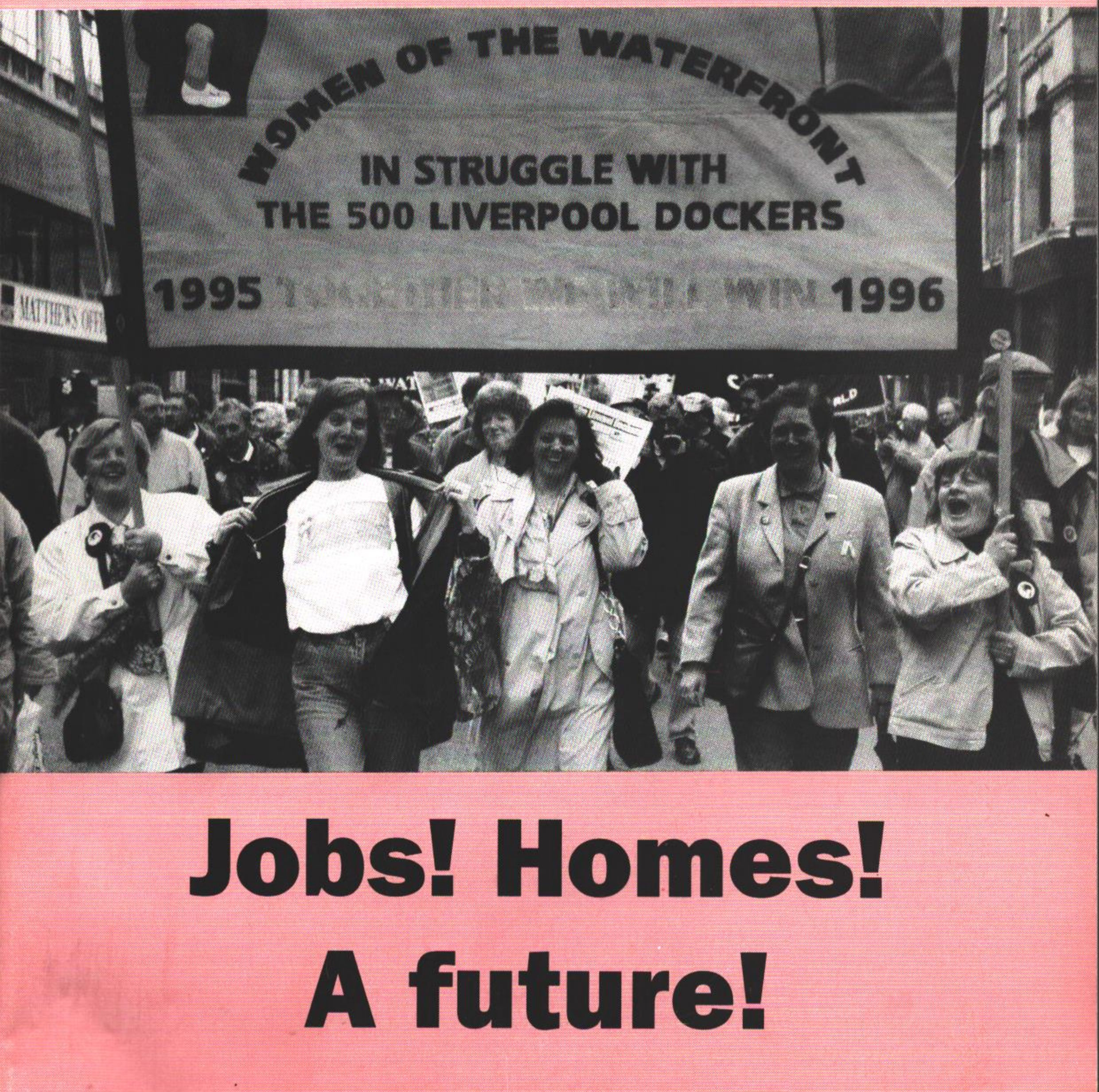
LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

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Labour Left Briefing

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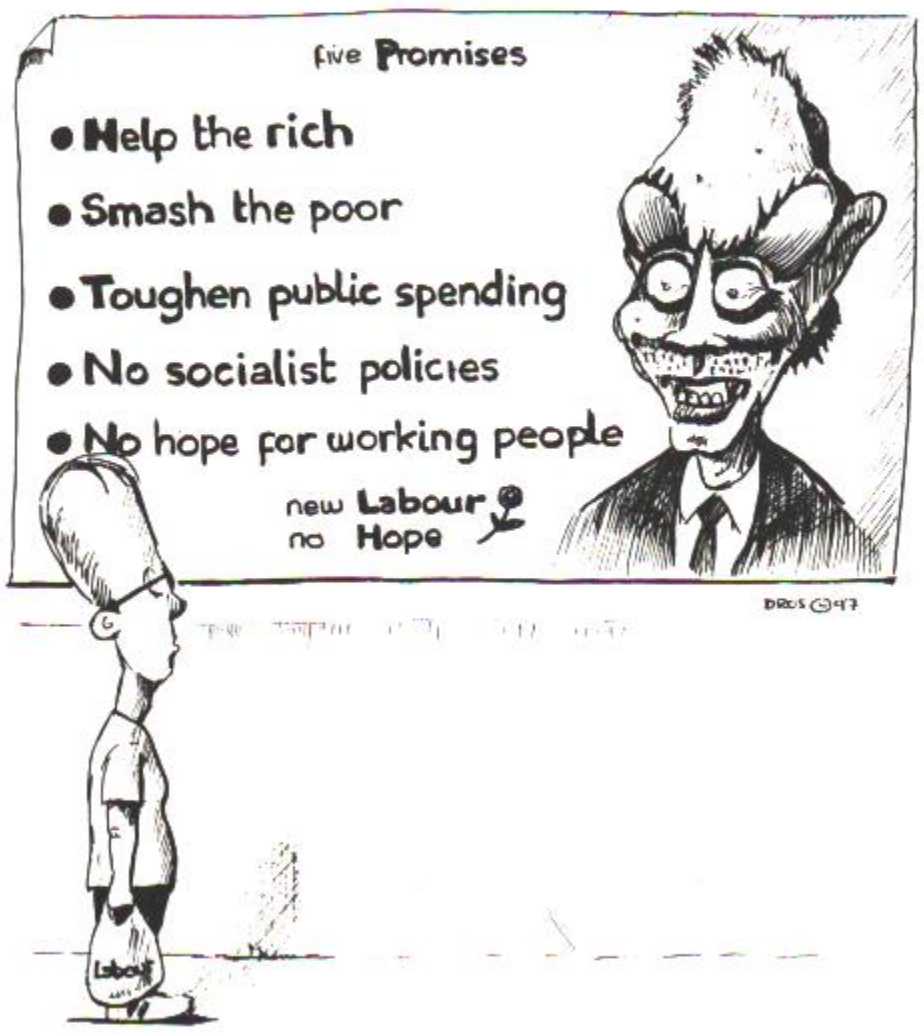
ONE OF THE underlying tenets of New Labour is that, having reached the end of history, we have also outgrown forever the days of mass action. Yet in recent months large-scale strikes and demonstrations have flared up in South Korea, France, Germany, Greece, Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Indonesia. In some cases, protests have scored major victories. In all cases, they have erupted without a by-your-leave to the professional politicians and the media, and succeeded in altering the previously accepted political agenda.

Far from being leftovers from a bygone era, these mass actions have been bred by the empty promises of the New World Order. In challenging the arrogance and the assumptions of rulers in the West, the old Eastern Block, and the Third World, they have pointed the way to the real issues of the next century. They have often demonstrated both a creativity and a courage lacking in the official opposition parties everywhere. Above all, they have shown that far from being an outmoded ideal, solidarity remains a beacon to the future and collective action an essential means of social change.

When people down tools or fill the streets, seeking command of their lives and their circumstances, they become powerful, as Tony Blair may discover sooner than he thinks.

A case in point may prove to be New Labour's "no tax rise" pledge, the policy centrepiece which Blair and Brown have been carefully, if covertly, constructing for two years — though not included in last year's manifesto ballot. It is not only a capitulation to the interests of the rich, it is also a slap in the face to any lingering aspiration to redistribute wealth.

