. Others struggle on under impossible conditions: one north London unit reported 40 patients on a 22-bed psychiatric ward. Care of the elderly is also in chaos, with cuts in the NHS and social services combining to leave growing numbers of frail elderly patients stranded as "bed blockers" in acute hospital beds.

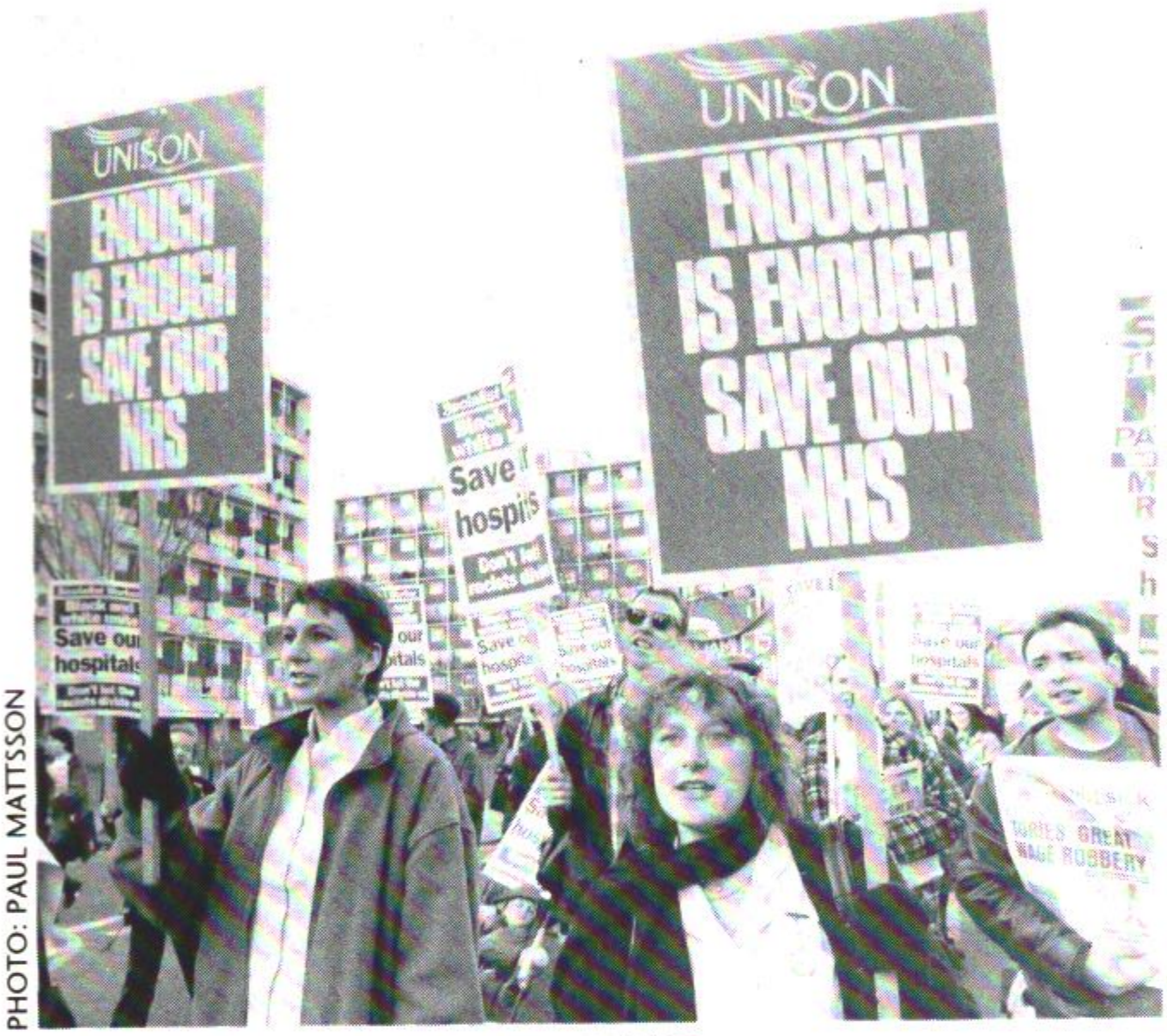


PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

East London 'Save the NHS' demo, 15/2/97.

But why should any of this come as a shock to Dobson and his ministers? Of course, the public picture was distorted by the evasions and downright lies of the NHS quangos, the health authorities and trusts which attempted to minimise the scale of the problem in the run-up to the election. This type of deception was utterly predictable from bodies composed of stooges selected for their willingness to do the Tory Party's bidding.

It was equally predictable that these same quangos would change tack immediately after a change of government, breaking their silence to unveil the massive crisis they had been concealing, and piling pressure on the new administration in a way they would never have attempted under their Tory masters.

True to form, trusts and health authorities have been "coming out" with horrendous multi-million deficits. Others have forged relentlessly ahead with closures of beds, services and whole hospitals, making a nonsense of Labour's promise of a "moratorium" on closures in London. By contrast, Labour's promised measures to save the NHS have evaporated. The Queen's Speech contains nothing to implement the pledge to sweep away GP fundholding and the internal market, even while figures show West Midlands GP fundholding practices have pocketed over £330m in surpluses, and managers admit that the market system is a shambolic failure.

The Royal Commission on care of the elderly, which Labour promised would be set up within days of the election, has not been heard of since 1st May. The promised year-long review of London's crisis-ridden health services has been scaled down to just four months, and with it the promised 12 month moratorium of hospital closures in London. Among the controversial closures proposed by the Tories, several are excluded from the review — notably Guys Hospital and Queen Elizabeth Hospital for Children in Hackney — and now seem doomed to closure.

Instead the whole focus has shifted to the NHS spending review, which we have been arrogantly told is "no holds barred", with a brief to dream up new unthinkable ideas and unspeakable solutions.

This is the review which has thrown up the old chestnut of imposing new charges on patients for seeing a GP, for food and accommodation in hospital, or for prescriptions for "wealthy" pensioners. Dobson has belatedly insisted that there is no plan to impose such charges.

All these ideas have of course been previously considered by the Tories and rejected, for the simple reason that they generate relatively little cash for the huge backlash of political opposition they would generate. Most users of the NHS are elderly, or people on low incomes, who cannot be forced to pay substantial charges. Offering them exemptions, together with the cost of administering the system, would mean the charges on those who do have to pay would be prohibitive, creating massive anger and resistance.

The plain truth is that the Tory cash limits for the NHS are unsustainable. If Labour is not to celebrate the NHS's 50th anniversary by delivering the most deadly package of cuts, Gordon Brown must be told to pump in more money.

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