LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

June 1997

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- Ken Livingstone
- Defend Labour Party democracy
- May Day in Turkey

It was Labour wot won it!

Mandate for social justice

Labour Left Briefing

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AGENDA



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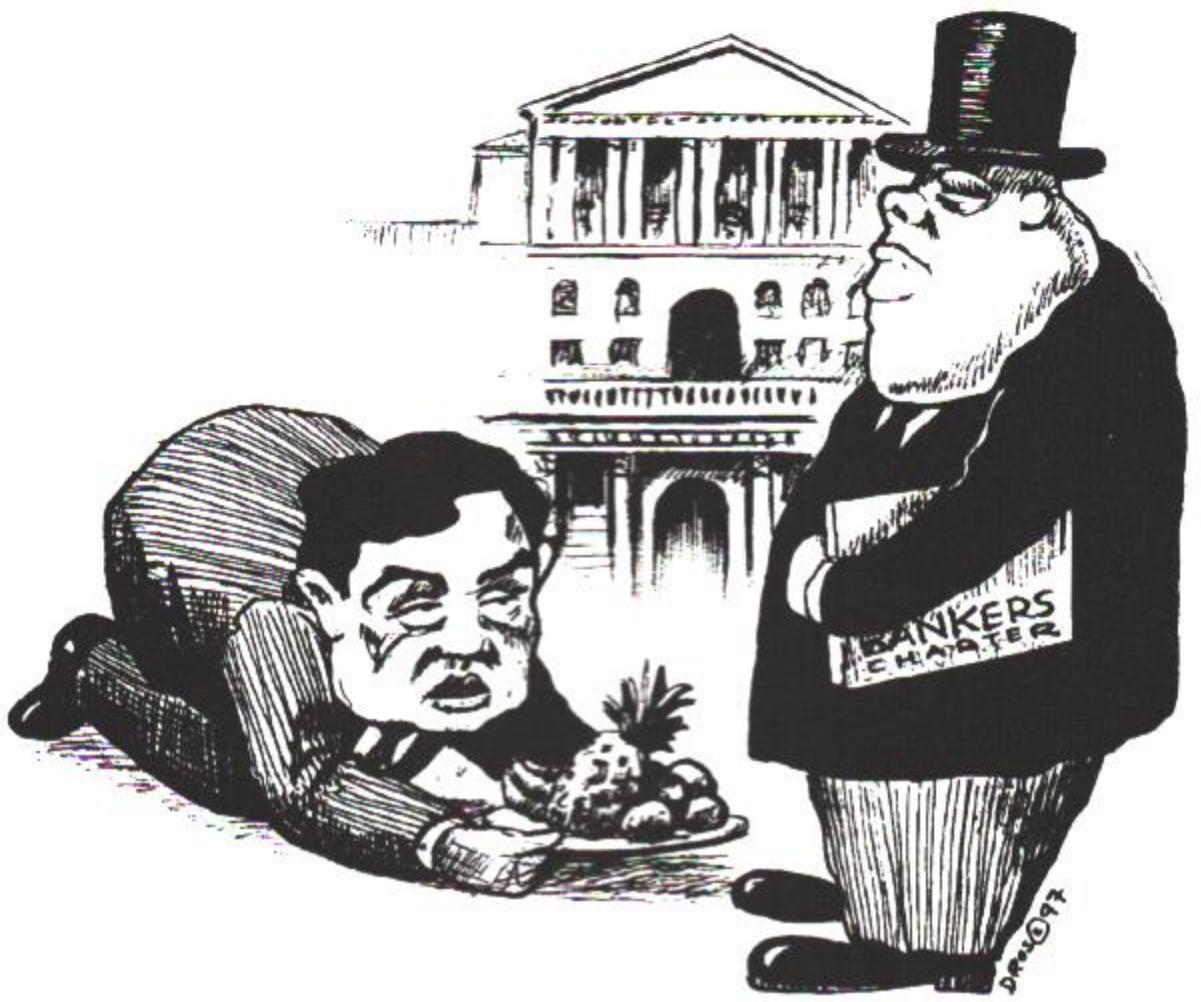
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Victory belongs to all of us!

LABOUR'S landslide was a victory for the whole labour movement and all those who battled Thatcher and Major. Its scale opens up exciting possibilities. Working class hopes, confidence, and expectations will rise. Blair's claim that it was "New Labour wot won it" is bogus. Labour's swing to the right made it easier for some middle class Conservatives to cast a protest vote for Labour, but this was just icing on the cake. The final result accorded with opinion polls, council, European and by-elections since October 1992 — when John Smith was leader of the Party and Labour's commitments to workplace rights, full employment, wealth redistribution and common ownership were intact. Voters were determined to remove the Tories by any means necessary and turned May Day into a referendum on the Tory record and philosophy.

The BBC's exit poll was revealing. 72% of voters supported raising income tax by 1p to pay for better education. 58% said the new Government should redistribute wealth (only 15% shared the opposition of New Labour and Tory to this idea). 74% wanted no further privatisations. An ICM poll asked Labour voters what the most important factors in their decision were; 71% named health, education or welfare state issues. A Gallup post-election survey showed that most voters believed taxes would go up under all three major parties; 86% thought taxes would go up under Labour — which did not deter them from voting Labour anyway. Anthony King, one-time midwife to the SDP, admitted: "The conventional wisdom of a whole political generation — that voters would never vote for tax raising parties — has turned out to be wrong" (Gallup reported that 72% of voters wanted public services extended "even if it means some increase in taxes"). It therefore seems fair to argue that on May Day, people were voting not for "New Labour" but for improved public services paid for through progressive taxation. They want a concrete change towards a more just and equal society, not mere rhetoric or a "change in tone".

Labour's campaign appears to have made no difference to the result, but it did succeed in setting a dangerous precedent. The narrowing of policy differences between the parties reduced the contest to an exchange of insults and a presidential-style focus on "strong leadership". If that trend continues, public cynicism will mount, along with voter abstention. Without a healthy democracy in which voters are offered honest and distinct choices, socialists cannot achieve any of their goals. However, the scale of the victory has undermined Blair's struggle to dampen down expectations. Roy Hattersley observed: "to succeed, Tony Blair has to fulfil hopes that he did very little to excite and to keep promises that he did not make." The right wing economist Samuel Britain mischievously but correctly pointed out that under New Labour "UK capitalism will be



far more unconstrained than the electorate really desires". Here emerges the principal contradiction facing the new Government: between the aspirations and confidence generated by its victory, and the neo-Thatcherite direction to which its inner core is committed. Two days before the election, Blair let it be known that there would be no increase in the value of benefits for the unemployed, the disabled, or the elderly. If such a proposition were put to Party members in a ballot, it would be overwhelmingly rejected.

Previous Labour victories have been immediately followed by an average 2.6% fall in equity markets. This time, the *Financial Times* Stock Exchange index rose by more than ten points to a new high. Richard Branson assured business colleagues that New Labour "will be more pro-competitive than the Tories". In his victory speech Blair promised to "govern as New Labour" and to work closely with business — no mention of the trade unions, workplace rights, minimum wage or an attack on poverty.

Of course, the change of government does make a difference and already steps have been taken which we would never have seen under a Tory Government. We warmly welcome the moves toward an independent food safety agency, abolition of the assisted places scheme, the moratorium on hospital closures, the reduction of VAT on fuel, restoration of union rights at GCHQ, the foregoing of ministerial salary rises, the proposed windfall tax, the pledge of an "ethical foreign policy", the promise of a London elected authority, and above all the speedy moves to establish a Scottish Parliament

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and a Welsh Assembly.

However, these positive developments are outweighed by a number of disturbing and in some cases disastrous initiatives — the shelving of the Freedom of Information Act and House of Lords reform, the punitive and repressive approach of Jack Straw's Crime and Disorder Bill, the appointment of the pro-EMU chairman of BP (a company deeply implicated in human rights abuses overseas) to supervise Labour's European policy, the downgrading of the Minister for Women, the refusal to return the Elgin marbles, the packing of the new Defence team with Cold Warriors whose first loyalties are to Washington and the arms industry, and Peter Mandelson's designation as minister for meddling in everything. The Government's most significant move is giving responsibility for setting interest rates to the Bank of England, a move which signalled Gordon Brown's commitment to neo-liberal orthodoxy. People did not elect a Labour Government to concede immediately one of its major economic levers to an unaccountable and undemocratic institution. Is low inflation to be the altar at which this Government, like its Tory predecessor, worships, regardless of the consequences for employment and economic growth?

Frank Field's appointment to the social security brief is ominous in the extreme. "Welfare reform", touted by Blair as a major theme of the new Government, means cuts in the value of benefits and in entitlement to them. Field's technique is to blind people with pseudo-science; his philosophy, however, is crude and clear: more stick and less carrot to winnow out the undeserving poor. Harriet Harman spelled out the threat saying that the welfare state wasn't "for people who just don't want to work." She attacked Peter Lilley for letting claimants "rip-off the system"!



Gordon Brown's budget — promised within weeks — represents the first major test of both the new Government and the labour movement. According to a report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, taxes must rise to maintain current spending commitments. To achieve the Tory budgetary targets, Labour will either have to increase taxes on corporate wealth or make cuts in public spending more savage than anything ever attempted by Margaret Thatcher. Given the economic philosophy outlined by New Labour during the election campaign, we should brace ourselves for the worst — and prepare to oppose it at every step.

It is important that the abolition of the internal market in the NHS is genuine, that the release of capital assets is on a sufficient scale to allow local authorities to begin tackling the housing crisis, that local government grants are reallocated on a fair basis, that benefits for asylum seekers are restored, that the primary purpose immigration regulation is abolished, that a new bill is introduced to establish workplace rights and re-establish some union rights, and, above all, that a minimum wage set at a meaningful level is speedily and effectively implemented.

While urging the Government to implement the few positive promises in its manifesto, we have to work patiently to coax the Party to break out of the constraints imposed by the manifesto — constraints which will prevent the Government from doing the things voters elected it to do. Reinstatement of the Liverpool dockers (the Government is a major shareholder in the MDHC) is a pertinent and essential demand. The coalition mobilised behind the dockers will continue to grow, though it is hard to predict what form it will take. Taking up the dockers' case — and their broader platform for social justice — inside the labour movement could provide a rallying point for the alternative to New Labour. Within the Labour Party and the broader labour movement, we have to demand, as a top priority, the restitution of free and frank debate. There must be no more pariahs. Unless the movement rediscovers the habit of independent and critical thought — and the courage to articulate it — the new Government will be forced to navigate without guidance from the essential compass of its rank and file base. We cannot allow the tired old cry of "oppositionist" to deter us from speaking what we know to be the truth. It is vital that left MPs promote alternative programmes and possibilities for the new Government.

If working people are not to be demoralised and sink into inertia, there must be voices insisting loudly and clearly that there is an alternative, and backing that assertion up with facts and arguments. History has placed a heavy burden on our comrades in the PLP. The pressure on them to conform will be enormous. But the long-term price of conformity — the elimination of the progressive option from British politics — is simply too high. For the Socialist Campaign Group, the coming months will be a challenge. It is also clear that there is a need for a much wider and looser grouping of the Parliamentary left.

All those who believe in redistribution, who wish to defend and extend the welfare state, who want to strengthen trade unions and restore Party democracy need to be talking and working together. Equally important, they need to co-ordinate their efforts in Parliament with like minded trades unionists and Party members. Rather than hope for the best from a Labour leadership that has written them out of the script, unions need to renew independent political action. Blair says trade unions will be treated just like any other pressure group in society. Trade unions should respond by taking him at his word and exercising their right to apply pressure in accordance with their organisational weight in society which remains enormous.

At its Easter Conference, the NUT voted to organise a national demonstration "to secure additional funding for education" before the Chancellor's autumn statement. UNISON and others unions should join in, adding demands for fresh resources for the NHS, local government and other public services. With the setting up of the Low Pay Commission, there is an urgent need to restart the national campaign for a minimum wage that will put an end to poverty pay, not merely re-enforce it. UNISON, the TGWU and the GMB have strong and long-standing commitments on this issue. It is time to rally their members and demonstrate in the most forceful, public manner what they expect from the Low Pay Commission.

Will the Labour victory rekindle life at the grass roots of the Party? Activists should aim to build on the confidence and excitement generated by the election result by initiating wide ranging discussion about the priorities of the new Government. Our immediate task is to defeat the *Labour Into Power* proposals, which would further centralise policy making and block potential channels of protest from CLPs and unions. It is possible that Blair will seize the moment to push for even more drastic inner-party "reforms", the effect of which would be to insulate Parliamentary politics, and indeed party and electoral politics, from working class pressures. Labour Party members, trades unionists, councillors, community activists, and indeed all those fighting for social justice should say loud and clear that the May Day victory belongs to all of us, and that we will not allow the clique of modernisers to hijack it.

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Watch out, there's a social security snoop about

And now he's in charge of the government's programme for welfare reform. Mike Marqusee tests Frank Field's capability.

LAST YEAR Frank Field claimed that "the fabric of society" was being torn apart by social security benefits — which, he believed, promote dishonesty and destroy incentives towards self improvement. He wants Victorian friendly societies revived and government-imposed "mutual aid", with people compelled to pay into a second, personal social security fund to cover unemployment, sickness and retirement.

"I speak as someone who admires Peter Lilley, but I do not think even he has realised the extent of the problem," said Field. In October he outlined plans for welfare reform: turning student grants into loans, cutting basic rate income tax to 19p and a starting rate of 5p with corresponding increases in National Insurance, abolishing SERPS, compulsory second pension policies, and requiring those earning over £10 a week to pay into a new national insurance fund. Field opposes universal benefits and means tests, because they "promote idleness, encourage dishonesty and penalise savings". Instead, he wants an insurance based social security system managed through individually owned private sector funds.

For Field, the efforts of people to survive in a low wage economy, including working for cash in hand to supplement poverty level benefits, are "immoral". But the lowest paid already have a life expectancy eight years less than the better off; one in three children are now growing up in poverty; and millions of elderly people are now reduced to a subsistence existence, thanks to the breaking of the link between pensions and earnings.

Field's Samuel Smiles-style moral strictures apply, it seems, only to the poor. He says nothing about cracking down on tax fraud, which dwarfs benefit fraud, or taxing the huge profits his schemes will generate for the private insurance and private pensions industry. His reforms would exacerbate inequality with further transfers of wealth from poor to rich. He is eager to place the burden of taxation on National Insurance, a relatively regressive form of taxation which protects high earners. He attacks housing benefit fraud without acknowledging its sources — landlord rip-offs, deregulation of private rented housing, and the absence of decent affordable rented accommodation.

Madsen Pirie, president of the right wing Adam Smith Institute, believes Field will complete the key task left unfinished by the Tories, "welfare reform", and he notes the similarity between Field's proposals — effectively the privatisation of social welfare — to the system pioneered in Chile under the dictatorship.

Twigg branches out

Stephen Twigg, ruthless leader of Blair's bratpack, has entered the Commons. Watch out, this man is a danger to our democracy.

MICHAEL PORTILLO'S demise in Enfield Southgate has unexpectedly put the ambitious Stephen Twigg in the Commons. Best known for his set piece speech denouncing Arthur Scargill at Labour's Clause IV conference, he dedicated himself to the eternal battle against Trotskyists while NUS president in 1990.

Twigg appeared in Islington Labour politics in 1991, immediately organising against local MP Jeremy Corbyn. Within a year he won a by-election in Sussex ward, where the other sitting councillor was Margaret Hodge, then Council leader. After Hodge won a Parliamentary seat in the Barking by-election in 1993, Twigg became her personal assistant.

After securing places on the Council for other Blair babes in the May 1994 elections, he became Chief Whip, suspending several dissidents, including Liz Davies. In April 1995, he engineered the "night of the long knives" at the Islington Labour Group AGM. Anyone deemed less than totally loyal to the inner core of local Blairites was pushed aside. He managed to alienate the local Labour Party centre, which had previously supported him against the left.

Twigg orchestrated the smear campaign against Liz Davies, cajoling several of his fellow councillors into writing letters denouncing her to Labour's NEC. Although Twigg actually drafted at least one of the letters he was careful not to sign any of them. When Liz successfully sued three councillors for libel, forcing them to apologise and withdraw the allegations in the high court, Twigg was safely out of the line of fire.

In August 1995 Twigg announced he was standing for leader of the Council against centre-right incumbent Alan Clinton in the Labour Group elections to be held the following spring, plunging Islington Labour politics into a long and bitter faction fight.

In early 1996 Twigg was selected in "unwinnable" Enfield Southgate. His plan was to use Islington to boost his national profile while waiting his turn for a safe Labour seat. In April 1996, after losing the leadership to Clinton by one vote, Twigg rapidly lost all interest in Islington. After being appointed General Secretary of the Fabian Society in 1996 he resigned as deputy leader, and wanted to resign altogether from the Council but was stopped by Labour colleagues keen to avoid a by-election.

Twigg has already been of much service to Tony Blair, who will find some special role for him. But, oh dear, his career plans have been fouled up. The last thing he wanted to be was a one term parliamentarian, and the Tories need only a marginal swing to take back Enfield Southgate. However, observers of Twigg's whirlwind five year performance in Islington would not be surprised to see him make the chicken run when the time is right.❑

A bad start for human rights

The appointment of BP Chairman Sir David Simon as Minister of Trade in Europe has been widely criticised by international human rights, trade union and environmental groups. Mike Phipps, Brent South CLP, reports.

BP HAS A major stake in the world's largest oilfield, Casanare, in the Western Amazon section of Columbia. BP's oil operations here have been linked to the persecution of local protesters and community leaders by the military. Along with other companies, it has paid a "war tax" to the Colombian military to safeguard its operations. The military has responded with a campaign of terror: 30 trade unionists murdered and 200 people driven into exile.

In addition to the "war tax", BP last year agreed to provide a further £39 million to set up a new military squad. This is on top of £375,000 paid to the military's 16th brigade, which even a Colombian government commission, in a suppressed report, accuses of executions, kidnap, torture and rape. The report accuses BP of handing over to the military photographs and video footage of local campaigners opposed to the environmental devastation that the oil drilling is causing.

Simon's appointment is reminiscent of the contempt for human rights shown by Labour's last Foreign Secretary, David Owen. Simon has no place in any Labour government, especially one apparently committed to a new "ethical" approach to foreign affairs.