It is argued that such a pledge is the price political parties have to pay to compete in the modern electoral arena. Those who oppose it "want to throw away the election". This is the received wisdom on which the edifice of New Labour is built. But is it true? Opinion surveys have repeatedly shown that voters support higher taxes for spending on health, education, transport, etc. New Labour is unimpressed. The apologists point out that people say one thing to pollsters but do something else in the privacy of the ballot box. This is a strange argument coming from those who normally place such faith in opinion polls. It also rests on a gross misrepresentation of the real choices surrounding taxation. Voters want to know: who pays how much for what? Thanks to New Labour, this central question - the share-out of the burden of taxation - has now been effectively banned from the election debate.



By saying there will be no tax rises, New Labour ensures that the current, unfair tax burden born by the bottom two thirds will not be alleviated, while the top third will continue to enjoy the lightest taxation in Europe. And if the no tax rise pledge is to be kept, there will be no alternative to massive cuts in spending on education, health, transport, etc., coupled with public sector pay 'restraint'.

At this point a Blair government may well find itself confronted by the kind of mass action which has greeted similar cutbacks in other European countries. When the reality of inequality intrudes, the "no tax rise" rhetoric will boomerang on Blair.

Who tips the scales of justice?

IT TOOK FOUR long years for the murder of Stephen Lawrence to hit the front pages and capture the nation's conscience. That it did so in the end was not thanks to the noble sentiments of a *Daily Mail* editor, or even the genuine courage of an inquest jury.

This injustice has been forced into public view by the persistence of Doreen and Neville Lawrence and their fellow campaigners.

The argument over the rights and wrongs of the *Mail*'s approach has obscured the real issue. The murder of Stephen Lawrence was not a one-off atrocity. It was part of a terrifyingly widespread pattern of abuse, harassment and violence. And its mishandling by the police and CPS was not an unfortunate accident, but typical of the mistreatment of black people across the criminal justice system.

At root, it was racism that killed Stephen Lawrence. It was racism that allowed his killers to walk free. Individual racist acts grow from a soil made fertile by public policy and state practices. The media, as well as politicians of both major parties, are reluctant to acknowledge that reality. People in the black community do not enjoy that luxury. It was awareness that this was not a one-off misfortune that spurred and sustained support for the Lawrences within the black community, and among allies across the country. As the long-delayed release of the innocent men wrongly imprisoned for the murder of Carl Bridgewater confirmed, justice in this country can only be achieved by relentless, organised protest from below. ❑

The unwarranted Police Bill

With the help of Labour's front-bench the obnoxious Police Bill received its second reading in the House of Commons. Only twelve Labour backbenchers supported an amendment which sought to preserve some civil liberties. Harry Cohen MP reports.

LAME DUCK Howard, with the aid of Labour, has overturned the Lords' amendment for prior approval of a judge before any bugging or burgling. Other Lords' amendments — like scrapping the charges to voluntary organisations for criminal conviction certificates of volunteers — will also be swept away thanks to Tory / Labour agreement. Under this legislation intrusive police surveillance and burglary of private homes, offices and hotel rooms will be authorised. Lawyers, doctors, journalists and even priests, who have traditionally expected privacy in their dealings with their clients, may well be subject to this covert policing. Also people with criminal records will find them returning to haunt them and perhaps keeping them out of work.

Jack Straw eagerly supported virtually all of this Bill with hardly a second thought for the consequences. He rushed to legitimise bugging and burgling which has been carried out unlawfully for more than a decade.

The Bill contains no provisions to safeguard the rights of the innocent or to protect civil liberties. The tenet that an Englishman's home is his castle has been violated for the state's convenience. Vast amounts of data can be collected on people with little check upon its accuracy or remedy for its misuse.

The police can even bug and burgle the family, friends or workmates of someone they suspect and then apply, in some circumstances, for retrospective authority. Astonishingly those who authorise this activity — police commissioners — are then the ones citizens are supposed to complain to if they think the action against them was wrong. These commissioners will probably have given the approval in the first place! Jack Straw proudly proclaimed this change to the Bill — from a chief constable authorising himself — as being superior to the Liberal proposal of prior approval by an independent judge.

The Bill enhances the powers of the National Criminal Intelligence Service. It is a move towards a British FBI. Shadow Home Office ministers talked of some local police force involvement, but it is tokenist and largely irrelevant. The police will be empowered to break in to people's homes and workplaces, plant bugs and rifle through and steal private documents, as long as they obtain the commissioners' permission. They can listen in or raid solicitors to see their records on clients or journalists to discover their sources. Those invaded do not have to be under suspicion of a crime themselves.



Harry Cohen MP.

They may merely acquaintances of a suspect. Demonstrators and protestors will find themselves targeted. The definition of "serious crime" which unleashes these powers includes "conduct by a large number of persons in pursuit of a common purpose". Tony Benn was right to say that this is targeted at workers taking industrial action. He also pointed out that it could be the model for any tyrant worldwide.

This Bill is likely to be challenged in the European Court of Human Rights. It breaches Article 8 of the Convention which gives the right to privacy in home and correspondence. The provisions requiring criminal conviction certificates are also objectionable. Employees will be forced to provide details of their past to their employer or would-be employer. They cannot require the same of their bosses, even though they could be a potential Maxwell. They will have to pay at least a fiver to a Criminal Records Agency to obtain a criminal conviction certificate and probably a tenner for the enchanced version of the certificate. Nobody objects to these checks for people working with children or other vulnerable groups, but they are going to become the norm in spheres where they are unnecessary. With the need for these certificates to be regularly updated, it's going to mean a heavy financial burden on the long-term unemployed and even volunteers for good causes.

Thirty-four per cent of males under 35 have a criminal record, so for many of them their chance of worthy employment will diminish significantly. Instead of rehabilitating offenders via useful work, some will be turned into outcasts with little future other than to turn back to crime. How crazy that a bill ostensibly about opposing crime could well create a more desperate criminal underclass.

The Government wants millions of volunteer workers, or their organisations, to pay for their criminal conviction certificate. An amendment in the Lords promoted by Age Concern inflicted a defeat on the Government but thanks to Labour's help the financial burden will be put back on the good cause organisations.

Labour should have opposed this Bill. Jack Straw showed that a cynical political stance came ahead of judgement and principle.

Labour should be the party to protect the people from authoritarian practices. That would find a wide constituency of support and it can be done without hindering an effective fight against crime and criminals. New Labour should not stand for a new police state.

LLB page 4

Making mincemeat of McDonald's

The McLibel Campaign presents an update on the McLibel Trial and profiles Helen Steel, one of the two campaigners involved in this mammoth legal battle with McDonald's. The trial began in June 1994 and has become the longest trial in English history .



PHOTO: JANE SKINNER

Helen Steel and Dave Norris.

AFTER TWO years of testimony and eight weeks of closing speeches, the "McLibel" Trial is now over barring the judge's voluminous judgment — which is expected in April/May. In their closing speeches, Helen Steel and Dave Morris (the 'McLibel Two') had the enormous task of analysing 40,000 pages of documentary evidence, and around 18,000 pages of testimony, as well as dealing with many complex legal submissions to the judge. Since there is no legal aid for libel cases, Helen and Dave represented themselves against McDonald's team of top libel lawyers.

The fast-food giant sued them over a factsheet entitled *What's Wrong With McDonald's? Everything they don't want you to know* which was produced in 1986 by London Greenpeace. The factsheet looked at the effect of huge multinationals on our society, and brought together criticisms frequently made by various groups about the promotion of junk food diets, exploitation of workers and animals, advertising to children, and damage to the environment. The union-busting burger bandits had hoped to use the UK's oppressive libel laws to silence their critics, but the tables were turned and the Corporation effectively found itself on trial.

When McDonald's served the writs on Helen and Dave, it was the latest in a long series of threats against groups who had tried to expose the company's business practices. Helen decided immediately to fight, "I was angry that they could even have the nerve to ask us to apologise to them. It's McDonald's who should be apologising to the public, for the damage they cause to society and the environment. They spend $1.8 billion a year on advertising and promotions, putting their point of view to the whole world, and yet they want to prevent other people putting over alternative points of view."

Helen, a TGWU member who currently works behind a bar in the West End, has been active in environmental and social struggles for many years. She got involved with London Greenpeace in the late 80's, attracted to the group because "it was about people taking action for themselves rather than writing off to politicians and asking them to take action for us".

She sees the McLibel case as part of a wider battle to create a society without exploitation and oppression, based around the sharing of resources. "We want people to have control of their own lives rather than having them dictated by government or big business. It's vital that people have access to alternative information about companies so they can make their own decisions."

"I think this is particularly important in an age where kids are being 'taught' about business at an increasingly young age". McDonald's UK 1994 Annual Review stated "McDonald's involvement with schools in the past has been primarily through our local restaurants. However our support for education took a major step forward in 1993 with the creation of McDonald's Education Service". The Review went on to talk about links between schools and businesses and gave an example of a project with an infant school in Scunthorpe: "The school then based its autumn term work on McDonald's. This included maths, history, music, dance and language classes. Three McDonald's 'restaurants' were set up and children as young as four started to develop an understanding of business." Helen views this as "really sick, it's basically indoctrinating young children into the corporate way of thinking."

Her experiences in the courts have reinforced the view that the UK libel laws exist to protect the interests of the rich and powerful, but that if people are determined and stand together, such oppressive laws can be made unworkable. She says "at the start lawyers advised us that with no money and no legal knowledge or representation we faced a completely uphill battle because libel law is so complex. However, although the trial was an exhausting experience, I don't regret fighting it. The whole thing has backfired on McDonald's because since the writs were served on us, over 2 million *What's Wrong With McDonald's?* leaflets have been handed out in the UK alone, and pickets and protests are growing. There's now also an Internet site — McSpotlight — which contains detailed information on all the issues in the case. So, whatever the outcome of the trial, McDonald's have completely failed in their attempts to silence their critics and stop the spread of alternative ideas."

- Please send donations and/or requests for information to: McLibel Support Campaign, 5 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DX. Tel/Fax 0171 713 1269. E-mail & Listserver: *dbriars@world.std.com*. (Cheques to 'McLibel Support Campaign'). Independent Internet info on McLibel, McDonald's and multinationals at: *http://www.McSpotlight.org/* ❑

Adopt-a-Store

THE MCLIBEL CAMPAIGN is calling for an international "Victory Day of Action" on the Saturday after the verdict (expected April/May). In the UK, it is hoped that a majority of McDonald's 750 stores will be leafleted on that day. You can assist in the co-ordinated leafleting on the day of action by adopting your local store. Contact the Campaign for an "Adopt-a-Store" form to complete.

Could do better!

Examining Labour's education policy, Bob Spooner decides there is room for improvement.

THE TRIPARTITE system of education was divisive. The eleven plus branded 75% of children as failures and dominated the elementary and then primary school curriculum so that the "basics" squeezed out other subjects.

History became a catalogue of British heroes: King Alfred turned his failings at food technology to a political purpose, Boudicca tied carving knives to her chariot wheels, and the insomniac Hereward. Teachers made fun of Canute and the whole tone was crudely euro-sceptic.

Grammar schools went in for uniform, a rigid curriculum, pedantic rules and regulations, learning by rote, constant tests, unimaginative homework, a daily Christian service, corporal punishment, the glorification of war, and even, in extreme cases, cadet corps. Aping the public schools, flannelled fools and muddied oafs dominated the ethos.

The best comprehensive schools were built around a new respect for individual pupils, whatever their academic ability. They sought out pupils' talents and built on them.

With subject choice and mixed ability teaching designed to awaken talent, they actively encouraged non-conformity. They emphasised understanding rather than knowing, a wide-ranging, flexible curriculum, co-operation rather than competition, a variety of sports for those who enjoyed them, fostering personal taste in dress and self-discipline rather than obedience to stupid rules. The daily assembly became a secular celebration of pupil talent. These people built up pupils rather than casting them down and enlivened their minds rather than deadening them.

Tory governments restored the grammar school ethos to all schools. Branding pupils at eleven has returned and been extended to 7 and 14; SATs have been used to dominate the primary curriculum with "the basics".

A rigid national curriculum has encouraged rote learning, competition is again in the ascendant and a sense of failure is fostered. Uniform and homework are back in vogue and social selection has made education divisive again, as schools mirror social differences. Christian assemblies and rules and regulations are back.

To the dismay of most teachers, Blair and Blunkett not only revel in these Tory devices but plan to extend them. Why should they want to get rid of the last of the grammar schools that epitomise these values?

As politicians are not trained in logic, they may well be sincere and, before the election, we can expect Blunkett to be cautious. He could dodge responsibility by pointing out that education has always been the responsibility of local authorities. Indeed, with their powers restored, most authorities would wield the axe, whether Blair liked it or not. To avoid this, the Tories centralised real power, while passing bits of it over to vocal, middle-class parents, whom they assumed would project Tory values. Historically, grammar schools have been eliminated in response to the long-term plans of local authorities with local elected representatives making the decisions. By handing the decision to parents, Blair and Blunkett have ensured that the Tory strategy of circumventing local democracy will continue.

Of course, by giving a vote to every parent in the area, they might close some grammar schools, but the method is wrong. We don't ask those who have been burgled to legislate on burglary, or car-owners to decide a road-building programme, so why should those with children settle the organisation of our educational system for future generations? On this issue, and the rest of our education policy, we need to think again, and think fast.

●Bob Spooner is the author of *State Education, What's Left?*



PHOTO: PHIL MAXWELL

"Look. Point 2. Mr Blair will ensure that Katherine has access to a computer."

Socialist Campaigners prepare post-election conference

The Network of Socialist Campaign Groups has called a national conference of the Labour Party and affiliated union lefts for Saturday 31st May.

The conference will discuss:

- the election and the opening weeks of what we all hope will be a new Labour government.
- the socialist economic and social strategy that we want to see the Party implement in power as the best way to remain in power and to reverse the near two decade legacy of Conservatism.
- the proposed changes in the structure of the party outlined in the NEC document *Labour into power: a framework for partnership.*
- preparation for Labour Party Conference in October.

Please put the date in your diary now.

'After the election:
what next for Labour?'
Saturday 31st May 1997
London Welsh Centre
157 Grays Inn Road
London WC1
(10 minutes from Kings Cross BR)

Registration fee: £8 waged, London; £4 waged, out of London; £4 unwaged, London; £1 unwaged, out of London. Make cheques payable to: "SCGN". Send to: the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, 3 Blades House, London SE11 5TW. Deadline for crêche: 11th May. Sponsored by the Socialist Campaign Group of MPs. Organised by the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups. For details ring 0171-254 0241.

LLB page 6

Going beyond equality

Peter Tatchell argues that Labour should be working for gay emancipation, not just gay civil rights and equality.

THE DOMINANT gay agenda nowadays is equal rights and law reform, rather than gay liberation and the transformation of straight society. Getting rid of homophobic discrimination is a laudable aim but does not go far enough. Ending anti-gay bias will not resolve all the problems gay people face. Some of our difficulties arise not just from homophobia but from the more general sex-negativism that pervades British culture, which also harms straights.

Equality has its limitations: it inevitably means parity on straight terms, within a pre-existing framework of values, laws and institutions devised and dominated by heterosexuals. Gay equality therefore means assimilating and conforming; homosexuals are expected to "fit in" to the straight system, resulting in co-option, invisibility and conformity. Queers act respectable and comply with the hetero moral agenda. In return they are "rewarded" with equal treatment. Meanwhile, all the sex-repressive social structures and value systems remain intact. The nouveau gay reformism of the late 1990s represents the abandonment of any critical perspective on straight culture. It substitutes acquiescence for healthy scepticism, unthinkingly copying heterosexual norms and mores, without the slightest attempt to distinguish between those worthy of queer emulation and those not.

There is plenty of evidence of the gay desire mindlessly to appropriate every civil right that heterosexuals have, no matter how crass or morally dubious. Gay pressure groups Stonewall and Rank Outsiders demand the right of homosexuals to serve in the armed forces but never question the authoritarian nature of the military or its bloody history of human rights abuses.

The Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights myopically calls for the age of consent to be equalised at 16, disregarding the sexual rights of young lesbians, gays, bisexuals and straights under 16. This is the problem with the equal rights mantra. It helps nice, respectable gays prepared to compromise and conform. Those who rock the boat and refuse to turn themselves into facsimiles of straight morality remain marginalised and excluded.

The demand for equality is also often tinged with a whiff of self-obsession and selfishness. Solely concerned with winning rights for homosexuals, it offers nothing to heterosexual people (perhaps if queers supported the interests of straights, more of them might support gay interests too). In contrast to this shallow reformism, anti-assimilationist queer emancipation groups like Outrage! have a post-equality agenda. We seek the extension of sexual freedom and human rights in ways that ultimately benefit everyone, regardless of sexuality, as the following examples illustrate.