In February 1997, Labour MEP Richard Howitt went on a fact-finding mission to Casanare. He took evidence from NGOs, BP staff, the Colombian government and victims of human rights abuses. He collected six testimonies from witnesses who claim to have had death threats after criticising BP. Two of these testimonies allege the direct involvement of BP staff.

Here we reproduce the testimony of Maria, a community leader:

"It all started with a strike. They were all watching people. There were people that followed us constantly. Carlos (Arrigul) expressed his concern in a meeting that one day he was followed. He named five people (who were being followed). They were (all) threatened and he was obviously killed. After they killed him, they started following me around. Two people entered my house at night. They expected me to be alone, but unfortunately for them, my father was at the house. We always have dogs in the house and the dogs drove them away. They drew a black cross on the front of my door. Another time they entered my house illegally when I was in Bogota. My mother and children were in the house. They left a mess — left clothes all over the floor. I went to the National Procodoria to present a case. This was one and a half years ago, and I have still not had a reply. I am still afraid. I feel many people are watching me. I was leader of my community. When I go to Yopal, I can see the same car following me around. I continue to talk for the defence of the people, but because of the threats I have to be much more careful. Before there were 42 communities pronouncing themselves against the human rights abuses, now there are only 17. All of the leaders to whom people come when they have complaints have fear in one way or another.

We are so unprotected. We don't know when they are going to kill us. We just want BP to respect our lives. My child still talks about the day the bad men with hoods came. I am afraid, full of fear. I sometimes cannot sleep because I know there are people after me. And I know it could be a violent death."

Anti-abortionists fail to win support

Leonora Lloyd, Women's Officer, Ealing Acton and Shepherds Bush CLP, reports: Anti-abortion candidates standing in 53 seats (52 as Pro-Life Alliance candidates) received a total of 19,040 votes (average 345) — under one per cent of votes cast in those seats.

In many cases they came bottom. In a few seats — mainly in Scotland, where the church directed the faithful how to vote — one or two percent of the votes went to anti-choice candidates. There was little effect on the results as far as Labour was concerned — the overall swing was over 11%, including swings from SNP to Labour, Liberal Democrat to Labour and Conservatives to Liberal Democrats. As an exercise in determining how the nation feels about abortion, it was a resounding success — for pro-choice campaigners.

The seats chosen by the PLA were more about getting 50 candidates to qualify for an election broadcast than the declared aim of opposing strong pro-choice candidates. The broadcast was rightly censured — not because the abortion to be shown was "obscene" but because they lied in claiming that it was a common method of abortion in this country and because the woman involved (never seen) is unlikely to have given her consent for the filming to be used in this way.

Roman Catholic Cardinal Hume said that the "high" vote received was a message to Tony Blair (who is rumoured to be turning to the Catholic Church) to give strong leadership to restrict and then end the scourge of legalised abortion. Even if there was the possibility of getting this through on a free vote, no government is likely to want to turn back history in this way. Rather, the trend is the other way, with South Africa most recently instituting liberal laws. Deeply Roman Catholic Poland's recent short-lived experiment had to be reversed. And no government concerned about rising public expenditure could afford the costs of illegal abortion and unwanted, abandoned children that would result. New Labour, intent on being popular, should heed the public polls showing massive majorities wanting further liberalisation, allowing women, not doctors, to make the abortion decision and change our law accordingly, bringing it into line with most of Europe.

●For more details contact the National Abortion Campaign: 0171-923 4976.

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Socialist alternatives?

Tony Dale, Manchester Central CLP, examines how candidates to the left of Labour fared in the election and compares their prospects with those of the Labour left.

IN RECENT years many good socialists left the Labour Party in disgust. Arthur Scargill became the leader of the Socialist Labour Party, Militant launched the Socialist Party (SP) and in Scotland Militant and others formed the Scottish Socialist Alliance. The election put to the test the belief that Labour's move to the right had completely discredited it in the eyes of many workers, that Labour was no longer in any sense a workers' party and that the time had come for a socialist party to stand in opposition to Labour. The election results were not good for the "socialist alternatives" to Labour. The SLP fought 64 seats gaining a national total of 52,000 votes. These candidates on average won about 800 votes, less than 2% in their constituency. The Scottish Socialist Alliance did not fare any better with an average of 609 votes. Discounting Tommy Sheridan's 3,629 votes in Glasgow their average falls to 407 votes or 1.2%. The SP fared worst of all with an average of just over 500 votes (1.2%). Without Dave Nellist's 3,262 votes in Coventry South the average drops to 369 (less than 1%).

The results show that large sections of the socialist left completely misjudged the mood in the working class who still view Labour as their party. Many have argued there is no future for socialists in the Labour Party due to the changing nature of Labour's membership and the collapse of the left. The annual elections for Labour's NEC are a good guide to the Party's membership. The Campaign Group candidates won on average 42,000 votes in the 1996 NEC elections, David Blunkett, Gordon Brown, Robin Cook, Harriet Harman, Mo Mowlam and Jack Straw polled just under 81,500 on average. In the General Election the SLP, SP and Scottish Socialist Alliance polled a combined total of 72,000 votes. In last year's NEC elections over 73,000 individual Labour Party members voted for Denis Skinner. The numbers of left wing socialists inside the Labour Party far outnumber the combined numbers of the claimed memberships of the many groups to the left of Labour.

Where are the socialists? They are fighting for change and socialism from within the Labour Party. In the run-up to the election the Blair leadership tried hard to reduce expectations of Labour in government. Yet



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Socialist Labour Party founding conference, 4th May 1996.

the *Guardian* are forced to observe: "So huge was (Blair's) performance that it has given rise to massive hopes and dreams, far exceeding what he promised in order to secure his victory".

The landslide opens up new possibilities for the left as the labour movement discusses how Britain is to be rebuilt. The Blair leadership may well become a victim of Labour's success.

What, no Hodge?

Tony Blair's omission of former front benchers including Joan Ruddock, Keith Vaz, Giles Radice, Kevin Barron and Tom Pendry from his team has led to shock and despair. "What will I do now?" whined one. Our hearts go out to these sad souls, confined to the backbenches, serving their constituents and arguing for their beliefs without the benefit of a well-paid team of advisers.

A most welcome omission from the front bench is Margaret Hodge, but why did Tony fail to reward someone who had so conspicuously served and flattered him? Tony gave Hodge a nightly lift back to Richmond Terrace in Islington. He would unburden his soul to the sympathetic Margaret — only to have her repeat what he had said in the Commons tea room the following day. Mightily annoyed at Mrs Hodge's famous lack of discretion, Blair has kept his distance from her since she embroiled him in the Liz Davies affair in 1995.

He may also be aware that Islington's residential care child abuse scandal and cover-up may come back to haunt Hodge, putting paid to her dreams of becoming London's first elected mayor.

There is no doubt that one of the most pleasing sights of the new Parliament was Margaret trudging around with a face like thunder. When a colleague said, "Isn't it great!", she asked, "Isn't what great?" "The election result," he replied. "Oh, that," she replied.

Our message to Blair: no peace without Sinn Fein

Brian Campbell, editor of Sinn Fein's *An Phoblacht/Republican News* assesses the prospects for peace following Labour's landslide.

THE LANDSLIDE must have filled the Irish Sea, because soon after Tony Blair strode imperiously across to Ireland.

His keynote speech — delivered in the unlikely setting of an agricultural show — was stridently pro-Unionist. Constitutional change was effectively ruled out, except for the Dublin Government who should, "in advance of a settlement", delete Articles 2 and 3 of their Constitution which define Ireland as the whole island. Moreover, said Blair, while there should be cross-border "arrangements", "we would not negotiate them" if they were threatening to Unionists.

In what was trumpeted as a concession and a change in policy, British officials will meet Sinn Fein in advance of an IRA ceasefire, he said. But the same thing happened in 1993. The only difference was that then it was done in secret. Praise be to open government.

The speech was "the smack of firm government" said one commentator and that particularly applied to Sinn Fein. "My message to Sinn Fein is clear. The settlement train is leaving. I want you on that train. But it is leaving anyway and I will not allow it to wait for you," Blair said in a clear echo of John Major... and Margaret Thatcher.

"The settlement train has left several times," said Martin McGuiness in response, "and it has always run into a dead end." Indeed, it is difficult to see how a settlement could be reached without Sinn Fein, particularly now given their gains at the Westminster election. With two MPs and their highest ever share of the vote and with further gains expected in local elections they have never been as strong. Sinn Fein now represents over 40% of the nationalist electorate. In some areas there has been a fierce battle for the hearts and minds of nationalists with those — some within the SDLP — who want to see an all-Ireland settlement gaining ground against those who would be happy to see an internal settlement with minimal Dublin input.

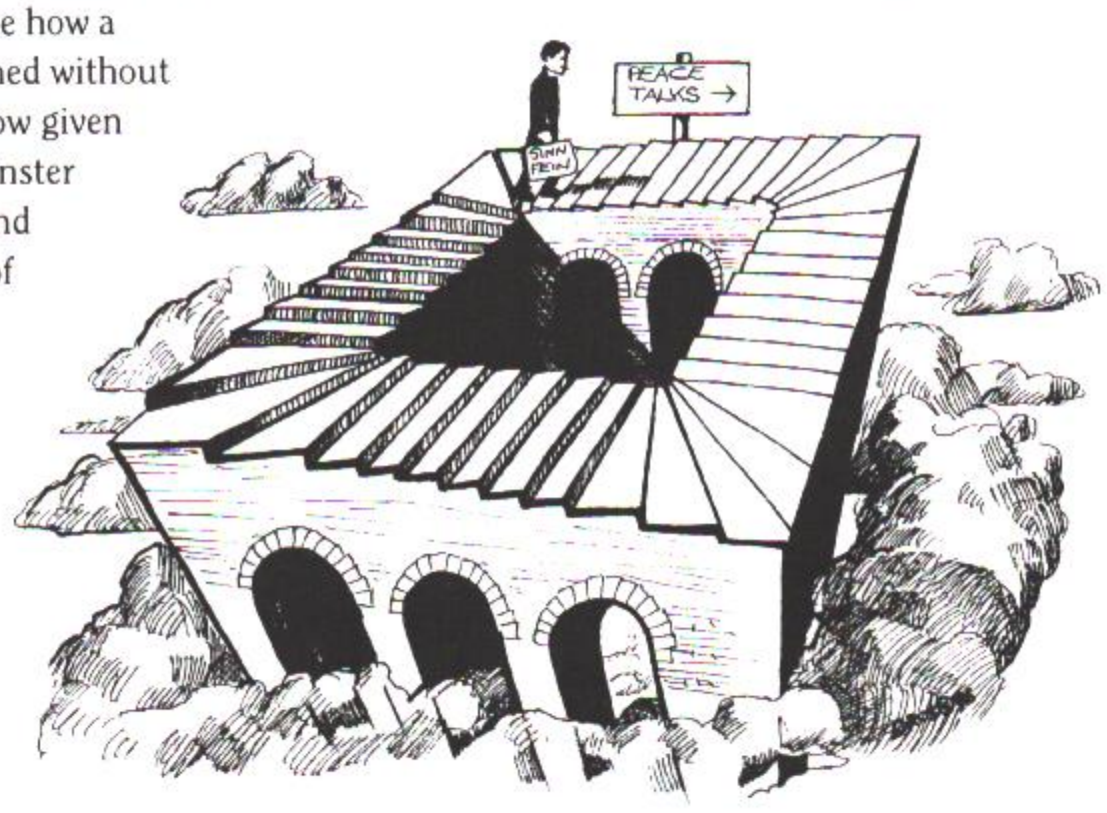
Sinn Fein also points to the multi-party talks to show the futility of excluding them; after a year, the talks have not got beyond wrangling over procedures and agendas.

It is this part of Blair's speech — that he will proceed without Sinn Fein — that shows that British policy has not fundamentally changed under the new Labour Government. It has long been the favoured strategy of the Northern Ireland Office to marginalise the "extremes" and do a deal with the centre ground. But in the Six Counties the centre ground is an earthquake zone or even at times a mythical place — as seen last summer during the events at Drumcree.

The Dublin Government under Albert Reynolds came to see that no solution was possible unless all parties to the conflict were involved. That policy shift bore fruit in the Irish peace process and the 1994 IRA ceasefire. The next step — meaningful inclusive negotiations with no preconditions — floundered on the Unionist-Tory alliance. Talks mean change to the status quo and those whose power has rested on the status quo have twisted and turned to avoid negotiations.

Conflict resolution throughout the world has shown that peace can only come when all parties to the conflict are at the table, yet this is still being resisted in the Six Counties.

Gerry Adams said that Tony Blair's speech writers should "stop recycling the failed rhetoric of the past. Sinn Fein has a democratic mandate and it is reprehensible that the British Government should exclude us while preaching about democracy."



In a message to activists in the Labour Party he said: "There is a long tradition within the British labour movement of supporting the right of the Irish people to self-determination. That must be reasserted in the trade unions, in the Constituency Labour Parties and elsewhere. Labour activists should make it clear that Tory policy on Ireland is not acceptable in the Labour Party."

The electoral gains by Sinn Fein seem to have passed Tony Blair by. He is aiming to disenfranchise those who vote Sinn Fein but there must be strong support for the democratic position that he must deal with the people's elected representatives.

Roisin McAliskey

Further details are emerging about the inhuman treatment of Roisin McAliskey.

Roisin alleges that when she was initially detained in Castlereagh Detention Centre she was subjected to repeated verbal abuse and threats. For example one woman detective constable told her "republicans are breeding like rats, breeding like shit", and told her which parts of her body were most vulnerable to blows that would cause a miscarriage without any evidence showing afterwards.

Roisin insists "something should be done about what goes on in Castlereagh". For the first few days of her interrogation there was no mention of Germany. She was in fact questioned about events in the north of Ireland in the preceding weeks.

It appears that they had nothing to charge her with but knew that the German authorities were looking for an unidentified woman in connection with the Osnabruck case. The RUC then contacted the Germans to suggest they investigate Roisin.

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Towards a Scottish Parliament

Cathy Jamieson, a member of the Scottish Labour Party Executive, reports on the spectacular results north of the border.

NEWS OF the demise of Tory MPs in once safe Tory strongholds of Edinburgh, Ayr and Dumfries brought loud applause, while Labour's victory over Michael Forsyth in Stirling brought rapturous shouts. We also cheered wildly as Tory after Tory was dispatched in England. But no one could have predicted that the Scottish Labour Party would be celebrating a complete Tory wipeout by winning Eastwood, a constituency taking in the most affluent of the leafy suburbs of Glasgow and hitherto the safest Tory seat in Scotland. But then the Tories couldn't even take control of the local council at reorganisation, despite having tried their best to redraw boundaries to their advantage.

The biggest cheer of the night was for Jim Murphy, architect of the "Scottish Party into Power Project" and reputedly one of the key figures behind the manoeuvres to unseat left wing members of the Scottish Executive Committee at the March Scottish Labour Party Conference. Left comrades hope that Mr Murphy MP will be so busy defending his majority that he has no time for internal party matters!

So the unthinkable, unbelievable had actually happened — not a single Tory MP left in Scotland, no Tory MEPs in Scotland and not a single Tory controlled council in Scotland! Since then, the Tories have been in complete disarray, doing all sorts of cartwheels over whether they will now support devolution and complaining bitterly about the fact that the electoral system is unfair — a bit rich coming from the party which forced the Poll Tax and local government reorganisation onto the Scottish people. We have also been treated to the spectacle of the Liberal Democrats (more seats) and the SNP (bigger percentage vote) squabbling about who is the second force in Scottish politics and who should be the official opposition in Scotland.

So what opportunities does the Tory melt down give Labour in Scotland? The election results make it absolutely clear that the majority of the Scottish people voted for parties committed to a Scottish Parliament with revenue raising powers. Concerns in the Scottish Party that there might be less enthusiasm for the Parliament from the leadership when in power were lessened with Donald Dewar's appointment as Secretary of State for Scotland. He gave an extremely strong commitment to the Scottish Executive Committee at its first meeting after the election, that not only would the Labour Party support broad campaigns for a Yes, Yes vote, but that the Labour Party would itself mount a strong campaign, and that winning the Yes,Yes vote in the referendum to be held in the Autumn will be a priority.

There is certainly no room for complacency on the part of the Scottish Labour Party, for despite the massive election victory, turnout in some areas was lower than in previous general elections, and there is still concern at the number of people who appear to be disillusioned by the political process generally, who will need to be motivated to vote in the referendum. It is also true that there is still a mood within the Scottish Labour Party that devolution of power must extend into the Scottish Labour Party itself, with autonomy to conduct its own affairs and take responsibility for staffing, policy development for the Scottish Parliament and campaigning on Scottish issues.

The Scottish Parliament is not of course an end in itself, but a means to delivering the kind of society that ordinary people want to live in, and this is clearly recognised by those on the left of the Party in Scotland. Electing the Parliament by the Additional Member System means that while we are all currently ecstatic about the lack of Tory MPs from Scotland in Westminster, the reality is that we are likely to have them back in a Scottish Parliament.

The Scottish Parliament will need to develop radical solutions to reverse the damage done by the years of Tory misrule. Getting young people into real jobs, establishing a minimum wage which will ensure a decent standard of living, and ensuring more resources in the health service are concentrated directly on patient care will make a start to delivering the changes that ordinary people voted for. But we must also begin now to look further into the future, and consider what Labour can progress towards — how can we develop new forms of social ownership, how can we make sure that local government is properly funded to meet the needs of local communities? Yes, there are hard choices to be made and difficult questions to answer. But if we are to aspire genuinely towards a fairer and more just society then we need to develop practical socialist solutions which can be implemented by a Scottish Parliament — the Scottish people have high expectations and will expect nothing less from Labour in power.



Cathy Jamieson

It was labour wot won it

***LLB* interviewed Jeremy Corbyn MP about the future of the left opposition to Blair in and out of Parliament.**

Q: Your campaign in Islington North was not exactly a New Labour campaign. What can you tell us about it?
A: We campaigned on socialist ideas and values, emphasised the growth in the gap between the rich and the poor in Britain and other issues that I've been closely involved in over the last fifteen years: the welfare state, pensions, miscarriages of justice, human rights in Britain and other countries, environmental concerns. We argued for collective solutions to the problems faced by the people of this diverse inner city constituency. In the end, we secured the best ever result in any election at any time in Islington's history.
Q: Many Party members have bitten their tongues in recent years. Will it be possible now to re-establish free and frank speech in the Labour Party and in particular in the Parliamentary Labour Party?
A: Open debate must return to both the PLP and the Labour Party as a whole. Clearly the period running up to the election is a difficult one for everyone. But we have to be clear now that this victory belongs to everyone who has worked in the Labour Party and trade unions and socialist causes. It is not a victory won by New Labour on its own or anybody else on their own. It was won by all of us.
Q: How do you read the mood at the moment in the Party? What do you see as the issues of immediate concern?
A: I think people are deeply concerned that the Tories have created this gap between the rich and the poor, and that the living standards of the poorest are dropping. Labour promised very little in this field during the general election, though it was forced to defend the principle of the old age pension. The new government is committed to negotiation with representatives of all pension organisations, and that's fine, but the demand being put forward by the National Pensioners' Convention and others for re-linking the state pension with earnings should be supported by everybody. As to other benefits, I've always been deeply concerned at the coercion which the Tories introduced into the social security system, not least through the "actively seeking work" formula in the Jobseekers' Allowance. The Labour tradition has always been that benefits should be universal and not coercive or conditional. However, there is an element of coercion in the suggestions being put forward by Labour concerning "welfare to work". We have to demand universal benefits and an end to the element of coercion, but above all we have to oppose the whole idea that you can run a social security system based on private insurance, whether against unemployment or sickness or old age.
Q: In that light, how do you view the appointment of Frank Field?
A: I know Frank well from working with him on the Social Security Select Committee and we have disagreed on a number of basic issues. Frank supports the idea of individual insurance policies; I do not. I can't therefore pretend to be happy that he is going to be proposing new social security measures. And when the Government says that it wants to "reform welfare", I am concerned. Of course, social security needs reforms. It needs reforms to eliminate poverty, to expand and enhance benefits and empower claimants. But I suspect the reforms being proposed mainly attempt to reduce state involvement — and spending — and increase the burden on the individual.
Q: Two days before the election, Blair announced that all benefits, including pensions, incapacity benefit, etc. would be frozen in real terms for five years. What are we going to do about this?
A: I don't know why this statement was made by Tony Blair and clearly there can never have been any decision of the Party Conference or indeed the National Executive Committee on this, and so this was a decision made in the heat of the campaign. If you freeze benefits at their existing level, you fossilise the existing levels of poverty and indeed the entire Tory tax-benefit system we've inherited, which transfers wealth from the poor to the rich. To break from that, we need to make taxation more progressive and increase benefit payments. We need to restore benefits to 16-17 year olds, completely reconsider the inefficient and unjust social fund and finally deal with housing benefit and housing benefit tapers, which are totally ludicrous. The biggest growth in benefit spending is actually in housing benefit, which pays not one penny to any individual claimant, but subsidises landlords.
Q: How would you define your role in the new Parliament? What would you hope to achieve given that you're clearly in a minority within the PLP on many of these issues?
A: I'm not so sure that we are in a minority on many of these issues. I've been talking over the last few days to newly-elected Labour MPs who all represent constituencies where poverty is a problem. They recognise that the Labour victory was achieved by the determination of a huge numbers of people to get rid of the Tories in order to tackle poverty. So I do think there's going to be pressure on the Government, pressure to increase taxation of the rich, either by altering the tax thresholds or lifting the ceiling on national insurance contributions or corporate taxation or removing the tax exemptions on share options. I cannot believe that hundreds of Labour MPs are going to stand idly by and do nothing while the poorest in our society get poorer, because that is what will happen if benefits continue to be frozen. So I'm hopeful that there is the possibility of a coalition of people who are prepared to do something about this in Parliament.
Q: And your role?
A: Working to ensure the issue of the gap between the rich and the



Mr. Blair strikes his Il Duce pose.

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poor — internationally, across Europe and in Britain itself — is constantly at the forefront of the PLP's attention. One proposal I made in opposition, which I hope will now be taken up, is that, along with the monthly figures on unemployment, inflation and money supply, we have a monthly figure of poverty and homelessness in Britain. So that when the suits on television every night discuss the latest round of economic trends, they can also take into account the numbers of people homeless and the numbers of children growing up in poverty.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

New Labour workers celebrate outside Conservative Central Office - lovely aren't they?

Q: While many of us on the left of the Party do appreciate the difficulties faced by socialists in Parliament over the last few years, I think it's fair to say that we will now expect a more coherent and dynamic performance from the Campaign Group. Is there any realistic chance of that?

A: Yes. We don't know yet what the size of the Campaign Group will be. We are in the process of approaching new members and asking them to join. But we are also keen on having open discussion meetings, which we have held before, on Ireland and other issues. Some MPs want nothing to do with the Campaign Group and others feel that they don't want to be in any kind of group at all. The important thing is to provide an opportunity where socialist arguments and debate can take place and appropriate pressure can be put on the Labour Government. So we are looking to provide a forum to do that as well as maintaining the identity of the Group. The Group's profile will inevitably rise a great deal, partly because active groups within the governing party usually have a much higher profile anyway and partly because those millions of people who voted Labour on May 1st are looking for a different kind of society than the one we have inherited and the Socialist Campaign Group will be working with others to ensure that the Government delivers it.

Q: Is it desirable or possible to build a larger, if looser, left grouping within the PLP, based not so much on the specific principles of the Campaign Group but on more general principles, such as commitment to redistribution?

A: Yes. There is a proposal being put forward by Paul Flynn and others to have a 97 group, which would be in effect a backbench group, the equivalent of the Tory 1922 Committee, which would mean that you could have debates without the power of the payroll votes deciding the outcome all the time. I think the idea of a forum of some sort is very important, because it gives an opportunity to people in *Tribune*, in the Campaign Group or no group at all at least to get together and talk about particular issues. On the welfare state, the gap between rich and poor, and the core values of the labour movement there is a lot of scope for unity.

Q: We are soon going to get a Crime and Disorder Bill from Jack Straw. If it contains, which is quite possible, curfews and restrictions on civil liberties, will there be opposition to it in the PLP? How far will it go?

A: I've never found any support whatsoever from the average member of the Labour Party or indeed the average member of the PLP for the idea of curfews or the attacks on civil liberty implicit in some of Jack Straw's suggestions. I think there's got to be very strong opposition to it. The opposition will also come from outside, from organisations like the Law Society, Liberty, etc. We cannot say we will solve crime in this country by a further curtailment of civil liberties. The cause of crime, essentially, is poverty. In the debates on the Criminal Justice Bill and the Police Bill before the election, there was a quite wide coalition of people prepared to vote against restrictions on rights, and I have every confidence that will happen again.

Obituary: Rod Fitch, class fighter

Rod Fitch, a long-standing member of Brighton Labour Party, took his life early this month. Rod joined Kemptown Labour Party in 1970 and having served as chair of the CLP was selected as PPC for Kemptown in the 1983 General Election. His proud slogan was "A workers' MP on a workers' wage", Kier Hardie's platform. Rod was active in the fight against fascism in the late 70's and was chair of the local Anti-Fascist Committee.

Rod came from a family rich in the traditions of the Labour movement. His brother Brian has been a councillor for many years as was his father Stan. Indeed, Stan Fitch was disciplined by the Labour Party in the 1930s over his support for the Republicans in the Spanish Civil War.

Rod was active in Hanover Ward anti-poll tax campaign which drew public meetings of over 100 people. He had the ability to "break the ice" at meetings and put the right-wing on the defensive with one speech.

But for many of the Brighton left, Rod will be remembered for his central role in the Friends of Brighton Labour Party — an ad-hoc organisation set up during Kinnock's witch-hunt of Brighton Labour Party in the early 1990s. Rather than polemicising as he was used to in the labour movement, his role in the Friends was one of co-ordinator — trying to bring out the best from the meetings and steer the left in its implacable opposition to the suspension of the CLPs which had giving their support to councillors who voted against the poll tax.

Alternative campaign diary

Mike Marqusee surveys the election campaign from Islington North.

March 17th: Ominous start: the *Sun* backs Blair. No one wants to discuss what Labour has paid for this endorsement, i.e. abandoning objections to cross-media ownership and, by implication, to the expansion of Murdoch's empire.

March 18th: Ward organisers meet in Islington North's new HQ: canvassing timetable discussed and election paraphernalia dished out.

March 22nd: Major's attempt to suppress the Downey report backfires. Brown on BBC unable to explain how Labour's refusal to remove the ceiling on national insurance contributions is compatible with the Party's commitment to a fair tax regime.

March 23rd: *Sunday Mirror* headline: "Top Tories used me as their sex toy".

April 1st: Canvass cards pasted up. Maps photocopied. Leaflets printed. Members missing. It's going to be a long campaign.

April 4th: Canvassing begins in earnest. Two complaints on the doorstep about Blair and New Labour.

April 7th: The Hamiltons ambush Martin Bell on Knutsford Heath. I have to laugh. Hamilton is a liar and a cheat and ought to be in jail, but he is small fry. Corruption is a political issue. The real questions are about the power of money and the absence of accountability. Bell's sanctimonious challenge has turned Tatton into a medieval morality play, a contest between an upright neutral from the BBC and a slimy Tory hack. Of course, that suits Blair and Mandelson — anything to keep politics off the agenda.

April 8th: The Institute for Fiscal Studies confirms that if taxes do not rise, Labour will have to make massive cuts in public spending. We said exactly the same thing in the last two *LLB* editorials. Will somebody pay attention now?

April 9th: *Newsnight* on Europe. Pressed by Paxman, Robin Cook explains his position on Labour's position on a single currency. "We have decided that we will take the decision when we have decided what is in the British interest and I will be happy with whatever decision is good for British interests". Thus, the sharpest brain in the Shadow Cabinet.

April 11th: The *Mirror* is running a daily "Blair Babe" photo on page three. Today's scantily clad young female is "a real red rose" — "sultry secretary Nicola Cook was just a baby when the Tories took power. Now 20 years on, she's developed into a stunning Blair Babe. Nicola lives in true blue Bexley in Kent, but says: 'I really, really do want Labour to win this election. We need a change and Tony Blair is the man to do it.'" New Labour, old sexism.

April 12th: Inspiring dockers demo. The best antidote to New Labour's vacuous campaign. I only wished Reclaim the Streets had targeted Millbank instead of the National Gallery.

April 14th: Call from the BBC. They are preparing a piece to screen after the election, but can't find anyone inside the Labour Party to say anything critical about Blair. Would I plug the gap? Presumably their last resort, I iron shirt and put on jacket, hoping to look slightly more like a pundit and slightly less like a scruffy lefty.

April 15th: The Islington North campaign is becoming something of a refuge for the disenchanted and dispossessed. Labour lefties spurned by their own constituencies. Human rights and environmental activists. Kurds, Turks, Kashmiris, Cypriots, Somalis, militant pensioners. Today Patrick, a Nigerian who lives in Camberwell, arrived on my doorstep. He had come to help Mr. Corbyn get re-elected "because of what he has said about the right of asylum."

April 16th: Users of the nearby Turkish Cultural Centre peer suspiciously at my red rosette. I realise they have taken us for emissaries from Blair, of whom they are not fond. We explain we are here on behalf of Jeremy Corbyn, and — through a translator — we discuss the shortcomings of the Labour Party and the necessity to elect a Labour government. They will help leaflet and stuff envelopes.

April 17th: Our big night: public meeting with Tony Benn. 350 people turn up at Highbury Grove School (where once upon a time Rhodes Boyson was Headmaster). Rapturous reception for Benn — who talks about the two flames of socialism, hope and anger — and for Jeremy. The air is full of the best kind of socialist fervour: determined to elect a Labour government, realistic about its likely inadequacies and prepared to challenge them. I watch people's faces as Benn speaks. They drink in every word, like a crowd finding the oasis in the desert, the political desert of this media-mesmerised election.

April 18th: IRA bomb threats close motorways, rail stations, airports and effectively slice the country in half — without a single fatality. A weirdly muted response in the media — as if this was a natural disaster to be endured with a show of British stoicism. You wouldn't know from this election campaign that there was a war of secession going on. That's the price of tri-partisanship on Ireland.

April 19th: At last a firm, quantifiable commitment from the front bench. Asked if the prison population would rise or fall under New Labour, Jack Straw answered

We need free trade unions

19th July 1997
Liverpool

A conference to discuss how the anti-union laws introduced under the Tory Government can be ended.

Sposored by Liverpool City UNISON and the Welfare State Network.
Tel. 0151-236 1944

The Dockers Support Group will be picketing Magnet Stores in Peckham (593 Old Kent Rd. SE15) on Saturday 14th June at 11am.

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without equivocation: it would rise.

April 21st: Islington North hustings sponsored by local newspaper. The Tory tries the "you never had it so good" line: unemployment down, house prices up, etc. By the time he gets around to insisting that public transport in London is better than ever, he is being heckled and jeered by most of the audience.

April 22nd: Canvassing at a local estate literally crumbling away as we knocked on doors. Just as a woman was telling me how useless the Council is, a piece of plaster fell from above and landed at our feet. Here, housing is the biggest single issue on the doorstep, but Labour's housing policy is just the phased release of capital receipts: a welcome promise, but one left over from the last election. I'm already dreading next May's council elections.

April 24th: Accompany Jeremy to local pensioners club. A rousing introduction by the chairman, a solid old CPer, then Jeremy lays out his position on pensions and restoring the link with earnings. There are plenty of supporters here, but one man stands up and says there's no money for pensioners because all the bloody foreigners are scrounging off the taxpayer. Half the room bursts into fervent applause.

April 26th: Blair on ITN. A mother of two on benefit demands to know why people on £100,000 a year cannot pay more tax. Blair blusters impatiently but never actually answers.

April 28th: Blair tells the *Sun*: "Our candidates are not headbanging nut cases. They are ordinary Labour people. Many of them read the *Sun*. Fifteen years ago young people were headbangers, militants and extremists. Today they are the modernisers". Worse yet in today's *Mirror*, Blair promises: "A New Labour government will keep strict controls on immigration. We intend to curb illegal immigration. Under the Tories, thousands of people illegally settle in this country each year and little is done to stop them". Outraged, I try to call HQ to complain. Impossible. Whatever number you dial, all you get is a recording of Blair urging you to volunteer for New Labour's election team.

April 29th: "Blair plans benefit freeze". The *Guardian* reports: "The tough stance is designed to make life on benefit less attractive, especially for the young". But incapacity benefit and pensions, the article reveals, are also to remain at current levels. Does Blair plan to dragoon the infirm and the disabled into work? Had Blair included this election pledge in his "Road to the Manifesto" ballot, Party members would have told him to get stuffed. To the Red Rose for Islington North's fund raising comedy evening with Mark Steel and Jeremy Hardy. A packed house is treated to non-stop jokes at the expense of Blair, Straw, Blunkett and New Labour. Thank God the media didn't turn up. After one reference to the leader of the Labour Party as a "fuckwit" I cast a glance around the room. Everyone was heaving with laughter. My favourite jibe of the night was Mark Steel on that great and enduring myth of our time, John Prescott's working class radicalism. "Just because you're fat and you've got a northern accent and your vest shows through your shirt doesn't mean you're a socialist".

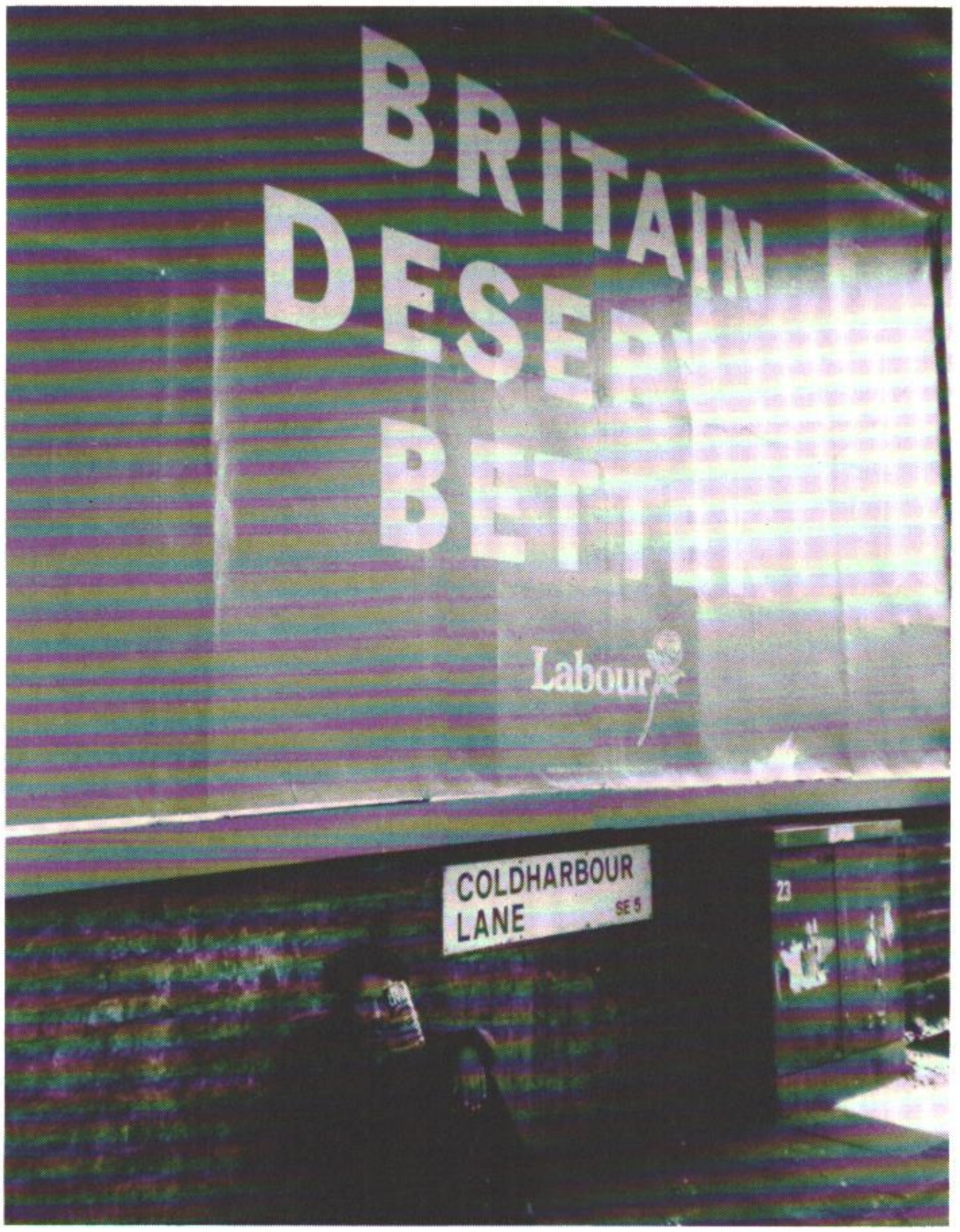


PHOTO: STEVE FRENCH.