While much of the homosexual movement is jumping on the gay marriage bandwagon, Outrage! argues for a more democratic, egalitarian alternative to wedlock. Our priority is an Unmarried Partners Act, granting equal rights to all unwed couples, gay and straight, such as recognition of next-of-kin, joint guardianship of children and inheritance of property on a partner's death.

Likewise, Outrage! is not keen on gay-exclusive anti-discrimination legislation, preferring instead to campaign for an Equal Rights Act to outlaw discrimination against everyone, not just queers!

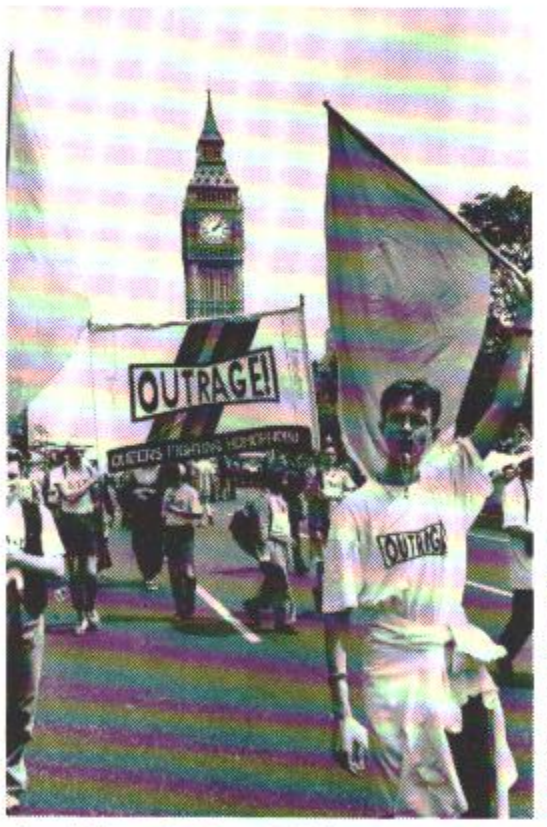


PHOTO: STEVE MAYES

Lesbian & Gay Pride, June 1994

Somewhat paradoxically, despite its strident anti-assimilationist agenda (or perhaps because of it) Outrage! advocates a form of sexual liberation that is, ultimately, more in tune with the common interests of queers, straights and bisexuals than any purely gay equality agenda could ever be.

●Peter Tatchell is a contributor to *Anti-Gay* (Freedom Editions) and the author of *Safer Sexy — the Guide to Gay Sex Safely* (Freedom Editions).

Education for the elite

Raj Jethwa, LSE Labour Club, reports on a dangerous precedent for all of higher education.

On 12th December 1996 the London School of Economics became the first higher education institution to reserve the right to impose its own top-up tuition fees on undergraduate students.

The proposed fee of £1,000 a year is an initial figure to get the principle of fees accepted and would have a minimal impact on the university's finances. As a result, the fees would have to be gradually increased.

Behind this move is the funding crisis in higher education, caused by the Government attempt to increase student numbers while cutting spending. In the present financial year the Higher Education Funding Council for England gave grants of £3.1 billion to 136 universities and colleges, a cut of £400 million before allowing for inflation.

The LSE's decision also reflects a desire shared by Oxford, Cambridge, Warwick, Manchester, Bristol, Leeds, Imperial College and University College London to create an "Ivy League" cartel. Even in the event of tuition fees being charged by all universities, this group would charge much higher fees to maintain the quality of their research. As the institutions became more profitable they would be able to raise fees further, making themselves ever more exclusive and research-based.

A motion tabled in the House of Commons by Ken Livingstone in January points out that these fees are leading to "a two tier system of higher education in which access to some of the most prestigious institutions would be based on ability to pay rather than academic criteria." Once top up fees are accepted, they will pave the way for the more far-reaching tuition fees, which would directly shift the burden of funding for the sector onto all students.

The LSE Labour Club has called a lobby of the Standing Committee of the Court of Governors, the body which will eventually take the decision to implement the new fees, on Tuesday 4th March at 4.30pm at Houghton St., London WC2. The lobby will be preceded by a rally with speakers including Ken Livingstone. Bring your banners!

LLB page 7

Sawyer suspends whistle-blowers

Leeds North East CLP has been suspended. Four leading CLP members - Malcolm Christie, Mike Davies, Celia Foote and Lorraine Hardy - are now threatened with disciplinary action. Mike Marqusee reports.

LEEDS North East's latest crime appears to be their insistence that the rules of the Labour Party be adhered to at the constituency's AGM. The Tory-held marginal is one of Labour's key target seats. In July 1995, the CLP selected Liz Davies as its PPC — only to have her removed by the NEC. Party officials were anxious that Davies' replacement be someone more to Tony Blair's taste. They pulled out the stops to swing the selection to Leeds councillor Fabian Hamilton, who fought the seat in 1992, and who had complained loudly and bitterly about his exclusion from the all-women shortlist requested by the CLP.

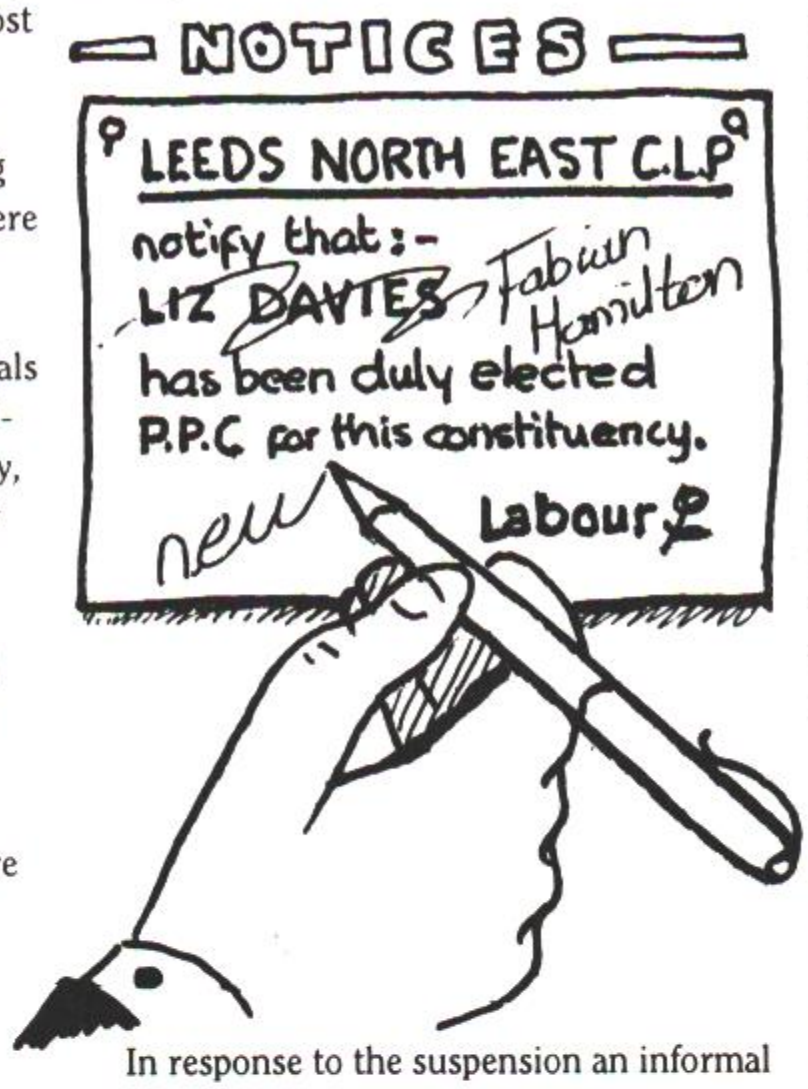
Hamilton has a history of failed companies and court-enforced debts. He insists he has never done anything immoral or illegal. In the last seven years, he has had seven county court judgements against him for debt, most recently in March 1996, when the Inland Revenue took him to court for unpaid tax. According to one Branch Secretary, during the new selection process, "CLP officers were directly instructed by Party officials to conceal from members relevant information". At the selection meeting itself, officials blocked any questions pertaining to Hamilton's companies, financial and legal history, or personal probity, while allowing similar questions to other candidates.