April 30th: Panic as Islington Council cocks up delivery of poll cards. Local Party inundated with phone calls from people who fear they have been struck off the register or who do not know where they are supposed to vote. Apparently the Council contracted out the printing to a private company, who failed to produce the cards on time. Meanwhile the Council's electoral registration office has been unreachable by telephone. We may pay the Chief Executive £90,000 a year for this service, but at least s/he won't have to pay more tax under New Labour.

May 1st: The sun is shining and getting out the vote is easy. Mayhem as we try to run three polling stations from my kitchen.

May 2nd: I visit a friend who has been on the dole for several years. A 30 year old street-smart cynic who has never voted or even registered to vote in his life, he is cock a hoop over the election result. Although he has no time for Blair, he was so excited by Labour's landslide he'd stayed up all night watching television. "I never saw that before. You actually can change the government. Amazing. I'm going to vote next time".

What do we do now?

Socialist Strategy for Labour

Saturday May 31st

Network of Socialist Campaign Groups
Post Election Conference

Registration - 10am
Start - 11am prompt
London Welsh Centre,157 Grays Inn Road.
(10 mins from Kings Cross BR)

Sponsored by the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs

"Corbyn? No! We're New Labour here"

Serial canvasser Don Rocinante reports on the tensions between the Millbank Tendency and the grassroots on the campaign trail.

LABOUR'S 1997 campaign was the most centralised ever. Some CLPs were effectively forbidden to canvass, as members were packed off to target marginals.

"The whole campaign was taken over by Millbank people with mobile phones telling us where to go," one activist told *LLB*. "The opportunity to build up the weaker wards was totally wasted."

Elsewhere campaigning was reduced to "blitzing" (a very sensitive term, this) and leafleting shopping centres with nationally-produced leaflets. In fact many members apparently refused to hand out the leaflet on crime because of its objectionable tone: it was often binned wholesale.

The bureaucratisation of the campaign made many activists despair. "We got canvass cards a week before polling day," complained one ward organiser. The arrogance of the Millbank Tendency also alienated less active supporters. One canvasser, working in the so-called target marginal of Regents Park and Westminster North knocked on the door of an irate ex-member. She had left the Party in disgust after 36 years' membership when Head Office had written to her asking if she would leave the Party some money in her will!

The targeting exercise was at the least timidly conservative, and, worse, an exercise in political favouritism. Activists were instructed to help in Glenda Jackson's Hampstead seat — hardly a priority. In fact, untargeted constituencies saw some of the biggest swings to Labour, such as Brent North at 18.8%, despite — or because of — not having the Millbank treatment.

Given these problems, it was distinctly refreshing to take part in Jeremy Corbyn's campaign in Islington North. Unlike many Labour candidates, Corbyn's election address stated he was running as a socialist and internationalist, an approach which galvanised not just many local members but also Kurdish activists and Polisario supporters who campaigned for him.

Islington's New Labour architects were not so keen to work for Corbyn. Some local "Twigglets" refused to put up Labour posters and one said to a canvasser "we're New Labour here — we're not voting for him".

Overall grassroots campaigning was well down on previous years in this media-led election. For the Millbank Tendency, participation must take second place to control. Given the handicaps, the landslide result is an eloquent expression of the deep-rooted desire for change.

Power-dressers of the world unite!

Liz Davies, Chair of Islington Council's Women's Committee, assesses the most "woman-friendly" government in British history.

ONE HUNDRED and one Labour women MPs — nearly a quarter of the PLP; five women in the Cabinet, the PM married to a career woman — this was not achieved by leadership diktat or by Tony Blair. All-women shortlists made the difference. The "one woman on every shortlist" and increased training for potential women candidates did not work.

"All-women shortlists", a longstanding demand of the Labour Women's Organisation, was toned down to all-women shortlists in just half of the winnable seats to get it through the 1993 Conference. Other demands — for the right to put motions to Annual Conference and to elect the women representatives on the NEC — were quietly dropped. Despite this, all-women shortlists proved controversial. In July 1995, Tony Blair declared the end of the policy, even though it looked like only a quarter of the incoming PLP would be women. The NEC decided not to appeal the industrial tribunal ruling against all-women shortlists. All selections after February 1996 were conducted with mixed shortlists and few further women were selected.

So what will change for women? The key test is not whether the new women MPs feminise Parliament, but whether they campaign for and achieve changes for ordinary women.

The record so far has been disappointing. Labour's *Strategy for Women* promised a Minister for Women at Cabinet level. Instead, the Secretary of State for Social Security — already one of the busiest and highest-spending departments — has now been given responsibility for women.

Will Labour's other policy commitments on women's issues receive the same slap in the face? *The Strategy for Women* included general Labour Party policies (such as reducing class sizes for 5, 6 and 7 year olds) and others involving no new spending (reviewing the law relating to rape and domestic violence). Labour women must campaign for these policies to be implemented, but also funding for refuges and other services for women fleeing domestic violence, and publicly-funded child-care.

Harriet Harman (before being appointed Minister for Women) was quoted as saying: "the big increase in the number of women MPs will drive forward policies on child care, opportunities for women at work and the balance between home and work". Let us hope all of the women Labour MPs put there by feminists in the Labour Party never forget that their job is to make a difference to the lives of ordinary women.

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"Bigotry swept away"?

A sense of expectation grips large sections of the lesbian and gay community following the election. The feeling that there has been a historic breakthrough was reinforced by the election. For the first time two openly gay MPs will join Chris Smith. Peter Purton, LCLGR National Committee, reports.

MANY PEOPLE were overjoyed to see Stephen Twigg defeat Michael Portillo in his safe seat (so "safe" that Portillo spent most of the eve of poll touring TV studios). Ben Bradshaw's victory in Exeter was no less an achievement. Although the Tory majority was only 4,000, their candidate Adrian Rogers, had run an explicitly homophobic campaign. Leaflets proclaimed that "school children will be in danger" if Bradshaw was to win. Not long ago, such rhetoric would have scored highly, if secretively, amongst sections of the population. This time, to judge by the swing, it had no response.

These results alone should mean that nothing stands in the way of comprehensive law reform by the Government. But anyone who thinks that Labour ministers will automatically incorporate measures dealing with the everyday discrimination against lesbians and gay men when they draft their bills would do well to recall the widespread cynicism which existed before the landslide, and the sound experience on which it was founded. The issue is whether sufficient pressure can be maintained to ensure that lesbians and gays are included. In many cases, it does not even require primary legislation: rules which were made before can be replaced by new Statutory Instruments.

While the results suggest that, as Ben Bradshaw said "bigotry was swept away" in the election, everyday life quickly reminds us that discrimination continues, and is legal, and that homophobia remains rooted in society. Until and unless a government confronts it head-on, we will continue to lose jobs, to be denied housing, to lose custody of children or denied fertility treatments and to be prosecuted for consenting "sexual offences".



PHOTO: FEMI OMOLE

Stephen Twigg with his campaign team.

Labour's victory opens up possibilities which have never existed before. No previous government has been elected with even the limited commitments that Jack Straw has made: an early vote on the age of consent, repealing Section 28, and introducing the European Convention of Human Rights. To press on to win full equality, is the challenge.

The Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights (LCLGR) will be taking advantage of the Labour victory to build up its strength and resources for the work ahead. At its AGM on 17th May, LCLGR will plan how to campaign for full equality. With a commitment to the necessary primary legislation, and immediate decisions to end discriminatory rules and practices, this Government could make an early and decisive difference to the lives of a whole community.

●Join LCLGR: PO Box 306, London N5.

Defend our welfare state

Former *Briefing* editor and newly elected MP for Hornchurch, John Cryer, argues that Labour must remain true to its basic belief in universal benefits.

THE DEFENCE of universal benefits, a referendum on the single European currency, the rebuilding of the NHS and the drastic reduction of unemployment. These are just a few of the central challenges which the Labour Government must meet over the next five years.

Job creation is crucial for the reduction of poverty and social inequalities. There are parts of Britain where deprivation has reached a level comparable to that in the Third World. Many of the old mining areas are in the grip of escalating crime and drug use has become a way of life. In east and north London, textile sweatshops have returned, where conditions are Victorian and the owners see industrial relations as the elimination of workplace rights. The only way to tackle the situation is by expanding investment and cutting unemployment rapidly. This, coupled to the strengthening of workplace rights to which Labour is committed, will create the kind of confidence among our natural supporters which could see us in power for many years. But the growth of the economy is inextricably linked to the Maastricht Treaty and EMU. In the election, Europe was raised by perhaps one in three people on the doorsteps and as far as I can recall hardly a single one supported EMU. Quite rightly, people are deeply worried by the prospect of handing power to unelected bankers who will be concerned with "price stability", not with unemployment.

Our support for a referendum on EMU is correct. I believe such a referendum will be a further nail in the coffin of the deeply reactionary and divisive Maastricht Treaty.

Clearly, with a growing economy and more jobs, a Labour Government will more easily be able to begin to roll back the pernicious spread of means testing, which has a vicious impact for millions of people. Universal benefits has always been a basic belief of the vast majority of Labour members and supporters and will continue to be so.

We have a great, perhaps unique, opportunity to show that free-market brutality is not the pinnacle of human endeavour and that socialism is the true repository of much that is fine and worthy in human nature.❑

Windfall has shortfalls

Last month's *LLB* editorial urged Blair to stand firm on the windfall tax. Here Michael Furst argues that it is deeply flawed.

NO ONE DENIES that the privatised utilities have made a fortune. The electricity companies alone have spent over £2bn of their profits by simply buying back their own shares, and have given over £1bn to shareholders through special dividends.

Gas, water, electricity, and telecommunications have been much more expensive than they should have been. The utilities were sold off far too cheaply. For instance the electricity companies were sold off for £5bn in 1990 but are currently valued at over £15bn.

A tax based on profits or on market values will simply be taking money from companies which have been overcharging customers, and especially domestic consumers, for many years. It is not the companies' money, but the extra money they've been extracting from you and me that will be confiscated. Secondly, as the regulators (Ofwat, Oftel, etc.) are so weak, it seems very likely that the companies will find ways of passing on to consumers the extra costs imposed by the tax. So all of the customers of these essential services will have been taxed twice over, once through inflated prices before the tax, and again after the tax.

The prices of essential utility services are in themselves a form of tax. None of us can get by without water and warmth, and, as usual, it's people on low incomes who pay the most "utility tax" — while high earners only spend 3% of income on gas and electricity, those on means-tested benefits spend 13% of their money on these essentials. Also, the companies are likely to use the tax as an excuse to shed yet more jobs.

Brown could raise the £3-5bn he wants for his workfare policies, by making sure that the utilities actually pay a reasonable amount of Corporation Tax. For example, the massively profitable water and sewage companies have paid absolutely no tax since they were privatised in 1989. He could also put a supertax on the obscenely inflated dividends paid to shareholders.

The prices we pay for these essential services are effectively a completely regressive form of taxation, so price controls are needed urgently. The whole issue of the privatised utilities' finances needs to be opened up for public scrutiny, not only on the basis of social equity, but also because we need proper energy and environmental policies. By simply accepting the one-off windfall tax, we miss the opportunity to promote a much more important political agenda.

A Labour Government? Kindly behave like one!

Bob Spooner, Leeds NE CLP, asks how Labour will respond to its clear mandate for change.

THE ELECTORATE were prepared to vote for anyone who could beat the Tories. Blair wants to extend and consolidate Thatcher's revolution. The manifesto reeked of Tory philosophy and Labour's campaign used Tory tactics, with scare stories about VAT on food and robbing OAPs of their pensions. Blair went to the right with promises to safeguard grammar schools and rejected the extension of employment rights to part-time employees.

Blair says the manifesto promises must be kept. Those who argued that Blair's me-too-ism was a smoke-screen to win the election and it would be different once in power, have to admit that the omens don't look good.

The linking of Frank Field with Harriet Harman is enough to give anyone the shivers. Field's advocacy of means-testing means a return to the ethos of the pre-war dole queue. Harman began by condemning Lilley for not being tough enough on single parents, who will be chivvied into training for non-existent or ill-paid part-time jobs.

Brown's sacrifice of power over the bank rate to bankers, the elevation by Blunkett of the demon Barber, most of whose education policies are bonkers, and using lottery money for education and health, strike more discords.

31% voted Labour — slightly more than the 29% who didn't vote at all. Among this 31% were undoubtedly Liberal Democrats, voting tactically, old Labour stalwarts with nowhere else significant to go, and disillusioned Tories. So much for a "New Labour" mandate.

But the country at large expects a Labour Government to behave like one. It will judge its success on whether it reduces child poverty, redistributes wealth, restores co-operation rather than competition to the ethos of schools, restores trade union rights, abandons our role as the armoury of the third world and in particular ends the export of torture weapons, ends the harassment of political refugees, introduces a minimum wage of well over £4 a week, and returns utilities and transport services to direct public control and eventual public ownership. The country will not be appeased by a House of Lords as a club for clapped-out politicians, a Scottish Parliament with the powers of a parish council, and a Welsh Assembly without them. Blair has a mandate for real change and the country will be short-changed at his peril.

LLB page 16

We elected Labour — not the Bank of England

Ken Livingstone MP pans the decision to hand the power to raise interest rates to the Bank of England and suggests a strategy to bridge the looming budget gap.

DESPITE THE protestations of the Millbank Tendency, Labour's victory was not down to any sophistry on the part of media spin doctors, but the huge desire to oust the Tories. The excitement on 2nd May indicated that voters voted for a a government which can modernise British society. That places a responsibility on every Party member to constructively explain what Labour needs to do in order to improve people's lives.

For Labour to succeed — and to win the next election — it must have a realistic view of the economy. This means confronting the growing financial crisis and rejecting the view that the economy is booming.

The most immediate problem is the severe deterioration in public sector finances, worsened by Clarke's desperate pre-election strategy of opening up the financial throttles. The current expenditure deficit in 1996 was £17.5billion, 2.4% of GDP. If you take into account capital investment and transfers, the deficit of the total government sector was £33.3billion, 4.4% of GDP: all this at the end of an upswing in the business cycle!

Such a budget deficit is a huge problem to deal with. A Keynesian would only run such a deficit in periods of economic downturn in order to stimulate the economy, whereas the Tories have run this deficit in a period of growth, however small by post-war standards. Given that this deficit is being run at the peak of the business cycle it will explode when the economy slows. This means that a deep public sector financial crisis is now foreseeable, imminent, and can only be avoided if rapid action is taken in Labour's first budget.

So it is frankly bizarre that our first action has been to hand over key powers to the Governor of the Bank of England. That decision indicates that the Government intends to follow the line of the City, the most entrenched and archaic of our national institutions, which has consistently put its interests above those of industry. The effect of leaving interest rates to the Bank will be an increase in the exchange rate of sterling, making it more difficult for exporters, and further discouraging the basic domestic investment we desperately need.

Investment and savings in the UK have fallen to unsustainably low levels. The Tory mantra is that wages are to blame for low investment, but the share of wages in the economy is at its lowest level for forty years. It is the corporate sector, not militant trade unionists, which is undermining investment. Savings have collapsed because of two basic pillars of the Thatcherite experiment: companies paying out their rising profits as dividends instead of investing them, and tax concessions to the rich. Both have led to increased consumption for the wealthy, but not the necessary investment.

Pressure on the British economy to compete internationally means that savings and investment will be pushed up, and this presents the Labour Government with a very stark choice. Labour could decide to allow extravagant consumption in the form of dividends to continue, and leave the present tax structure unchanged. If it did, the only way to finance the revival of savings and investment would be at the expense of the average wage earner, the very people who have switched back to Labour to give us our first chance in government in nearly 20 years. Average wage earners would be paying for the excessive consumption of companies and shareholders, and the Government's popularity could not survive



Ken Livingstone MP.

Put simply, the wealthiest must pay, not because they deserve to (although they do), but because that is the only way to confront these economic choices and maintain a Labour Government. The windfall tax must be increased to raise £10 billion. Dividends have to be controlled so that company income is invested and not consumed by shareholders. The Government should introduce a higher rate of capital gains tax on short term profits compared to those realised over a longer period. Corporation tax relief should be halved from 20% to 10%. The ceiling on National Insurance contributions should be raised for those earning more than £50,000 a year, and military spending should be reduced to the Western European average — which would include withdrawal of UK forces from Germany.

These measures would break the back of the budget deficit, and they would ensure that those who have voted Labour will not pay for the follies of the Tories' economic failure. Every Party member should be encouraged by the possibilities opened up by this huge Labour majority. There is a genuine feeling throughout the country — even among non-Labour voters — that we need radical reform and modernisation. This is our greatest opportunity since 1966. We will never be forgiven if, as then, we let it fall from our grasp.❑

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Target: full employment!

Brian Burkitt, Pudsey CLP and Bradford University, outlines the choices facing the new government.

AFTER EIGHTEEN years of Tory misrule, embracing two depressions and a continuous squeeze on the public sector, the new Labour administration faces a long, uphill struggle to steer Britain towards a more prosperous and egalitarian future. Nonetheless its first 100 days in office will prove critical, either propelling policy towards radical reform or engaging in a more humane management of the status quo. The initial choice of direction will prove costly to reverse.

The first 100 hours do not inspire confidence: raising interest rates and removing the Bank of England's conduct of monetary policy from democratic accountability are deflationary and regressive. Yet Labour's prime target must be to restore full employment. Full employment is pivotal to achieving economic efficiency and social justice. It will restore workers' dignity and trade union strength, create sustained growth and provide the resources for improved public services.

In order to achieve this fundamental objective, Labour must initiate radical reform in three crucial areas:

- it needs to restructure economic policy, so that growth and full employment are sustainable over the long run;
- it must distribute power from capital to labour in the workplace by revising employment legislation;
- Britain's international economic relationships require recasting. Any move towards a single EU currency on the present deflationary Maastricht basis should be vetoed. Instead the Government should work for looser co-operation between governments committed to economic expansion and the restoration of full employment. It could also initiate a wider world focus by negotiating a series of long term bilateral trade agreements with lesser developed countries.

These policies require sustained development, but let us focus on two: overhauling the budget and employment legislation. By accepting Tory public expenditure ceilings, Labour will soon be compelled to choose between increasing taxation or further cuts in spending. Such a choice becomes even more difficult because higher taxation for the better-off has been rejected, the receipts from a windfall tax are a problematic "one-off", whilst economic growth generates more resources only after time.

Despite New Labour's self-imposed straitjacket, it can create a fairer society by deploying alternative redistributive measures. It could raise corporation tax from its traditionally low British levels, extend VAT to private health and education, and introduce a transactions tax on foreign exchange dealings not directly linked to trade. It should establish a Royal Commission to discover the most efficient mechanism for reducing defence expenditure, while directly employing the resources released for peaceful production. It could abolish the allowances that enable the rich to avoid tax; thus the tax-exempt status of PEPs and TESSA would disappear, because only higher rate taxpayers can take full advantage of them. It is also time to scrap mortgage tax relief.

All these measures provide finance for job-creating public expenditure and for increasing personal allowances so that more low paid workers will no longer pay income tax. Within the first 100 days, New Labour's commitment to reduce VAT on domestic fuel and power from 8% to 5% must be honoured, but as the inaugural stage of a radical five year strategy to lower VAT over a substantial range of commodities, which would assist the poor more than income tax cuts.

In its first 100 days, Labour needs to set out a comprehensive programme of employment legislation to be implemented over a single Parliament. The most profound change in labour markets since 1979 was the shift of power from employees to employers. Not only have rights at work been eroded, but much of the risk incurred in running a business has moved from capital to labour. A strategy to tackle job insecurity and widening inequality involves strengthened employment protection from day one in a job, new rights for working parents, a compulsory training levy on employers and the statutory enforcement of collective bargaining rights. It also entails outlawing age discrimination, reviewing the unfair dismissal compensation cap of £11,300 and ending the abuse of zero hours and self-employment contracts. It should enshrine a legal right to strike, to take solidarity action and to trade union recognition when a majority of employees in a workplace vote for it. The implementation of these proposals would help to rebuild democratic institutions and people's rights.

By implementing such measures Labour can inaugurate a culture change, where full employment is once more regarded as the major priority of economic policy. The state should become "the employer of last resort", just as the Bank of England is "'the lender of last resort" to City institutions. Public investment could then be used to create jobs in labour intensive areas — education, hospitals and personal social services. Redistributive taxation upon the rich can finance such initiatives; the alternative is an non-egalitarian economic and social infrastructure that undermines every citizen's security.

The task for socialists during the first 100 days, and long after, is a fight to ensure that Labour restores full employment and the infrastructure that is so essential to us all.

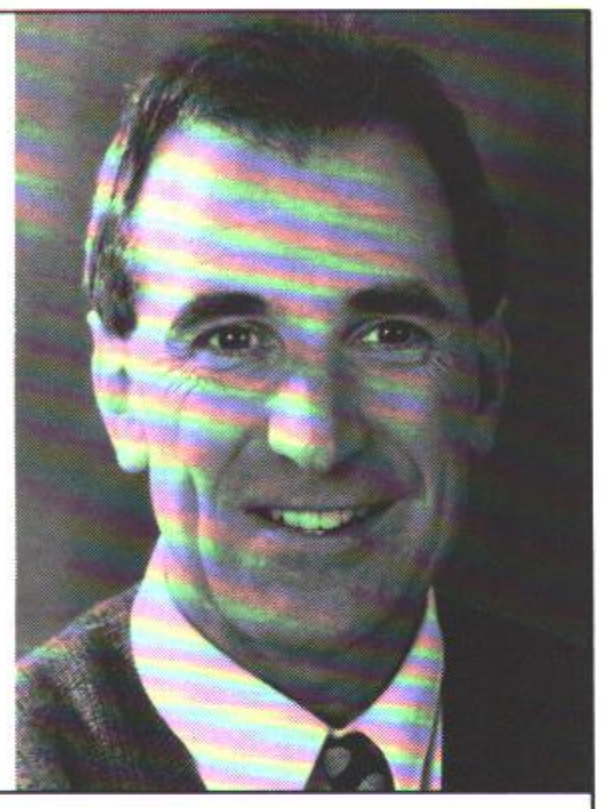
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the Alan Simpson column



The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.

"It's still the economy, stupid!"

A LOT OF water has gone under the bridge since Clinton's American campaign team ran this as the recurrent theme of their election bid. As Labour's new ministerial teams stride their way around the corridors of policy decision making, they would do well to remind themselves of the slogan, of the mistakes in judgement Clinton made about it, and of its central importance in determining how Labour will ultimately be judged.

With the all benefits of hindsight, large sections of America are now coming to understand that it was the economics that Clinton ignored (rather than the slogans he ran with) which are turning out to be the central issues of our time. Some of these are easy to summarise:

- The real economy and the money economy are not the same thing, nor do they (necessarily) share the same values or priorities.
- The "jobs" economy only connects with decent pay if you make it do so.
- "Competitiveness" means neither efficiency nor responsibility. Increasingly, it means no more than low pay/least cost, and is based on zero tolerance of environmental duties or employment rights.
- While the majority of people in the work economy do so either in small/medium size firms or in the public sector, the weight of political influence has shifted to corporate and trans-national institutions. Such institutions no longer have a rooted commitment to secure and sustainable employment within the domestic economy.

The implications of what follows are as far reaching in Britain as in any other economy.

To hand monetary policy over to the Governor of the Bank of England is not only a transfer of economic authority from the elected to the unelected; it is a transfer to a narrow group whose (self) interests are unlikely to reflect those of the rest of us.

Bankers like high interest rates. It's what makes money for money, but is this good for the economy? If you have a mortgage, or are an exporter, or are in employment which is affected by interest rate rises, this is less good news. It was high interest rates which drove Britain out of the ERM, but only after driving hugh numbers of firms into bankruptcy during this period of folly. Further rises in interest rates will also create bankruptcies, redundancies and repossessions which will do real damage in the real economy. Celebrations in the City will be unable to mask this.

In America, the obsession with "flexible employment" and cut throat competition turned skilled workers into shelf-stackers in supermarkets... and cut their wages by two-thirds! There are few votes or sympathies for a workers party which goes down that path. The "right" to work in insecure employment, for poverty pay, is not a right that the Party or the wider labour movement will fight for. Nor will they fight for policies which allow pollution of our land, air and water resources on a scale which has become both reckless and obscene

Labour comes into government as the inheritors of a lop-sided and damaged economy. The Tories reduced it to a service economy, abandoning manufacturing and encouraging the belief that we could live off dividends, share options and sell-offs. To guarantee ourselves a second term, Labour must turn this round to an economy based on secure employment, with no place for subsistence or starvation pay. We could excite the country if Labour grasped the nettle of creating a huge, popular wave of green-collar employment; a wave which would create jobs at the same time as tackling environmental crisis and backlogs of neglect. Young people, pensioners, local authority, the churches and a glittering array of environmental campaigners would sing our praises were we to do so... but the City may not.

Long term investment — in jobs, services and sustainable technologies — will take money from taxes, and a distinct public sector lead. This is the bullet which Labour must bite on.

The 1997 Capital & Class *conference*

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UNISON Conference: preparing for life under a Labour government

Tony Dale, Manchester Central CLP, reports on issues likely to dominate the conference of Britain's largest union.

DELEGATES gathering in Brighton, while relieved over Labour's victory, have few illusions the situation will be radically transformed. At the very least 18 years of Tory attacks on public services have ended and conference will be looking to identify areas where a start can be made to reverse the Tory Government's anti-working class policies.

UNISON conference is significant for the wider labour movement as it will outline a radical agenda going beyond the present plans of Tony Blair's cabinet and will identify many of the issues where there is likely to be widespread dissatisfaction with the policies of the Labour Government.

The call for a minimum wage at half male median earnings of £4.41 per hour will be reiterated. Labour's proposal to set up a "Low Pay Commission" involving employers to fix the level will be sharply criticised.

Gordon Brown's statements indicating Labour will be bound by the Tory public spending limits have prompted widespread opposition. The union's National Executive is proposing "the top priority of the new Government must be to introduce policies aimed at ensurjng full employment and renewed public services capable of providing the services that people need and wanted, by employees who are motivated and decently paid".

UNISON sees the ending of Compulsory Competitive Tendering and the Private Finance Initiative, both of which resulted in the privatisation and running down of public services, as essential to the future of public services. Gordon Brown's continuing squeeze on public sector pay will be roundly opposed — workers want a reversal of 18 years of pay erosion in the public sector.

The union advocates a Europe based on full employment and the welfare state in opposition to the Maastricht criteria for monetary union. Conference is likely to restate its opposition to a single currency if based on convergence criteria which threaten public services, jobs and pay.

Conference is likely to side with Barbara Castle in the call for pensions to be index linked to earnings. Reinstatement of the Liverpool dockers will be supported. A heated debate will take place over the Hillingdon strike due to the national leadership pulling the plug on official union backing. The repeal of the Asylum and Immigration Act is likely to be demanded.

Conference will echo the debate in the union's Affiliated Political Fund section over the future of links between the Labour Party and the unions. It is clearly in UNISON's interest to maintain Labour's links with the unions and protect the position of the unions and the local Constituency Labour Parties inside the Party's structure. An alliance of CLPs and affiliated unions could protect Party democracy by defeating the *Labour into Power* proposals.

The advocy of a radical agenda will not lead immediately to big industrial battles and a new "winter of discontent". In the future tension between the Government and public sector unions could spill over into open political disagreements and industrial conflict. In that battle the agenda outlined by UNISON is likely to have the sympathy and support of wide layers of the labour movement. Whether this battle happens is in the hands of Tony Blair and his cabinet. If they continue with austerity policies and hostility to the unions then conflict is inevitable.

Lock-out at Aerospace

FORTY ONE MSF members at Project Aerospace Ltd in Coventry have been locked out since last December, when new management tried to impose wholesale changes in working practices and attempted to remove all union rights.

The workers continue to mount a daily picket outside the factory. Workers at the company, which makes prototype and specialist car bodies, have never been in dispute before.

"Everything changed last year when they brought new management in. At last year's annual negotiations they refused to take any action on some quite serious asbestos problems that we had in the factory, they didn't want to know about health and safety. They also offered us nothing on pay, pensions or the sickness scheme — all of which needed urgent attention. Their main proposals were about changes in work practices; they wanted to take away our right to have a safety rep, and to remove all trade union rights in the factory", said senior shop steward Hughie Paine.

This take it or leave it deal was rejected by the metalworkers, and the management responded by locking them out. Since then the company has tried to bring in scab labour, but the stewards maintain that little real work is being done in the factory. Hughie Paine says that the new hard-line approach by management seems to be part of a bigger plan to cut costs.

Shortly before the dispute began Project Aerospace directors joined others to form a new shell company, which, Paine thinks, was to be used as a vehicle for contracting out work, or used as a way of closing down the factory, then re-opening it with new employment contracts.

The workers have been publicising this plan and getting support from other workers in the area, and Paine thinks that they've managed to stop the plan being put into action.

- To join the picket line or to get speakers, call 01203-474261 or 0976-971796. Donations to "Project Aerospace Dispute Fund", Coventry Trades Council, Unit 15, The Arches, Spon End, Coventry CV1 3JQ.

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Support Southwark strikers

Ray Ferris, NATFHE Cut Branch Committee, reports:

One hundred and sixty teachers at Southwark college in London enter their fourth week of all out indefinite strike action against compulsory redundancies.

The strike was provoked by a £1.5 million cuts package which includes proposals to force senior lecturers onto worse contracts and conditions, sack other teachers, and casualise teaching through the much criticised Education Lecturing Service agency for part timers.

The strike is very solid with more than 9 out of 10 union members on strike and over 2 out of 3 strikers either picketing or helping in some other way. We have already organised a successful lobby of a college governors meeting and a demonstration through the borough. And we have helped put the issue of further education funding onto the national news agenda, pressurising the Labour front bench to reinstate funding cut by the Conservatives.

College management is taking a very hard line and refusing to even meet with the union to resolve the dispute, despite the election of a new government and a commitment to funding. They have already deducted pay at the end of April only a week after the strike began, unheard of in our sector, and strikers lose two days pay for each day on strike because managers claim we do not work for them during our college holidays!

It is vital that we win our fight because of what the Conservatives used to call the "demonstration effect". If we can show that it is possible to fight back against compulsory redundancies and management by diktat then other workers in further education and elsewhere will also feel more confident in standing up to management cuts. It will also maintain pressure on Labour to deal with the chronic underfunding of education.

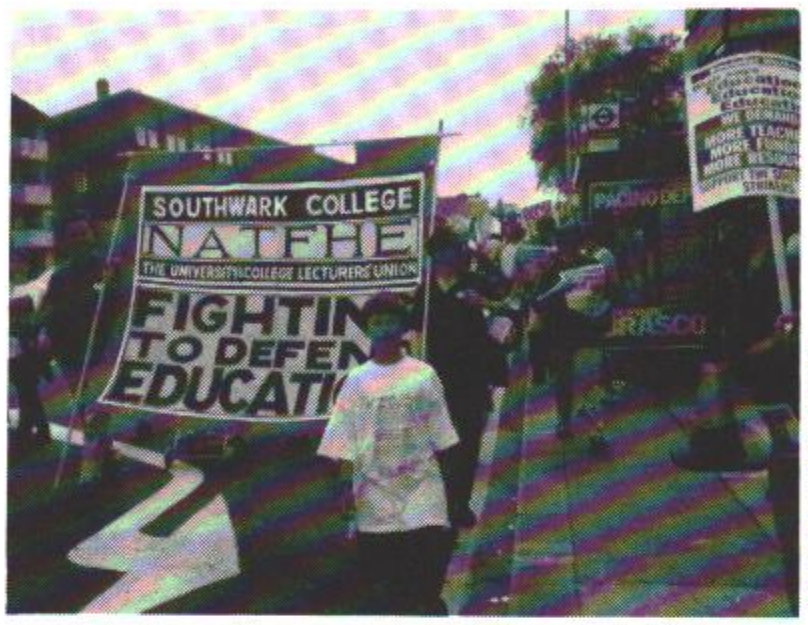


PHOTO: ED HALL

Southwark college NATFHE demo, 3rd May.

Readers can help by sending messages of support and, more importantly, by collecting money for our strike fund so that we are not forced back to work by financial hardship.

- Messages of support to: Southwark NATFHE strike HQ, Industrial Mission, Christ Church, 27 Blackfriars Road, London SE1. Phone: 0171-401 8753: Fax: 0171-620 2690. Cheques payable to: Southwark College NATFHE Strike Fund.

Strike wave hits FE colleges

Further education is in complete crisis after years of cuts, worsening conditions for lecturers and students, mass redundancies and casualisation of the workforce. Dave Palmer, Chair of NATFHE College of North East London branch, reports.

Despite a complete failure of leadership by NATFHE, staff at many colleges are taking action. Because colleges are "independent corporations" any attempt to organise a national strike is effectively illegal under anti-union laws. The new Government claims that its priority is: "education, education, education" but its commitment to Tory spending limits means cuts and redundancies in Further Education.

NATFHE estimates that FE needs an extra £2bn at least to reverse recent cuts. In 1993 FE colleges were taken out of council control, incorporated as independent quangos and now compete against each other for funding in an internal market based on numbers recruited. Funding per student has been cut repeatedly. Higher cost urban colleges' funding has been further reduced to "converge" with lower cost suburban and rural colleges — inner city colleges face higher cuts. Lecturers are forced into new "flexible" contracts which massively increase workloads. Lecturers still on the old contract have had no pay rise for 3 years. Pay and conditions now vary widely between colleges. Labour has said it wants national bargaining to "put an end to conflict, localised fragmentation and disruption". What this means in practice is unclear.

Provisional allocations for 1997/98 have been decided. Nine out of ten colleges get cuts and all colleges have to make 7.6% "efficiency savings". The "demand-led" element of funding (based on student numbers) is to end. These allocations are further devastating blows for a sector already cut to the bone which can absorb more cuts only if colleges close or merge. The Association of Colleges has demanded £39m from David Blunkett. Nationally over a dozen colleges are in dispute over cuts and restructuring. The FE budget is about £3bn. Approximately £500m is spent on colleges in London. Around 10%, i.e. £50m, is being cut from these colleges' budgets. Most Inner London colleges are making cuts of around £1m. In London Southwark, Kingsway, Lewisham, Lambeth, North East London and Southgate colleges have been on strike or are balloting for strikes.

Despite a new government we face Tory-style funding cuts. Education unions must unite with students, user groups, parents and other interested parties to fight for the resources that the state education sector has been so long denied.

Lol Duffy

Lol Duffy, the suspended Liverpool City UNISON branch officer, has been reinstated and cleared of misconduct. Lol was suspended, after the UNISON Branch distributed leaflets as part of an anti-cuts campaign.

Toni Byrne, branch secretary of Liverpool City UNISON and Chair of the Joint Trade Union Committee, said, "Lol was suspended for carrying out legitimate trade union activity and has now been reinstated because of the support given to him by UNISON members, especially those in the Central Policy Unit who took unofficial strike action. It was also heartening to see the support given by other trade unionists both inside the City Council and around the country".

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MDHC still reeling

Chris Knight writes: On 2nd April, six dockers' stewards attended the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC) AGM. Stewards grilled Chairman Gordon Waddell. What if a Labour government demanded reinstatement by threatening to withdraw their 13.87 per cent shareholding?

Waddell informed shareholders that MDHC has met with two officials from the Treasury, who divulged that the current Government had already formed the intention to sell its shares. Waddell told shareholders that productivity was 50 per cent up. So steward Bobby Morton asked why have two shipping lines (ABC and CanMar) left the port while no new ones have been attracted? Is this a marketing failure? Waddell claimed they had attracted new lines, but was unable to name them.