Though beaten at the meeting by left candidate Pam Tatlow, Hamilton emerged the overall winner thanks to postal votes. However, CLP officers complained to the NEC that the number of postal votes exceeded the number of applications. There were also complaints about Hamilton's business record. Nonetheless, the NEC endorsed Hamilton on 25th September.

A concerted attempt to replace left-inclined officers with a New Labour slate failed at this year's AGM. At the meeting, a regional officer gave a verbal instruction, allegedly emanating directly from Walworth Road, to accept four individuals as delegates. These individuals had previously been turned down by the constituency executive (at that time with the official's full approval). One was from an unaffiliated GPMU Branch! The others were from a GMB Branch which was entitled to two delegates, but had sent five delegates (two of the five, it turned out, were not even valid members of the GMB Branch).

The AGM voted to uphold the rules of the Party and not to accept the improper delegates.

Subsequently, CLP members were informed that the AGM was invalid, and that the constituency and its officers were suspended until a new AGM was convened, sometime after the election. "Leeds North East has been suspended for keeping the rules," observed CLP Chair Celia Foote. "It seems to many of us that this unjustified attack prefigures a general attack on democracy in the Labour Party and especially on the rights of CLPs."



In response to the suspension an informal meeting open to all Leeds North East members was held on Sunday, 9th February. Despite a letter sent to all CLP members by a regional official advising them to stay away from the meeting, nearly one hundred attended. A fighting fund was set up to campaign for the re-instatement of the CLP and its officers.

Meanwhile, Fabian Hamilton is facing a private prosecution for seventeen alleged offences under companies' legislation. The most serious charge carries a maximum sentence of two years' imprisonment.

The prosecution is being brought by an individual who is a member of Leeds North East but holds no office. Contrary to suggestions made by Labour spin doctors, the prosecution is not being brought by Leeds North East CLP nor is the CLP funding it. However, according to a report in *The Guardian*, Hamilton is enjoying the service of Labour Party lawyers in the criminal court.

The determination of senior Party figures to rid themselves of dissidents seems to have overwhelmed their usual strictures about pre-general election caution. Already, Peter Coleman, Labour's recently retired Director of Organisation and Development, has been forced to write to all Leeds North East members apologising for an inaccurate and defamatory statement he had made in an earlier communication regarding Mike Eslea, Chair of Chapel Allerton Branch.

Thanks to constitutional amendments pushed through with minimal debate in 1995, Tom Sawyer does enjoy sweeping powers to suspend members. These powers must, however, be exercised within the Rules of the Party and the law of the land. They were certainly not intended by Conference to be used to silence whistle-blowers, which is what has happened in Leeds North East.

Why are Labour officials going to such lengths to protect Fabian Hamilton from scrutiny by Party members and the public? Has it occurred to Tom Sawyer that he is not only throwing away a potential Labour seat, but possibly exposing himself to court action? Leeds North East has an excellent campaigning record, having pushed back both Tories and Liberal Democrats in a string of council elections. The four members facing disciplinary action have all made immense personal contributions to the Party over many years.

- Messages of support, resolutions, letters to the NEC and the Director of Organisation and Development (David Gardner) as well as donations payable to 'Celia Foote (Leeds North East)' should be sent to: Celia Foote, 24 St Martins Drive, Leeds, LS7 3LR. For more information tel. 0113-262 4667.

Stop the demented octopus!

Ken Livingstone MP argues that the months following the general election could be the "most decisive in the history of the labour movement for a generation".

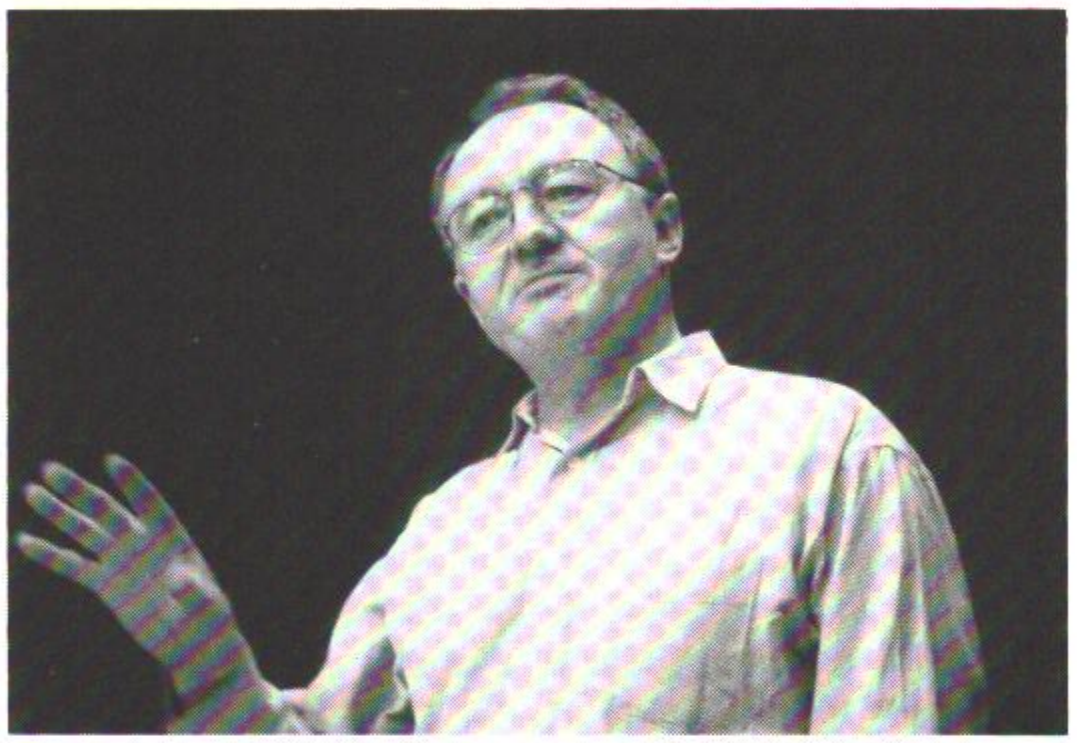


PHOTO: DAVID POPE

Ken Livingstone addresses the AGM of the Network of Socialist Campaign Groups.

THE *Labour into Power* document presented to the January NEC meeting is the most significant attempt to restructure the Labour Party since the 1918 constitution.

A new Joint Policy Committee will become the supreme body of the Party, chaired by the Prime Minister and made up of equal numbers of Cabinet and NEC members.

A separate Cabinet section means that front-benchers will sit on the NEC and JPC in their ministerial capacity, and be bound to support Cabinet decisions or face dismissal from the Government. Combined with the payroll vote, this will give the PM an automatic majority. The Women's Section is to be abolished, and there is a proposal to prevent MPs standing in the Constituency Section, thus eliminating Dennis Skinner and Diane Abbott.

Resolutions and amendments will be diverted into a two year process between the National Policy Forum, the JPC and the NEC, A diagram in the report which attempts to clarify these new procedures looks like a demented octopus, set up to strangle accountability.

Labour into Power would cut the leadership adrift from the labour movement. It would fulfil the Labour Co-ordinating Committee's goal of ensuring that "there is no potential for the NEC to become a focus for opposition to a Labour Government" (*New Labour: A Stakeholders' Party*, LCC 1996).

The Times concluded that "the effect will be to centralise the Party organisation and give the Labour leader greater control."

This clarity was not reflected on the left. *Tribune* reported that the document "is a genuine attempt to strengthen and extend internal democracy." It went on: "That is the view of leading party figures, who are angry at the way their hard work has been distorted [by the media]."

Tribune's report smooths the waters by emphasising the "plans to set up a big post-general election consultation exercise", ignoring the experience of Clause IV and the *Road to the Manifesto*. The Millbank Tendency say that their new constitution will be more democratic, but as none of them have been elected to their positions their view of democracy is somewhat limited. Gordon Brown's gesture in standing down from the NEC should not obscure the fact that the new proposals will mean greater representation for the Parliamentary leadership.

The introduction of quotas for the NEC will be used to disguise the abolition of the NEC Women's Section. This will lead to the further erosion of Women's Conference, women's sections and the Labour women's organisation.

Unlike its news reports, *Tribune*'s editorial correctly pointed out that the proposals "effectively downgrade the NEC and... there is a clear intention to neuter Labour's annual Conference."

This reality must now be hammered home. There will be no genuine consultation exercise, particularly with the Party closed down from February to June, and the vote will not be postponed. One Millbank Tendency MP quoted anonymously in the *Financial Times* said that they have to rush it through now to exploit the euphoria which would follow a Labour victory in the general election.

Some people have forgotten that a Labour government can be unpopular. Denis Healy recalled in his memoirs the enormous pressure when that happens: "There will be times when a minister, a prime minister even, needs to stop and think: the Treasury wants me to do it. The *Daily Mail* will crucify me if I don't do it. But the Party won't accept it. I just can't do it. Sometimes the Party will be right."

The Party was right during the last Labour Government. We have had nearly twenty years in opposition because that Government did not listen to the Conference. The Keep the Party Labour campaign, which co-ordinates the opposition to the Millbank fifth columnists, has produced a model resolution. Every opportunity to raise it should be taken.

The months following the election are going to be the most decisive in the history of the labour movement for a generation. Stopping these proposals will be a significant setback for the Millbank Tendency and will give the Labour Government a chance to avoid a road to defeat and the return of the Tories. ❑

Model resolution for trade union conferences

Conference believes that the success of the next Labour government requires the full participation of affiliated trade unions and constituencies in the Party's decision-making process. Conference calls for respect for the following democratic principles and representative structures.

a) The sovereignty of the Annual Conference; no reduction in the amount of time given to policy debates in plenary sessions;
b) The right of trade unions, affiliated organisations and CLPs to submit resolutions directly to conference, without restrictions as to subject;
c) Conference timetable should reflect the numbers of resolutions and amendments submitted on particular subjects;
d) Maintenance of the equal partnership of affiliated organisations and CLPs, reflected in the present 50:50 distribution of Conference votes;
e) Maintenance of the present level and structure of trade union and women's representation and input, including on the NEC;
f) The right of affiliated trade union branches to elect delegates to CLP General Committees, with GCs retaining their present rights in matters of policy and organisation;
g) The right of CLPs to select their parliamentary candidates from Party members who have been validly nominated, and not to be restricted by the introduction of an approved list;
h) The right of CLPs to nominate one of their members or their MP for the NEC constituency section.

- **A fuller version is available from Keep the Party Labour, 10 Park Drive, London NW11 7SH.**

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debate

Take the leap - don't wait to drown

Paul Field and Dave Palmer argue that it's time for *LLB* to abandon its support for the Labour Party.

"I WANT A situation more like the Democrats and the Republicans in the US. People don't even question for a single moment that the Democrats are a pro-business party. They should not be asking the question about New Labour". Tony Blair, *Financial Times.*

Tony Blair has effectively completed his mission to turn the Labour Party into the alternative party of big business. With an eye to a second term he understands that he needs to carry out his most unpopular measures as rapidly as possible. Once New Labour takes office it is almost certain to proceed immediately with a radical contraction of the post-war welfare state. They intend to prove themselves more zealous in the pursuit of public sector "efficiency" then the Tories.

To pose the question as to whether the fatally holed ship of Labourism has yet sunk below the waves, or is still partially afloat, is now an irrelevance. Staying on board means drowning. The prospects of a resurgence of the left within New Labour are infinitesimal. The political, social and organisational conditions which sustained the Labour left have now clearly disappeared. To argue for a national vote for New Labour is no longer tenable.

To read CLPD's recent newsletter you would think it was 1987 not 1997: "Labour has adopted a programme on which we shall fight the election. Even if many of us have reservations about parts of it, these must be put aside for the time being. Labour must present the image of a united party." Which parts of Labour's socially authoritarian, free-market, anti-public sector, anti-worker and anti-poor programme are we to have "reservations" about?



Those who argue for left activists to continue the (very) "long march" through the Labour Party institutions are now devoid of any strategy. They are reduced to arguing that left activists should continue as reluctant, silenced and impotent foot soldiers of Blairism, in the vain hope that "something might change". The end of January 1997 saw two decisive events with Brown's speech on tax and the adoption by the NEC of Tom Sawyer's Party organisation proposals.

Brown's commitment not to increase the top and standard rate of income tax for a whole Parliament is a watershed. In the same speech, he pledged to stay within the existing Tory public spending targets (which are impossibly tight) till 1999. Any commitment to re-distribution has been abandoned.

Previous Labour leaderships, whatever they did in government, always made election promises and raised expectations. Labour's post-war identity was based on the social inclusiveness of Keynes' economic legacy and Beveridge's welfare state. This tradition is now dead. Cold War foreign policy and racist immigration policies co-existed in the past with reforms that promised material gains to Labour's core constituency: the manual working class. So when Labour governments frequently "betrayed" they were faced with open revolt within the labour movement's own institutions. Blair is the first Labour leader to make it perfectly explicit that he intends to attack the working class and the poor from day one.

The NEC has now adopted Tom Sawyer's proposal on re-organising the Party which will turn conferences into media-based rallies. There will be no channels of internal democracy through which to oppose Blair. At the next Conference the tiny forces of the Labour left will make their "last stand". We predict that events at New Labour's October conference will only serve to underline that New Labour is no longer contestable terrain.



Blair's set-piece confrontations with the left over Clause IV and his draft manifesto pledges reveal that those who back the left's "leading personalities" in NEC elections do not represent a coherent political force that can be mobilised against Blairism. The bedrock of the left's activist base has deserted New Labour: 38,000 left the Party between 1994-1995. At the same time 113,00 were seduced to join the Blair bandwagon.

Blair has succeeded in silencing his left critics in the PLP, now muzzled, neutered and quiescent because they fear being removed as election candidates. We are told that what remains of the parliamentary left must "keep its powder dry". Left MPs are right to remain mute till after the elections, in the hope that opportunities will arise for them to act as a focus of resistance to a Blair government. It is hoped that public sector workers will rapidly begin to fight against pay restraint. Obviously we all wish for a revival in workers' struggle and the fortunes of the left but this is not a strategy, just a hope that "things will get better".

What are the arguments advanced by *Briefing* supporters for staying in the New Labour?

- Argument One: nothing has really changed. The labour movement and New Labour are still synonymous. While the trade union link remains intact we must stay within New Labour, however unaccountable

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that "link" is, and extenuated it becomes. It is unlikely there will ever be a clear break with the unions, nor does there have to be for Blair to complete his project. The Democrats are heavily funded by US unions, who campaign for, and indeed have some political influence over them. British trade union leaders will maintain a new form of relationship with New Labour, and adapt to their new role as one "interest group" among many.

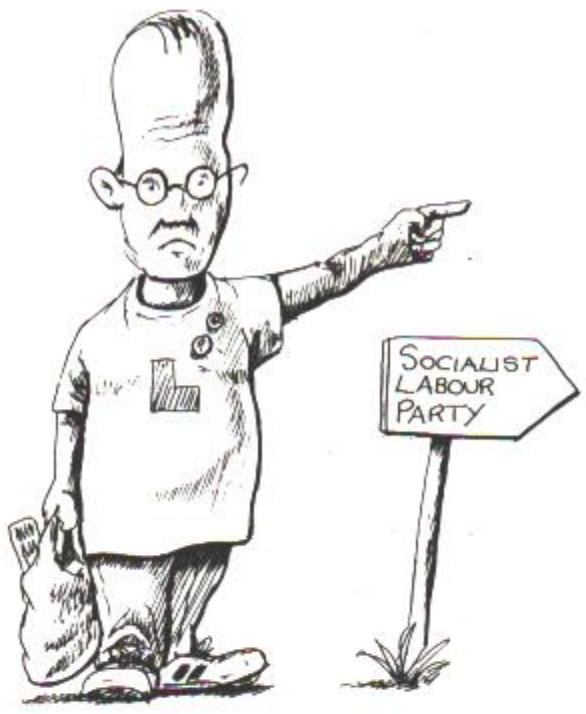
- Argument Two: best described as "Old Labour Strikes Back". The trade union and parliamentary "centre-left", i.e. John Edmonds, Bill Morris, Clare Short, Peter Hain, etc. will no longer be able to stomach life under New Labour. A point of no return will be reached; these major unions leaders and their parliamentary allies will revolt against Blair, which will result in a major split from New Labour and the re-founding of a traditional Labour Party. This eventuality is about as likely as Iceland invading the United States.
- Argument Three: that with most credence, is best described as "waiting for Ken". Its adherents admit privately that the battle has been lost. Their main criticism of the Socialist Labour Party is that it was launched at the wrong time and the "best opportunity" to make a break will arise probably 1-2 years into a New Labour government. Those who say this make no preparations to do so.