Waddell freely admitted that the dispute is having an impact. Profits are a further £2m down. Waddell blamed the loss on the company's Euroline ferry service. The company had received massive EU funding supposedly for "job creation". Where were those new jobs? Waddell acknowledged that they had not yet materialised but were jobs the company "hope to create".

What about casual labour? Waddell denied MDHC employed casual labour. Invoices from a casual labour firm were waved in the air. Waddell repeated his denial. Early in May, during the night, the MDHC removed and impounded the strikers' picket caravans. MDHC's excuse is that they own the land on which they were parked. True, but the leaseholders are Labour-controlled Sefton Council.

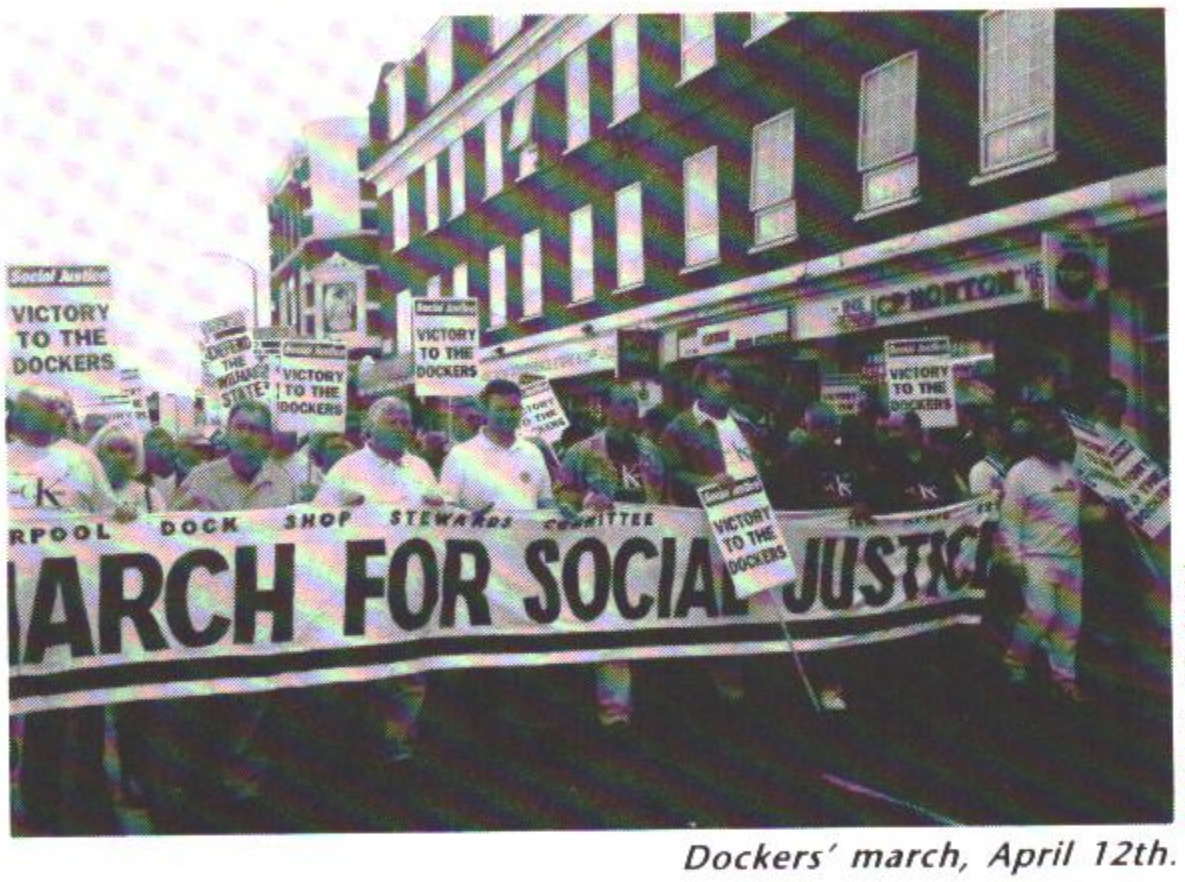


PHOTO: ED HALL

Dockers' march, April 12th.

- London Dockers Support Group, Saturday 31st May, 11 am, Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, Holborn. Donations to: Merseyside Port Shop Stewards, 19 Scorton St., Liverpool L6 4AS.

Trade union notebook

Sixty-five members of the Bakers Union working at the Arnaouti Pitta Bread Bakery in Tottenham have gone on strike to protest at their "slave" conditions of six 24-hour shifts with only one break, twelve days holiday after one year's work, £3.37 an hour, with no pension or sick pay and no union recognition. The employer is using agency scab labour. Tesco and Safeways are amongst the company's customers.

- Donations/support to: Paddy Hill, Auxiliary Officer, No.1 Region, Bakers Food & Allied Workers Union, Sinclair House, Unit 9, 66 Willoughby Lane, Tottenham N17 0SQ.

Thirty one members of the CWU at Critchley Label Technology have been sacked following disputes, including a one week strike, over recognition and redundancies. Critchley is now employing scab labour from a local agency which, together with 24 hour picketing, is severely affecting production. Critchley is an area of high unemployment and solidarity messages, invitations to speak and financial support are urgently needed.

- Contact: Critchley Strikers, CWU, Sue Hoskins, 54 Beech Grove, Oakdale, Blackwood, Gwent NP2 0NB, tel: 01495-220 597.

The Labour Government's trade union reforms could be under pressure sooner than expected. BIFU, the banking union, want to force the Midland Bank into recognising the union's right to represent 9,000 junior and middle managers. Labour has promised legislation to force recognition where over 50% of the workforce votes for it.

A charter for trade union rights has been produced by the Welfare State Network and the Liverpool Dockers have published a charter including rights for trade unionists. If you have anything to add to the debate on trade union rights please e-mail it to the address below. Liverpool City UNISON will be setting up a page on its web site shortly to include the discussion papers sent to it.

- Web site: liv-unison.uk.com . E-mail: info@mail.liv-unison.uk.com

Sheffield's Labour Council is threatening to issue up to 67 compulsory redundancy notices to staff from several departments. In addition 148 compulsory redundancies are threatened for later in the year. UNISON has run four successful official ballots for strike action in the departments where the redundancies are threatened. However, because the Council postponed the issuing of notices from before the General Election to immediately after, all the ballots have lapsed. UNISON is therefore re-balloting.

Members don't want to take action but if the Council issues compulsory redundancies, they will have no choice — after 18 years of Tory cuts they are not prepared to see a Labour Council make compulsory redundancies.

The Hillingdon hospital strikers, who continue their strike unofficially and without UNISON strike pay following the union's NEC's decision to call off the strike without a ballot, are taking their fight to the employer and to UNISON's conference.

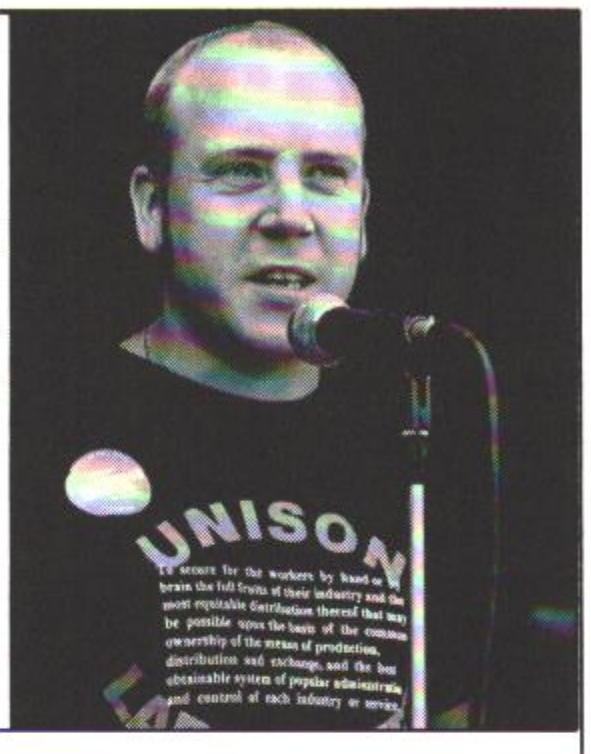
Following a film show which raised £3,000, strikers and supporters protested outside the Brixton HQ of their employers, Pall Mall. Although UNISON conference will be faced with a motion of censure of the NEC, motions seeking to overturn the decision have been ruled out of order. The strikers need to raise £2,000 a week. Donations to: Hillingdon Strikers Support Campaign, c/o 27 Townsend Way, Northwood, Middlesex, HA6 1TG (payable to HSSC) or directly to Account Number 2853884, Lloyds Bank, 21/22 High Street, Uxbridge, sort code 30-98-91.

UNISON delegates from local government branches meet on 20th May to discuss proposals to harmonise terms and conditions for manual

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the Geoff Martin column

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



After the relentless soundbite politics of the drawn-out election campaign it was a real treat to be among the 50,000 people who converged on Finsbury Park at the London May Day festival the following Monday to celebrate the dumping of the Tories. When I spoke at the rally I pointed out that although the election campaign was targeted at a few thousand swing voters in the marginal constituencies, it was the millions of ordinary working people who stacked up their votes behind Labour who will be the real political force in the country over the next five years. A BBC poll of people who voted Labour showed that both our traditional supporters and our new converts are overwhelmingly to the left of official Labour policy.

Both categories showed huge majorities opposing privatisation and supporting wealth distribution — this is the high ground that the left now need to occupy if we're going to develop a momentum which will seriously influence the new Government. I also pointed out at May Day that it was the trade unions who had formed the backbone of Labour's stunning success. It was our activists, our resources and our members hard-earned cash which got the vote out on the ground, regardless of what the media might tell you about the slick Willies up Millbank Tower.

I'm personally sick and tired of watching the unions being forced on to the defensive about their role. It's our Party and a bit of assertiveness now about our position wouldn't go amiss. We still hold 50% of the votes at Party Conference and we shouldn't be shy about using that strength to push for policies which would really make a difference to our members and their families.

I have no doubt at all that right at this moment there's some policy wonk from the LCC drawing up a plan for ditching the union link but at least Stephen "union buster" Byers has been kept well away from the employment department. We cannot afford to drop our guard — the Keep The Link campaign is still the right vehicle and we need to raise its profile throughout the union conference season this summer.

THE OTHER important lesson of the election campaign was the abject failure of the Socialist Labour Party to register even a blip. The anti-Tory mood was always going to swing behind Labour regardless of the qualities and policies of individual candidates. Decades of class loyalty don't evaporate overnight and nor should they. But the truth is that while the key objective on 1st May was to dump the Tories, the bulk of Labour's voters were also trooping into the polling stations because they expect something a damn site better than we've had over the past eighteen years. That's the mood that the serious left have now got to tap into.

The issues that drive the politics of these voters are our issues. The minimum wage, full employment, the NHS, education, workers' rights — chalk them up loud and proud, not because we're into sniping for the sake of it but because someone's got to keep vibrant, socialist politics alive and kicking. That means broadening our appeal around a set of core issues where we know that we can maximise our impact and reaching out as widely as we can. For example I still believe that the vast majority of Labour members joined the Party because they believe in wealth redistribution rather than some woolly pursuit of "fairness". Ken Livingstone was right to crank that debate up immediately after the election. I also take the view that a healthy chunk of the new PLP didn't seek election because they wanted to hand control of key elements of the economy straight over to the unelected Governor of the Bank of England. This move alone, with all its Maastricht-inspired overtones, gives the left something very real to mobilise around.

So the choice for the left is in our own hands. We can follow the SLP into glorious isolation or we can work to catch on to the mood which battered the Tories into the ground. Of course the threat of exclusion remains but so do a lot of good Labour Party socialists both inside and outside Parliament.

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

and white collar workers. Union officials claim it would represent a step towards ending low pay and discrimination against women and manual workers in local government.

While a single set of terms and conditions, a minimum wage of £4.26 per hour and a 37 hour week for all employees are aims that branches support, this deal has to be considered with care and viewed with suspicion when councils are cutting thousands of jobs across the country. No additional money is being offered to pay for the "improvement". They must all be funded from the 2.82% linked pay offer.

Many national conditions of service, defended with industrial action in the past, are being lost to local negotiations. UNISON was formed to unite strength in numbers. This deal will leave branches to fight on their own.

Rather than the great victory officials claim, these proposals represent a poor deal with very limited help to some low paid and effectively the start of the wholesale breakup of national terms and conditions.

MSF activist Glenn Sutherland has lost his appeal against sacking from the National Association of Citizens Advice Bureaux, where he worked as a printer, for unauthorised photocopying of trade union notices. Supporters claim that private photocopying is a common practice in the offices, and he is being victimised for being a first-rate shop steward. There have been two national one-day strikes, with over 30 new union recruits, and there will be another the day before an emergency meeting of NACAB's Council on 23rd May to consider his sacking. Letters of protest to the Chair of NACAB: Helena Shovelton, NACAB, 115-123 Pentonville Road, London N1 9LZ (copies to: Jennie Twydell, 80 Pembroke Street, London N1 0DP).

Palestine: what a state

Bob Deed, a member of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Solidarity Campaign, looks at the likelihood of an independent Palestinian state.

THE POST-OSLO and post-Netanyahu situation is full of ambiguity. We see Netanyahu and his right-wing coalition re-deploying from occupied lands, albeit small parcels of territory. We have even heard sections of the Israeli right break the taboo surrounding the words "Palestinian state" — although the murmurings of these words by figures in Likud and the National Religious Party have ceased during recent months. Yet the Oslo peace process now appears deadlocked. The Oslo process was seen by many as "the only game in town".

However, many Palestinians and their friends in the Israeli peace movement and the international solidarity movement hoped that it would lead to an independent Palestinian state. Some in Palestine and elsewhere saw parallels between the autonomy offered by Oslo and the autonomous Zionist community of the Yishuv in the 1930s which became the State of Israel in 1948. Oslo was seen as creating a dynamic towards an independent Palestinian state. To some extent the Palestinian Authority is taking on the character of an independent Palestinian state. But what kind of state could evolve? And how is this consistent with the tensions and conflicts arising in relation to the site of Jbel Abu Gneim ("Har Homa") near Jerusalem?

Netanyahu varies his rhetoric and gestures with alternating diplomacy and aggression. He won power promising a "secure peace" while exploiting the violent antagonism of the Israeli far-right to the peace process. His coalition includes both representatives of the far-right fiercely attached to the idea of Israeli sovereignty over the whole of Eretz Israel ("Greater Israel") and members of parties representing religious and immigrants interests who tend to be disinterested in the peace process. The main complicating factor is Netanyahu's attempt to appease the far right (both inside the cabinet and inside the settlements) while avoiding the stigma of being seen by the world to renounce Oslo. The product of these different forces is seen in the work of the bulldozers ploughing through the trees on Jbel Abu Gneim. Netanyahu pressed on with the plans that had been postponed by the more prudent Labour-led coalition. Similar settlement activity continues in other areas in Jerusalem and the rest of the West Bank. There are plans for six further areas of settler colonisation to complete the encirclement of the Palestinians of East Jerusalem.

This aggressive settlement activity continues to destabilise the peace process. It hampers the Palestinian Authority's ability to co-operate with the Israeli government and security forces. It draws the Palestinian youth onto the streets to confront the Israeli soldiers and settlers in scenes reminiscent of the Uprising of 1987-93. It also upsets both Egypt and Jordan who have made peace with Israel as well as further antagonising Syria which is looking for evidence of Israel's commitment to negotiate in good faith on the future of occupied territories.

The situation could be radically altered by the possibility of a National Unity government. For months there has been speculation about a Labour-Likud coalition. There have even been rumours about the allocation of portfolios. However, the recent scandal surrounding the bizarre appointment of a little-known lawyer and Likud hack as the Attorney-General appears to have put any plans for a National Unity government on ice. If a National Unity government comes into being, it has a ready made set of proposals for the final status negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. Last year Yossi Beilin, a contender for the Labour leadership and Michael Eitan, the leader of the Likud parliamentary faction, met and agreed a plan for a Palestinian entity on parts of the West Bank. Their plan followed the negotiations by Beilin with a figure in the Palestinian Authority close to Arafat. The Beilin-Mazen plan foresaw a State of Palestine being created alongside the continuing presence of the Israeli settlements, most of which would be annexed to Israel.

Although the PLO Executive denied the existence of the document, the idea of a statelet would probably be acceptable to sections of the Palestinian Authority. So, if a National Unity government does come into place as a means of allowing Netanyahu to keep the premiership without having to keep faith with the far-right, a rump state for the Palestinians may be on the agenda. It would offer Arafat the prestige which he craves, but it would offer nothing for the three million refugees who could not be absorbed by a micro-state. Even the citizens of the statelet would gain little as they would remain surrounded by an Israeli state which had grabbed a lion's share of land and resources. With hindsight it is clear that Oslo may have created a dynamic towards an independent Palestinian state. The imbalance of power between the players has meant that the Palestinians may win their independence but it will be a pathetic prize as Israeli domination is entrenched. And, of course, in the absence of justice, the prospects for a lasting peace look poor.

●PSC can be contacted at BM PSA, London WC1N 3XX.

Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign

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Turkish left fights state repression

Pat Byrne, Streatham CLP, recently returned from a human rights delegation to Turkey, reports on signs that the left is recovering from the dark days following the 1980 military coup.

MASSIVE MAYDAY demonstrations in the main cities of Turkey confirmed that popular discontent is growing. The spirit of the 100,000 workers and youth on the weekday march in Istanbul withstood the intimidating show of force by state security. Inspiring revolutionary songs and chants rose from the sea of red banners through dust storms whipped up by police helicopters.

While the Islamic fundamentalist Refa Party encourages traditional subservience, a new generation of female activists were as visible on the marches as their powerful role in the struggle demands. I'll never forget the sight of a woman barking out commands to unifomed ranks of the TKHP military wing, or the posters of the female hunger striker, one of the first women to die in last year's traumatic prison death fast, or the sad sight of the Mothers of the Disappeared leading the DKHC contingent.

The repressive nature of the state dates from the 1980 army coup when the military, assisted by the CIA-financed "Grey Wolves" fascist groups, unleashed a wave of assassination and persecution against the left. The relationship between the armed forces and the far right has since been consolidated with the fascists carrying out those operations against the Kurds with which the government does not want to be directly associated.

The extent of state harassment of left parties, the media and human rights organisations, less well known internationally than the repression of the Kurds, was highlighted during last year's UN Habitat II Conference on Human Settlement held in Istanbul. The police imprisoned 3,700 people during the Conference, and prevented the Turkish Human Rights Association from holding an alternative conference.

The close relationship between state officials, politicians, criminals and fascists was unexpectedly revealed last November. In what has since become known as the "Susuluk Incident", a normal, if tragic, car crash turned into a political sensation. The occupants of the car were revealed to include the Chief of Police, a leading mafia mobster, a member of Parliament from the governing coalition party, and a leading fascist wanted by Interpol for a range of terrorist anti-left attacks and involvement in an assassination attempt on the Pope. In the boot of the car were weapons, drugs and passports illegally issued and signed by government ministers.

The increasingly diverse media channels could not overlook such a scandal. Government attempts at "business as usual" faded as massive protests demonstrated the indignation of a wide cross section of the population. Millions have been responding for months to the call for householders to turn their lights on and off at 9pm each evening in order to illuminate the dark forces of the state.



May Day 1997, Istanbul.

Tremendous economic growth over the last 15 years is transforming Turkey from a predominantly rural country into a relatively modern industrial nation. However, the absence of effective democratic checks means that ordinary Turks are not getting a fair share of the increased wealth. The revolutionary trade union federation, Disk, suppressed by the 1980 coup, has re-emerged and is gaining members. Kesk, a new public employees' federation, has developed in defiance of the ban on unions in this sector. Yet less than 10% of the massive Turkish proletariat is organised.

How will this be reflected in the next election? The centre-left social democrats, with 30% of the vote, are divided between two main parties, which both seem compromised by the corruption and nationalism that underpins the war against the Kurds. They shun any talk of electoral alliance with the moderately left Kurdish party Hadep, who are only excluded from parliament by the increase of the electoral hurdle from 5% to 10%.

The trade unions recently announced steps to launch a left social democratic party, which may provide an alternative for the millions of Turks alienated by the existing "professional" politicians, who have recently been turning to the far right and fundamentalism.

The fundamentalist Refa Party is using its new power in central and local government to "Islamicise" decision-making and appointments — to such an extent that tensions have developed between them and the army who want to retain the secular state established in the 1920s by Kemal Ataturk. Talk of a new coup to halt the Islamicisation process may be sabre rattling by a CIA directed military which clearly fears any drift towards an "Iranian style" regime.

Britain's new Labour Government seems to be taking a better line towards Turkey — demanding much tougher conditions on human rights and democratic reform before agreements with the European Union can be made. However, the real nature of the Turkish state is not widely known and without pressure the Foreign Office could soon lapse back into the old cynical Tory policy of accommodation.

Members of our recent human rights delegation have therefore decided to launch a Turkish solidarity campaign to build support among Britain's sizeable Turkish population and other parts of the labour movement. Watch this space for more details.❑

Tony Blair: a triumph for the French right?

By Andrew Coates

BRITISH POLITICS entered May's French elections with a bang. New Labour's victory on 1st May was heralded by sections of the French right as proof of the validity of their own policies. The centre-right *L'Express* stated that "The true winner of the British elections was Thatcherite liberalism." Blair was seen as combining markets with social cohesion — the ambition of the Gaullists. Pundits advised the French Parti Socialiste to learn the lesson and to turn away from the "extremism" and "voluntarism" of their electoral programme. Lionel Jospin denied the charge, preferring to concentrate on Labour's adoption of the Maastricht Social Chapter.

To many French commentators Britain is not a model. Major's miracle unemployment rate is widely reported as fraudulent. On the right, Thatcherism is considered as a relic, not to be imitated. "Liberal" (in the economic sense) has become an insult. Blair's "stakeholding" and "partnership" correspond to the conservatives' vision, where the social-partners, unions, employers, and the state manage a wide domain, from social security to health. The true debate at the heart of the campaign concerns how far the French had to adapt these traditions to global markets.

On the right, the Gaullist RPR, and the right-wing UDF, are torn between those advocating greater sacrifices in order to qualify for entry into EMU, and those who wish to retain the "social cohesion" of Gaullism. Nobody should underestimate the role of the Front National in moulding the way the latter is understood. After the FN's victory in elections in the southern town of Vitrolles, every conservative politician has Le Pen in mind. Far from being a rabble, like the British BNP, the "national right" is solidily structured, with support from conservative professionals to the dispossesed of the suburbs. The Mouvement pour la France, led by Phillipe de Villiers (which has Sir James Goldsmith on its Euro-list) is a similar Catholic, even Royalist, reactionary force, with backing in the countryside. The far-right defends French identity against globalisation, from an ultra-nationalistic stance. Last year their racism even infected a part of the left, with the Abbe Pierre, and the former Communist, moslem convert, Roger Garaudy, railing against the "Zionist cosmopolitans".

The French left's campaign is very different to New Labour's in its willingness to embrace a large part of the left. The Socialists have reached an accord with the Communist Party (PCF), the centrist radicals (now minus convicted fraudster Bernard Tapie), the Mouvement des Citoyens (led by former left minister Chevenement), and Dominque Voynet's progressive Green Party, les Verts. Their strategy to fight unemployment by a reduction in working hours, state intervention, and the defence of a social Europe is backed by a broad section of the left, from Jacques Delors' daughter, Martine Aubry, to the Communists. On the negative side, no Socialist can wipe away the memory of the Mitterrand's 14 years presidency, and the mass unemployment it left behind. France underwent its own "Blair" revolution in the mid-eighties, and backed the bankers and markets in the way they negotiated Maastricht. They left many cynical about the idea of socialism.

In many respects the Socialists are in mid-transition from Blairism to something new. For many it is refreshing to see the issue of capitalism and class debated. The challenge is defined by thinkers such as Claude Neuschwander: liberalism is against democracy. The French PS lives in the real world, and not Tony Blair's fantasy of one-nation politics. Yet the PS's social base remains almost exclusively middle-class.

The unions — notably the much more independent-minded and vigorous Communist CGT — have kept their distance. On 24th April, 200 workers from the Belgian Renault plant of Vilvorde came to ask the socialist town of Lille what they were going to do to fight their redundancies. They were met with police batons.

Jospin has avoided close identity with the struggle against racist immigration laws. He preferred to fight the National Front in an obscure provincial town, rather than on the streets of Paris and Strasbourg. If the socialists win and have to cohabit with conservative President Jacques Chirac, they are not in a position to take effective socialist measures. Yet, by returning to the traditions of the left, the PS has won support and, whatever the result, will be able to play a part in rebuilding socialism in Europe.

Euromarchers demand social justice

Alan Thornett reports: Marchers are on the road across Europe protesting about unemployment and all forms of social exclusion. They are heading for Amsterdam on 14th June for the inter-governmental conference of the EU. In Britain they started from Jarrow and Preston and are due to pass through London on 7th June with a rally and a demonstration.

Labour have been elected and the celebrations have rightly taken place. But where does this leave the unemployed and the homeless, those on low pay and living in poverty? Labour is already preparing wholesale "reforms" of the welfare state with Frank Field in charge. The need to defend the welfare state has increased not declined.

The convergence criteria for EMU require that government spending be cut prior to entry. The policies of the new Labour Government will be shaped and constrained by this.

The big decision for Tony Blair is whether to go into the first round of EMU or wait. That decision will probably determine the pace of "reforms" of the welfare state. Waiting for the second round may not be so easy. Important sections of British industry fear being sidelined entering in the second round. Concessions already being made to Blair by EU ministers, like reducing VAT on domestic fuel, are sweeteners for EMU. The decision to surrender control over interest rates, for whatever reason it was taken, is a prerequisite for entry into EMU.

Once in EMU the effect is the same. The constraints on government borrowing contained in the form of the Stability Pact agreed recently iin Dublin.

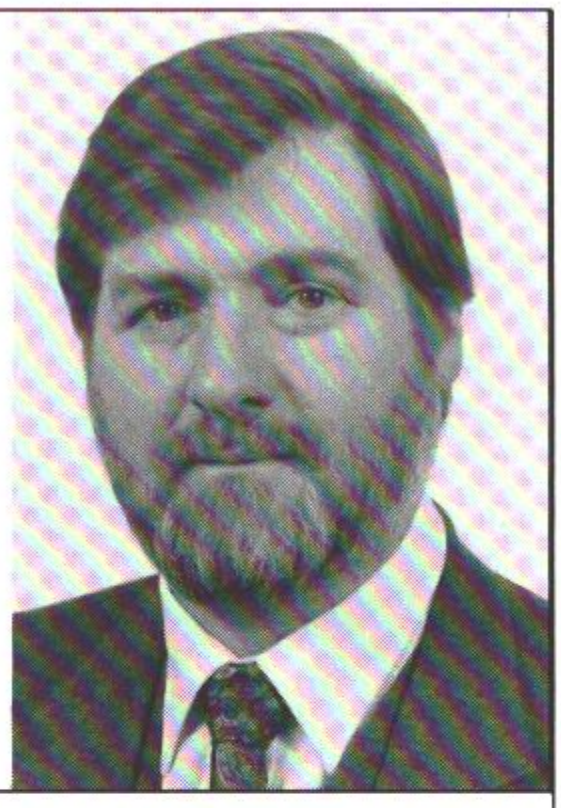
It is to protest at these measures that the marchers are on their way to Amsterdam. They will tell Tony Blair that it is not true that the Labour Party or the trade unions are united in their approach to the Maastricht treaty, the single currency or the EU. There are those who's first principle is opposition to unemployment and the defence of those who are the victims of the divided society. These are represented by the Europe marches and the many who have sponsored and supported them.

●Further information: Glenn Voris, Secretary of the British marches, St. Helens TUC Resource Centre, 21-31 Barrow St., St Helens, WA10 1RX. Tel 01744-755889.

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the Michael Hindley column

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



DURING THE long night of Tory rule now thankfully ended, the "Social Chapter" took on a rosier glow than it deserved. It is worth recalling briefly the derivation of this measure which the Labour Government immediately signed up for.

The Big Idea with which Jacques Delors revived a flagging momentum towards European integration in the late 1980s and early 1990s was "internal market": that is, the completion by 1992 of the promise held out in the Treaty of Rome for the Four Freedoms - free movement within the Common Market for goods, capital, labour and services. The left, fearing rightly that the free movement of capital would result in even greater imbalances within Europe as investment chased the best return by seeking lower labour costs, sought compensation by "a level playing field" on the social agenda. The simple aim was to avoid cut-throat competition by raising standards.

There was already a split emerging in the European Union (EU) between those who advocated high skill, high wage consensus economics and those led by Thatcher, who believed that the higher social costs in Europe would disadvantage us in global competition, particularly in meeting the challenge of the rising Pacific Rim economies. This split has been accurately short-handed as "Rhenish versus Transatlantic capitalism".

Thatcher was a role model for any would be shop steward: absolutely determined to oppose higher social standards "imported" from Europe, she successfully watered down the proposed "Social Chapter" to the point that, as was proven, it was counterproductive for Major opting out at Maastricht.

Once the Tories were clearly not on board, the EU Socialist leaders, principally Mitterand and Gonzalez, with all their prestige as government leaders, badly let down the European left by not reinstating the "teeth" of social legislation which Thatcher had so cleverly extracted. One important reason for this is that, particularly after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, the leadership of the West European left was convinced that there was no alternative to world wide free market economics and global competition.

The EU leaders now accept to an alarming degree that the "social market" model was simply a fair weather friend, that a consensus based economy was only possible during the false security of the Cold War when capitalism would make concessions because it feared (wrongly as it turns out) that there was a real existing alternative over the Berlin Wall.

On 1st May many in Europe rejoiced as we did to see the Labour victory, mainly because they see the Labour Party as a natural ally in holding off the severities of rampant free market economics. During the Blair reign, comrades in the European Parliament have often expressed the same mixture of credulity and wishful thinking as many comrades at home, namely that Blair is not really as right wing as his pronouncements indicate and somehow this is all a ruse in order to win the election.

NOW THE litmus test is not going to be the actual signing up for the Social Chapter, but how far the New Labour Government actually pushes for social advance in the EU. In John Smith's time the effective compromise between those who oversold and those who undersold the Social Chapter was the statement that a Labour government would immediately catch up on Social Europe by signing and would then place itself in the forefront of a movement to re-establish the idea that social welfare and a dynamic economy are not incompatible. That is sadly no longer the policy.

Blair has already handed a veto to the CBI on the setting of a minimum wage. He has already said that future social legislation from Europe will only be introduced if it is compatible with our competitiveness, again handing a veto to the CBI.

The trade union movement will find that having paid for the election it can get no special favours, unlike multinationals. Can anyone imagine the howls if Blair had appointed a prominent trade unionist as a Minister for Europe, rather than the head of BP?

There is no sign whatsoever that Rhenish capitalism will be the model for Blair. His role model will be Clinton and, to the sad disillusionment of the continental left, Britain will still be the Trojan horse for transatlantic capitalism in Europe.

Those in the Labour Party with the greater problem will be our believers in modernising Britain through contact with Europe. It is they who have trumpeted the joys of civilisation by Brussels directives. It is they who now will fall foul of a government which has accepted the Thatcherite revolution. It was the Union Jack, not the twelve star EU flag (let alone the Red Flag) which Blair's people handed out to the crowds on Labour's arrival at Number 10.

New Labour: at the heart of Europe?

The Sans-Papiers

The new movement of asylum seekers and immigrants without papers in France.

A Woman Draws the First Lessons

by Majiguène Cissé

Pamphlet available from Crossroads Women's Centre,
PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU.
Tel.: 0171-209 4761.

Asylum rights

John Stewart, treasurer of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns assess the prospects of the Labour Government improving rights for refugees.

THE ELECTION of a Labour Government with an overwhelming parliamentary majority of 179 will be welcomed by the thousands of people in the UK threatened with deportation or removal under Immigration Act powers. Despite Prime Minister Blair's deliberate strategy of damping down expectations of radical change and the rotten record of past Labour governments on immigration issues, most deportees will feel more confident today than prior to 1st May.

For me this feeling of confidence and hope was encapsulated by a phone call I received on the day after the election. "We've won!, we've won!" came the cry from a Nigerian man fighting deportation. For a moment I thought he had heard from the Home Office that he and his family could stay!

Previous Labour governments have not set a high standard of concern for human rights and the dignity of people on the receiving end of immigration legislation. The immigration acts passed by the Wilson Government in the 1960s and Labour front-bench support for successive Tory laws attacking the rights of immigrants are a sorry precedent.

Nonetheless the massive rejection of the Tories that took place on 1st May opens up a vast range of possibilities.

The Labour Party campaigned with three main pledges on immigration: the abolition of the primary purpose rule, the repeal of Section 8 of the 1996 Asylum and Immigration Act on workplace checks of employees' immigration status, and a commitment to look at the rules on deporting people co-habiting with UK nationals for two years or more.

These pledges are welcome. However we believe they do not go far enough.

Among other measures identified by deportees as being needed are:

- The restoration of full entitlement to social security benefits for asylum seekers;
- As a matter of emergency, cash to be allocated directly to asylum seekers (rather than the current situation where local authorities can provide food and shelter under the 1948 National Assistance Act but not money);
- The right of British nationality to children born in the UK. This was the situation prior to 1981 and the 1992 Labour Party manifesto pledged to "restore the right to British citizenship for every child born in Britain." Unfortunately this pledge was missing in 1997;
- The right of British-born children to have their parents living with them to look after them;
- Immigrants with long residence in the UK to be given indefinite leave to remain. There is currently an unwritten convention that those who have resided in the UK for fourteen years or more are allowed to stay permanently if they so wish. This should be formalised and the length of stay qualification reduced;
- Legal recognition of the special problems faced by women in abusive or violent relationships who cannot leave their partners without risking their right to remain in the UK (the One Year rule);
- The right for young adults and dependent children over sixteen to join their families settled in the UK. The Council of Europe Social Charter provides for family re-unification for children up to the age of 21. This right should be extended to all children;
- Individuals in gay and lesbian co-habiting relationships to enjoy the same right of settlement as heterosexual couples;
- Unmarried heterosexual couples to be treated the same as those who are married;
- The right for families settled in the UK to receive visits from family and friends abroad without obstruction from immigration officials.

So far unfortunately, not all the signs coming from the new Government have been positive. Chigozie Mbachu, a Nigerian national living in the London Borough of Newham with his common-law wife and two British children, was deported in the week following the election. His new MP, Jim Fitzpatrick, wanted time to examine the case but the removal was carried out before new and full representations could be made.

An appeal from the Winson Green hunger strikers

"We are writing this letter from a cell in Birmingham prison. We have taken the liberty today to let the outside world know how we are feeling deeply within ourselves. We are asylum seekers detained in a category B Prison. We are being treated as criminals.

We are locked up usually for 24 hours per day with only one hour's association per week and only allowed one shower per week. We have no facilities of any kind. We are among criminals, many of whom share cells with us. We feel we are discriminated against by being detained in a criminal institution instead of a detention centre.

We call upon anyone who is concerned about our detention, to say that we believe we are being treated unfairly and unjustly. If we were detained in China or Turkey or any other totalitarian country we could understand the denial of our basic rights under the 1951 Geneva Convention to which Britain is a signatory. We have read that the UK was the leader in the human rights revolution, and that the greatness of the UK is its freedom of speech and human rights protection.

Our demands are:

- **Urgent solution to the detainees held in a criminal regime at Winson Green Prison.**
- **Urgent implementation of 1951 Geneva Convention Treaty without delay or excuse.**
- **Fair treatment to all detainees across the UK.**
- **Respect and protection of human rights.**

We believe that with your help we can get fair treatment. To the truth of justice to one and all!"

Signed: the detainees interned in Winson Green Prison.

- **Please fax letters to Jack Straw (0171-273 3965). Send letters of support to the hunger strikers c/o NCADC, 22 Berners St., Birmingham B19 2DR.**

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now!

Chigozie was put on a plane to Lagos without being allowed to say goodbye to his family. His partner was not able to give him any money or even his passport before the plane took off.

In Winson Green Prison, Birmingham, 15 asylum seekers began a hunger strike at the beginning of May to protest at the conditions they were being kept in. Like the courageous two month hunger strike of the asylum seekers in Rochester Prison at the beginning of the year, these detainees are calling for a swift and fair settlement of their cases. Mike O'Brien, the new Immigration Minister, refused to receive any representations on the issue.