To base our entire political strategy on the possible future actions, and private assurances of, 3-5 "better" Campaign Group MP/MEPs is to offer no way forward. Those who argue that it is necessary to remain in New Labour because a handful of MP/MEPs might take a "principled stand" against Blair (eg. over social security reform, spending cuts or a Single Currency) are clutching at straws.

Even if a stand is taken, and a few MPs are expelled from the PLP, this is no excuse for the rest of us not to begin the hard task of building a labour movement alternative to New Labour. Fetishising the parliamentary activities of a few individuals is a passive and dependent approach to politics. Any stand they make can only be one episode in a long, drawn out and uneven process of political realignment.

The left needs to develop the kind of electoral pressure points on New Labour that the Referendum Party has sought to establish in relation to the Tories. The RP is not running candidates against Tories who oppose a Single Currency. Likewise it would be an error not to support those Campaign Group MPs who have made clear their opposition to Blair. To deprive New Labour of 5% of the vote in up to ten constituencies would indicate the potential for an electoral alternative to Blairism. Who we support should be based upon a local assessment of individual candidates, their track records and whether they are clearly to the left of New Labour.

The Socialist Labour Party and the Militant-controlled Socialist Party clearly lack a broad base of support, and have



numerous weaknesses. Neither of these groups represents a credible long-term alternative but a respectable vote for their general election candidates would at least begin to create the possibility of freeing millions of working class voters from the electoral stranglehold of New Labour.

The key task now facing socialists is to construct a national labour movement alternative to New Labour which can break the traditional electoral loyalty to voting Labour "in order to get rid of the Tories" which currently exists amongst the "natural supporters" of such a party. If we accept that we are incapable of building a broad socialist electoral alternative to New Labour in our communities and trade unions then the left is really dead. The idea that the political terrain for labour movement activists is more hostile outside New Labour than within is now completely unsustainable.

No time for self-indulgence

Dorothy Macedo calls on socialists to campaign for a Labour victory, and prepare for battles ahead.

WHEN GORDON BROWN announced that the incoming Labour government would stick to the Tories' spending plans, there was an immediate reaction. Colleagues at work said "What's the point of voting Labour?" Party members reacted with dismay (though not surprise). "How many votes has he cost us?" one asked; another, one of our star campaigners, angrily declared he wouldn't do any more canvassing or work for Labour on election day. In *The Guardian*, Francis Wheen sarcastically enquired, "If Labour win, how will we know?"

So what is the point of voting Labour? If you accept that Gordon Brown and Tony Blair will be able to dictate Government policy unchallenged, that might be a valid question. However, I believe that Party members and the wider labour movement have a right — and a duty — to insist that a Labour Government acts on behalf of the people it was created to represent.

The only way we will progress towards socialism is when working people feel confident enough to demand the things they want. Right now, after nearly two decades of monetarist policies, they feel insecure and powerless. They would like a minimum wage, action to improve housing, more resources for the NHS and education. At present the only way they see of achieving these aims is to vote for a Labour government. It is pointless to sneer at such expectations; we have to start from where people are, not from some parallel universe where the workers are class-conscious socialists.

There is no doubt that many Party members, whether MPs, councillors or local Party activists, are keeping quiet in the run-up to the general election. After that, the situation will change. Demands for increased resources will come from many quarters, such as trade unions, service users and pressure groups. Whether the Labour government will respond in any way to such demands is a different question. We need to match the pressure from outside bodies with pressure from within the Party. If we want Party members to listen to us, we need to be seen, now, working for the Labour victory that makes this scenario possible. People who sit on the sidelines at this juncture can hardly expect to get a sympathetic hearing after the election.

With only weeks to go to the election it is crazy self-indulgence to walk away from the Labour Party. People who do so should realise they risk making themselves irrelevant when the key struggles take place in the coming months and years. ❑

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debate

Stay and fight

Liz Davies argues that as Labour prepare for government thoughts of leaving the Party are, at the least, mistimed.

IN DECEMBER 1995, writing in *LLB* I said: "The working class is now looking to Labour to redress the Tories' ravages. To abandon Labour at this juncture would be to abandon that aspiration and jeopardise our chances of defeating the Tories." In answer to the question, "Has there been a fundamental change in the Labour Party?" I argued that the Labour Party has always had right-wing policies (and leaders), but that possibly the developments we were living through under the leadership of Tony Blair might, in the end, add up to a fundamental break with the Labour Party's social constituency and the broader labour movement. I concluded that it was too early to tell, and that leaving the Labour Party would be burning our bridges.

Since then, the policies of the Labour Party have gone from bad to worse. A number of the recent developments have sickened large numbers of Party members, by no means merely the die-hard socialists of the "hard left". Blair has attacked beggars for the crime of being visible and pledged "fast track punishment for young offenders". Jack Straw backed Michael Howard's minimum sentencing and police surveillance proposals. Most seriously, Gordon Brown will not increase the rates of income tax, even for those on the highest incomes. Labour will not increase public spending, except in those areas which can be paid for by the windfall tax.



PHOTO: DAVID POPE

Liz Davies.

The only half-decent policies remaining are the (gradual) release of housing capital receipts to local authorities, the (unspecified) minimum wage, the (heavily qualified) commitment to a Scottish Assembly, and the (partial) reform of the House of Lords. These hardly compensate for the refusal to raise taxes or increase public spending, the victimisation of the poor and the planned attack on the welfare state, including pension rights.

Yet I still believe activity in the Labour Party remains the best available option for socialists — as long as that party remains linked to the broader labour movement, and in particular as long as members retain the potential to make policy and to hold the leadership to account. The new NEC proposals, *Labour into Power — a Framework for Partnership*, would hopelessly weaken that link and probably terminate that potential.

Under the proposals, the NEC will cease to be the elected governing body of the Party and will be turned into a mere talking-shop. Conference will no longer hold debates (already these are manipulated by the leadership to reduce dissent), but will be a mixture of workshops discussing policy (but not making any decisions) and TV rallies. Party members will lose the right to propose motions for Conference through their constituencies, whose role will be reduced to knocking on doors during elections.

The timing of the proposals is crucial. By introducing them now, the leadership hopes that Party members will be so caught up with working in the general election and so euphoric in its aftermath that they will agree to cede once and for all their ability to hold the Labour government to account.

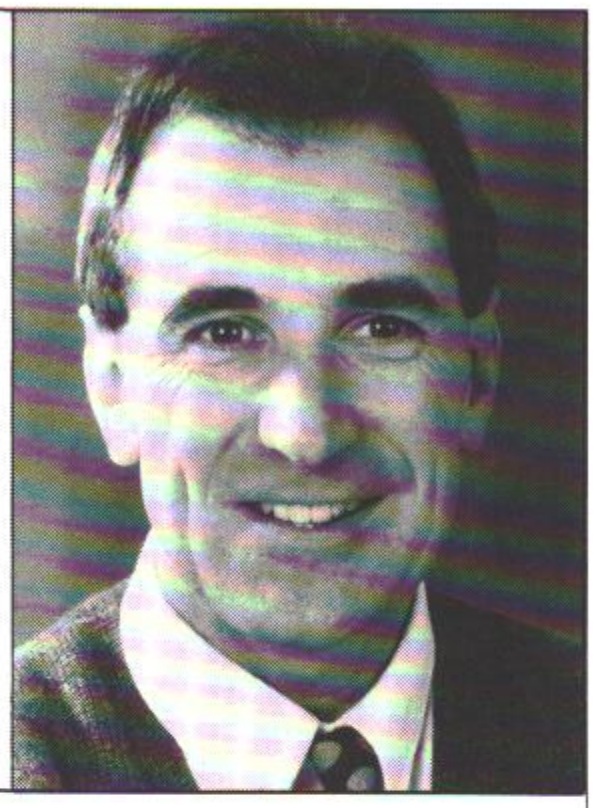
These proposals, combined with the continuing assault on dissent within the Party, may well add up to that fundamental change which I referred to above. But the proposals have not yet been passed, and at the very least it is necessary for socialists to organise the broadest possible opposition to them. Those who leave the Party now will end up in the awkward position of SWP members — calling on trades unionists affiliated to the Labour Party to vote to save a link which they themselves have eschewed. The mood of the electorate is a desire for new priorities and a clean break from 18 years of Tory government. Undoubtedly, if Labour responded to this mood, it could seek and win a popular mandate to implement policies that would start to redress the ravages of Tory rule. Unfortunately, with Labour's bipartisan approach on criminal justice, taxes, public spending and Europe, it is almost impossible to see how a Labour government will actually make a positive difference to the lives of millions desperate for change.