One of the problems is that the new Labour Home Office team is surrounded by the same civil service advisers used by Michael Howard and Ann Widdecombe. If these people are not replaced quickly we will have many more examples of the Labour Government implementing Immigration Rules in this harsh and callous manner. Labour MPs with an interest in immigration matters should be arranging a meeting with Mike O'Brien to express their concerns and to press for policy changes. This could go some way to acting as a counter-weight to the advice given by right-wing civil servants.

Next month will see the publication of a major new report issued jointly by the Asylum Rights Campaign, the Immigration Law Practitioners Association and Justice. The report will detail asylum procedures in ten other countries and make various recommendations to bring the UK into line with best practice. The report will give an ideal opportunity for the Government to launch a wide-ranging review of asylum procedures and immigration laws as they operate in this country.

As part of this review socialists in the Labour Party should call for the repeal, in full, of the Asylum and Immigration Acts 1996 and 1993 and all the other racist legislation passed by governments of all parties this century and the enacting of fair rules that recognise the benefits that people coming from abroad bring to this country.

- Contact NCADC at 22 Berners Street, Birmingham, B19 2DR. Tel. 0121-554 6947.

Now Straw has Onibiyo case on his desk



PHOTO: ED HALL

Members of the Onibiyo family with Rodney Bickerstaffe and Jeremy Corbyn MP

Ed Hall reports: On 9th May Jeremy Corbyn MP accompanied by Rodney Bickerstaffe delivered a letter to Jack Straw supporting the Onibiyo family and the demand that the threats of deportation should be removed from Joyce, Jemi and Tora Onibiyo, and the return of Abdul and Ade be made possible.

Sisters Lola and Toro Onibiyo with their mother Joyce met with supporters at the House of Commons to see the letter delivered. The Labour Government has an opportunity to put right the wrong of the deportation orders of Michael Howard, and to give hope to a family which has faced heartache and forced division.

●Further information: Onibiyo Family Anti Deportation Campaign, c/o Lambeth UNISON, 6a Acre Lane, London SW2 5SG. 0171-737 2134.

No beacon of light in the East

ANTI-RACISTS IN east London were delighted at BNP candidates' poor showing in the general election. Their campaign was low key and the tension many had feared did not arise.

That the BNP can no longer mobilise the numbers on the streets is welcome, although the fear is that many of the younger supporters have moved on to less respectable activities than electoral campaigning: C18 grafitti appeared around the Labour Party HQ in Poplar.

While the BNP candidates in east London polled more heavily than those elsewhere in the country and had roughly doubled since their last General Election showing, they were down on the 20-30% seen in Council elections held since 1992. John Tyndall, Poplar & Canning Town, scored 2,849 (7.3%); David King, the BNP east London organiser, scored 3,350 (7.5%); and Gordon "wolfman" Callow scored 531 in Hackney South & Shoreditch (a third of his vote as a losing candidate with Derek Beacon in Millwall, May 1994). However, their votes were heavily concentrated in key wards: scenes of past local government successes, to which they will doubtless return when London council seats are up for election again in May 1998. The depleted numbers of "New Labour" activists must not become complacent.

Labour member nominates BNP candidate!

Gillingham now has its first-ever Labour MP but it also had its first BNP candidate. The Labour Party was rocked by scandal when it emerged that long-time member, Lil Banner, her brother, lodger and lodger's sister had signed the BNP nomination form. She claims she was ill at the time, but the reality is that she and her fellow signatories are well-known as racist bigots. Banner has declared there "are too many blacks, send them all back!" After an initial angry reaction, election agent Paul Harriot has let the matter drop. Banner was amongst those who in 1989 bayed for the expulsion of *Militant* seller David Turner, formerly the Party's Ethnic Minorities Officer. Gillingham CLP has never had a black or Asian council candidate, while the Liberal Democrats have had two Asian councillors.

Sexual apartheid

As we approach this years' Gay Pride celebrations, Peter Tatchell says the legal system subjects lesbians and gay men to separate and unequal treatment.

THIS SUMMER'S Lesbian, Gay Bisexual and Transgender Pride March on 5th July marks the 25th anniversary of Pride celebrations. Those celebrations were the beginning of the modern movement for queer liberation in Britain.

Over the last 25 years there has been a dramatic improvement in the lives of lesbians and gay men. However, this is largely due to self-help. There's been no significant gay law reform since the partial decriminalisation of male homosexuality in 1967. Minor changes, like the lowering of the age of consent to 18 last February, have often perpetuated discrimination.

The legal system is, effectively, a system of "sexual apartheid". It subjects lesbians and gays to separate and unequal treatment in terms of the laws governing sexual behaviour, marriage, employment, child adoption, membership of the armed forces and so on.

This institutional discrimination is premised on the doctrine of straight supremacism: the idea that heterosexuals are superior to homosexuals. Reflecting this belief, the law denies gay people basic human rights that straights take for granted. This entrenched denial of legal rights to queers is in some ways analogous to the apartheid regime which existed in South Africa. Obviously, it is not based on the extreme economic deprivation and police state brutality, but at the level of supremacist ideology and legal discrimination, there is a shocking degree of similarity (but no comparable public outcry).

Lesbians and gay men in Britain have never, of course, been banned from living in particular neighbourhoods yet we can be refused housing by a bigotted landlord and we have no form of legal redress.

Nor are queers officially forbidden to use "hetero only" bars or restaurants. But we can be lawfully refused service by a leisure venue or retail outlet which objects to "poofs" and "dykes". In law there is nothing we can do about it. Although lesbians and gays are not excluded from the right to vote — we might as well be. Queer votes count for little in electorates dominated by heterosexuals and in a legislature with an in-built straight majority which consistently refuses to uphold lesbian and gay human rights.

In some respects, the system of "sexual apartheid" causes forms of suffering that even the South African regime never inflicted. Black people under apartheid were denied the right to inter-racial marriage and separated from their partners by the mining and domestic labour systems. However, they were never subject to a blanket ban on marriage and automatically refused inheritance rights on the death of their partner, as happens to lesbians and gay men.



PHOTO: BOB WATERMAN

Gay Pride 1977.

Moreover, although black families in South Africa were often torn apart by the apartheid system, black children who lived with their parents could count on getting love, understanding and support — and a sense of self-respect and black pride. In contrast, gay kids grow up in the prison of a heterosexual home, with straight parents who often despise, mistreat and reject them. This leaves many of us suffering from a lack of identity and low self-esteem, which can later lead to severe depression and destructive behaviour such as alcoholism and suicide.

Thankfully, we have witnessed the demise of race apartheid in South Africa and the adoption by the ANC government of a constitution which is the first in the world to explicitly guarantee equal treatment to homosexual men and women. How much longer will lesbian and gay people in Britain have to wait for an end to the system of "sexual apartheid" which treats us as second class citizens?

- Peter Tatchell's new book, *We Don't Want To March Straight - Masculinity, Queers & The Military*, is published by Cassell, £4.99p.

Not invited to the Party

Disabled people gatecrash Blair at Royal Festival Hall. Kate Adams from Incapacity Action reports.

AT 4.00am on May 2nd members of Incapacity Action joined London Dan (Disabled People's Direct Action Network) at the Royal Festival Hall on the first demonstration of a Blair government, demanding enforceable civil rights including scrapping Incapacity Benefit and the All Work Test.

Two claimants died from heart attacks after their incapacity benefit was withdrawn. Another sustained a serious injury during her test for incapacity and thousands have experienced increased poor health with the stress of losing their income. Some have waited for an appeal to be heard on reduced income support for up to six months.

Our message was delivered with good humour but some revellers were hostile towards us. While not trusting Blair they still wanted to celebrate the Tories' crushing defeat. We had a different perspective — we can't celebrate until we are invited to the party. We did not feature in the manifesto commitments. Labour have said they will amend the Disability Discrimination Act and monitor the Incapacity Test with a view to reform — cosmetic changes only.

Disabled people are still trapped by inaccessible buildings and transport, segregated in special schools, employment discrimination and benefit cuts. Labour's huge majority means Blair has no excuses.

- Send donations to Incapacity Action, 65 Casimir Road, London E5 9NU.



New Labour, new promotion opportunities

Over the weekend following the Election, many civil servants were summoned to meetings with their new Ministers. In the **Department of Transport**, an official in the railways division received an urgent telephone call at his home to report to the Secretary of State's office. He arrived breathless and sweating, to find the room full of ministers. He was greeted by the Permanent Secretary, Sir Patrick Brown. "I'm pleased to meet you" said Sir Patrick. "I'm the Permanent Secretary. Congratulations on your ministerial appointment"!

So there

The first meeting of the new **Parliamentary Labour Party** was held, as TV viewers will know, in the hall where the Church of England Synod normally meets. Once the media had departed, backbenchers began the onerous task of questioning the new rulers of the country. **Ken Livingstone, Dennis Skinner** and others asked why the Government's first move had been to hand over control of interest rates to the Bank of England. Some detailed and compelling arguments against this move were placed before the new Prime Minister, who rose at the end of the debate to respond. Standing behind the lectern and adopting his most Episcopal, ex-cathedra manner, **Blair** explained. "Look, I'll tell you why we did it. I'll tell all of you why we did it. We did it because it was the right thing to do." End of statement, end of debate. Next stop: the doctrine of Prime Ministerial infallibility?

Fishy business

Interesting to note that proposers for the Tory candidate in **Gedling** included Magdalen **Roach** and Geoffrey & Irene **Trout**.

Youth speak

May Day brought mock elections to **Hornsey School for Girls**, a North London comprehensive.

After a vigorous debate and high turn out, the results were as follows.
Conservatives: 38.
LibDems: 106.
Greens: 208.
Labour: 220.
Socialist Labour: 268.
The purpose of mock elections, of course, is not to elect members of Parliament under a first past the post system but to express shades of opinion. In that context, the result can only give *LLB* readers hope for the future. Here was an electorate born and bred under Thatcherism and clearly, they want no more of it, whether in its Tory or New Labour guises.

How the mighty are fallen

You might have thought Tony Blair would have repaid the T&G's **Jack Dromey**'s craven loyalty by at least allowing him onto the imposed shortlist for Castleford and Pontefract. Attempting to elicit a comment as Brother Dromey attended an NEC interview to get on the shortlist, *Newsnight*'s Michael Crick asked, "Are you here with Mr Blair's blessing?" Obviously not! Mr Dromey refused to answer that, or the next question, "Have you ever been to Pontefract"?

With friends like these

The Friends of Independent Schools has launched a levy not on its members but on all parents of children at **independent** (ie. fee paying) **schools** (no sign of a ballot here — the "voluntary" levy is simply added to pupils' bills). The plan is to build up a campaign against any reduction in subsidy to assisted places; against VAT on fees and generally pro-elitist education. The FIS's parliamentary liaison office is also concerned at loss of charity status for independent schools — yes, that's right, these schools actually receive all the benefits of charity status. Thank heavens David Blunkett will be committed enough to stand up to these attacks under a Labour Government.

Fosters out of the laager

Derek Foster, the scabby right-wing Blarite ex-chief whip was rewarded for his loyalty by Big Tony when in the new government, Derek was...demoted. Clearly a man of great principle, he reacted to his position as Minister of State at the office of Public Service (about the 25th most important person in government) by...jacking it in after just three days.

Target Westminster!

Francis Wheen on Radio 4's *News Quiz* on 17th May pointed out the illogicality of MPs opposing the right of Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness to enter the Palace of Westminster. After all, their presence would make it less likely to be a target!

Correspondence

Our letters page will reappear next month. Send your letters (under 250 words) to *LLB*, PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU or email llb@gn.apc.org

AOB

"Don't expect any money or help at the next election" - *Margaret McDonagh's* gentle tip to new Labour MPs who might oppose the Labour Into Power proposals.

"Bold, brave and right" - *Norman Lamont* on Brown's decision to give the Bank of England the power to raise interest rates.

"In the past I have always voted Labour but they don't seem to be standing this time so I'll be switching my vote to the Tony Party" - *Billy Bragg.*

"My breaking point could be the bulldog...I'm off when Tony Blair begins to talk like Thatcher of 'Winston'" - *Bernard Crick.*

"I'm definitely at the Tony Benn end of the spectrum...My dad was a lifelong Tory voter...but the Tory Party he supported...would probably be more left-wing than the present Labour Party" - *John Peel.*

"Conservatism with a human face" - *Martin Kettle*'s slogan for New Labour.

"I don't understand people who say that they can't vote Labour because Tony Blair has gone too far...Further than Wilson who backed the Vietnam war? What they're saying is 'Napalming a village I could tolerate, but privatising air traffic control is overstepping the mark'" - *Mark Steel.*

"It is not Labour Party policy to ban hunting with hounds" - *Jack Cunningham MP.*

"Labour is strongly opposed to the so-called sport of hunting with hounds. Labour is the only party with a long standing commitment to have a free vote in the House of Commons to ban it" - *Labour's animal welfare leaflet.*

"I don't think anyone ever wants to hear that record again" - *Kirsty Wark* on D-ream's Labour anthem, *Things Can Only Get Better.*

"Trust and care are my watchwords, learned over years working with Peter Mandelson" - *Colin Byrne*, former Labour Party Chief Press Officer.

"Is this what the British Labourites mean by a more democratic and pro-European policy? They are no different from the Tories" - *Radio Athens* on Chris Smith's refusal to return the stolen Elgin Marbles.

Don't give me no *LiP*

Christine Shawcroft, Chair of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, appeals for maximum opposition to the leadership's latest and most fundamental assault on internal democracy.

FOR THOSE of you who thought it couldn't get worse after the Clause IV vote, there was the *Road to the Manifesto* "consultation". And for those of you who thought it couldn't get worse after the manifesto vote, there was the *Party into Power* "consultation". And if you thought it really couldn't get any worse after that, it's now *Labour into Power* (*LiP*) — the "Party" is being removed from the equation completely.

The softly-softly launch of the original document, during a pre-election period when branches had been told not to meet, and on no account to have an AGM, is itself suspicious. Many Party members missed it completely, and don't understand why this year's Conference will be so crucial. There can be only one reason for the leadership trying to sneak this past quickly before anyone realises quite what's happening — if rank and file members do realise what's at stake there will be uproar. In the very limited time available, we have got to alert the mass of the Party to what is going on.

The proposals are based on the premise that the failures of the last Labour Government were entirely down to opposition on the NEC and in the Party at large, rather than the members of that Government. If only we had kept our mouths shut over the five per cent pay limit, for example, and not protested, taken strike action etc, Labour would have won the '79 election. The fact that Denis Healey and Roy Hattersley have now admitted that the five per cent target was unnecessary, provocative and destroyed the faith of workers in a Labour Government, is brushed aside. The NEC will be stuffed with leadership clones who know which side their bread is buttered. Conference will be reformed so that no opposition is allowed a voice. Policy "submissions" will disappear into a two year rolling programme to ensure immediate issues go off the boil. Submissions will be accepted from external organisations with no affiliation to the Party at all.

The CBI will have as much input to Party policy as your constituency or union branch. The long delay before the Standing Commissions report back will give ministers carte blanche to make it up as they go along. Already we have seen Gordon Brown hand over control of interest rates to Eddie George — not a feature of the manifesto consultation, as I recall. All this begs the question —what on earth is the Government going to do that is so terrible? Why is it so desperate to head off any criticism before it starts? Maybe there is a clue in the appointment of Frank Field to look at the reform of welfare benefits. Members read about this in the papers and their blood ran cold.

The *LiP* proposals must be defeated if the Party is not to be reformed out of existence. The tactics we must use have been the subject of lively debate. Keep the Party Labour has produced resolutions against different parts of the document, so as not to be ruled out of order by the Conference Arrangements Committee on the one subject "rule". They have also produced a resolution calling for a year's delay, on the grounds that there has not been sufficient consultation. Neither of these positions is mutually exclusive. If the proposals were delayed this would be a victory and a chance to alert members to the true nature of the proposals.

To win outright opposition at Conference would be more than a victory, it would be the turning point in the battle for the soul of the Party. Members need to ensure that their CLP or union branch sends a submission opposing the proposals, and also a Conference motion and amendment dealing with an aspect of the report, or calling for delay. Whatever seems most likely to get support in your organisation must be pushed forward now. Next year will be too late.



Christine Shawcroft.

Resolutions to Labour Party Conference:

Party structure

This Conference recognises that the existing structure of the NEC directly reflects the federal make up of the Party consisting of CLPs, affiliated trade unions, Socialist Societies, Women's Sections and the Youth Section. The NEC is the Party's governing body between conferences by virtue of its direct election by the Party's affiliates and individual members and its accountability to them.

Conference reaffirms that the Labour Party is a federation of affiliated bodies each having provision for representation at all levels of the Party structure, with the representatives being accountable to their nominating organisation as well as to those who elected them. Conference therefore determines that affiliation shall remain the basis of the Party's and NEC's structure. Labour organisations seeking representation on the NEC shall do so through affiliation as Socialist Societies.

Conference also notes the *Labour into Power* document proposes 'further consultation and discussion on whether CLPs should continue to have the right to nominate MPs for the Constituency Section of the NEC.'

Conference considers that the distinction made by *Labour into Power* between MPs and other Party members is an invidious one since as nominees MPs have the same status as everyone else.

Conference believes that CLPs should not be denied their existing right to nominate MPs for the Constituency Section and that individual Party members should not be prevented from voting for MPs when they wish to do so.

Conference calls upon the NEC to conduct a consultation over the next 12 months to consider NEC representation, within the existing framework for Party interest groups, such as local Labour councillors, as Socialist Societies with a special status similar to that held by the Black Socialist Society.

CLP and Affiliated Organisations input into the Party Conference

This Conference reaffirms the right of Constituency Labour Parties and affiliated organisations to submit directly to Conference without prior sifting resolutions on subjects of their own choosing, amendments and constitutional amendments.

Conference further determines that its role as the Party's sovereign policy-making body requires that the Conference agenda continues to be formed from these resolutions and amendments, and that the Conference timetable continues to reflect directly the numbers of resolutions and amendments submitted on particular topics.

Conference instructs the NEC to bring forward to the 1998 Annual Conference constitutional amendments fully enshrining these provisions in the Party's Rule Book.

- **The deadline for resolutions to Labour Party Conference is 20th June. This is also the deadline for responses to the consultation on *Labour Into Power*.**

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