Labour leaders are working flat out to dampen the expectations of the electorate, but this is a harder task than silencing internal Party critics. The voters who will put Blair into Number 10 will be looking for a Labour government to make concrete improvements in their lives. The discontent when Labour fails to deliver will make itself felt not just in opinion polls, but also in the trade unions and among Party members. The scale and nature of that discontent, and above all the degree to which it is organised, will be the major factors in determining the future of socialist politics in this country. In comparison, the electoral efforts of people and groups outside the Labour Party will count for little.

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the Alan Simpson column

The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.



Warning to future pensioners

IN MID-FEBRUARY, the House of Commons Select Committee held a two day Open Forum. Its subject was the future cost of Europe's pensions.

Participants came from every part of the European Union as well as from the World Bank, the OECD and private finance. Their questions were simple. How big will future pension bills be? And who will pay them?

Thoughtful though some of the contributions were, the sub-text of the discussion was clear: the rich are growing tired of the burden of the poor, and they are no happier sharing this burden between countries than they are (any more) between generations within their own country.

In every European country the pensions' bill is set to rise, sometimes dramatically. In many, there is a huge looming gap between the pensions' bill and pension contributions to cover it. In Germany they estimate that the cost of pensions will exceed the costs of unification (already over £250 billion and set to rise for at least another ten years). Similar increases will occur in Belgium, Denmark, Ireland, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, France and Finland. Limited increases will occur in Portugal, Italy, Spain and Sweden.

Only in the UK is there likely to be a small gap between pension costs and the funds to pay them (due in part to the degradation of the state pension, and the numbers living in pensioner poverty).

As one "expert" after another pointed out, to stabilise spending on pensions, countries will need to make new cuts in benefit levels and pensions' eligibility. The OECD helpfully listed some of the choices to be faced:

- raising the age of retirement (to 67)
- requiring 35 years of contributions to "earn" a full pension
- ending the indexation of pensions
- lowering the value of the pension
- increasing contribution rates of personal taxation
- encouraging private pensions to replace public ones.

Some of those present saw this as the key argument against a single currency, but their case is built on the wrong reasons for criticising the Euro. True, a huge increase in pension costs could force European interest rates up and set countries at each other's throats over who picks up the cost of whose pensioners. But this is not the core of the issue.

It fell to the German representative to remind us of a universal truth: "The working generation has to produce all the goods a society needs." This realisation underpins the belief in the social insurance system, that pensions are an act of solidarity between one generation and another. We contribute into a common pot in the knowledge that it will support us all.

You can supplement this "pay as you go" system by a "funded" system of government bonds, to cover for changes in the ratio of pensioners to workers. These bonds, however, are linked to the other end of the chain: investment in the domestic economy, to provide the jobs which pay the wages which fund social insurance.

THE NEW deal being urged on us by global capital, is that private pensions (speculating in the equity markets) should replace any assumptions about common and public ones. Yet these are precisely the schemes which pursue dividends in the most exploitative markets around the world... and destroy domestic employment in the process.

So where is the alternative? It was left to Jeremy Corbyn to point out that cutting pensions just left more pensioners in poverty, and that destroying jobs also destroyed pensions. The challenge is to restore full employment, not to abandon it. But more than that we must challenge the new locus of capital itself.

Neither Britain nor the EU are poor. Yet wealth has become increasingly more concentrated in corporate than personal hands. Today's tax regimes reward firms which replace labour with capital. The largest firms pay the least in taxation and the lowest share of their turnover in either tax or social insurance. Some £67 billion a year changes hands in Britain in company takeovers which create not one single extra job. When all other purchases of goods attract either 8% or 15% VAT, why do we not view the purchase of the means of production itself as a legitimate basis on which capital itself should be taxed?

We should not be fooled into believing that German pensioners are the cause of UK pensioner poverty. Nor is the argument between tomorrow's workers and the pensioners who allowed their jobs to disappear. Capitalism will demand that the poor be left to pay for themselves or argue among each other about who is to blame. Socialists must explain that it is the restoration of jobs and the harnessing of capital which will pay the bill... and leave wealth to spare.

***LLB* hates resorting to reproducing sections of Hansard to fill the magazine. However we could not resist reporting this recent interlude in the debate on Social Security on 19th February.**

Mr Corbyn: Public investment in good quality housing is good for the people who live in it, and good for public expenditure as a whole. Spending money on Housing Benefit to prop up private landlords is not good enough. It is a crass waste of money, as the Government are at last beginning to recognise.

Mr Andrew Mitchell: I always enjoy the hon. Gentleman's speeches, and I have great respect for the integrity that he brings to his side of the debate, especially as he makes his hon. Friends on the Front Bench squirm. Will he make something clear to the House? He has said that extra public expenditure is needed. Will he confirm that he is entirely happy with the Labour Party's policy of living within the overall spending totals, in the unlikely event of Labour ever being elected?

Mr Corbyn: I have no idea, any more than any other Opposition Member, what the books will look like when we have won the general election on 1st May. But rest assured that I shall be here campaigning for better housing for the poor in this country. Whether the Minister will be here as well is for the voters of Gedling to decide.



Our lavish NHS pay rise

Staff nurse Helen Weatherley listens hard for champagne corks

SO THE Government has confirmed that nurses will be awarded a so-called inflation busting pay rise this year. But listen in to hospital wards around the country and you are more likely to hear the sound of piggy-banks smashing than champagne corks popping.

What we will actually get is 2% from 1st April, with the other 1.3% in December. It does not take Carol Vorderman to work out that this means only 2.4% over the whole year. Health Service top brass have complained that even a staged award will be impossible to meet without cuts in services. And there were Review Body rumblings about pay freeze deals in order to protect jobs. No-one should underestimate the low morale among nurses and other health workers at the moment. Cut-backs mean we cannot provide the quality of care we would like. This is driving more and more staff out of the NHS, further deepening the current crisis faced by users. After 18 gruelling years, we have come to expect stingy pay increases from the Tories. We are used to their contempt.

What is harder to swallow is New Labour currying favour with big business, promising no tax penalties on the rich, but making no solid, worthwhile promises to public sector workers. The results of a recent survey published in *Nursing Times* showed that 41% of the nurses interviewed do not trust any party with the NHS. Mr Blair and his merry band should take heed. It seems clear that Major is throwing down the gauntlet to Blair, who has shouted long and loud for decent pay increases for NHS staff. Now there is a real chance his mob are going to have to cough up, Blair is starting to sing a completely different tune.

We are being used as a political football. Great, if we could achieve a good score by the end of the match, but it looks more like the result will be a good kicking from both sides before we are knocked into touch yet again.

What do we want?

Manchester UNISON Branch Executive member Tony Dale considers the role of trade unions under a Labour Government

TONY BLAIR, Gordon Brown and the rest of Labour's front bench are trying desperately to dampen down expectations on an incoming Labour Government. But they are not succeeding. Despite the moves by the clique around Tony Blair to shift Labour away from the unions, their members see a Blair Government as a government by the labour movement for the labour movement — and they expect it to deliver.

UNISON is now the largest trade union affiliated to the Labour Party. Its role under a Labour Government will be one of the crucial factors determining the direction of the Party. Already the front bench is making noises about preparing for an early conflict with the public sector unions over pay and funding for services.

The unions still have a big organisational weight inside the Labour Party due to the size of their affiliation. All the shifts to the right over the last few years have only been won with their support, or at least their non-opposition. They still have a powerful voice if they choose to use it.

The views of the unions continue to carry political influence with many Labour Party members. Their attitude will be crucial in how the labour movement responds to a Blair Government. The unions will be central to any fight to get a Labour Government to implement progressive policies. This position is being threatened by attempts to weaken the link. But if the trade unions in alliance with Constituency Labour Party activists put up a resolute defence of the existing structures then it can be successfully defended.

Over the last few years the prospect of a Labour Government has been reflected in trade unions' policies. Below are a series of policies passed by UNISON conferences in 1995 and 1996 indicating what UNISON wants from a Labour government. The list outlines a series of policies around which a broad alliance of the trade unions and Labour Party activists could campaign:

UNISON members need the government to pursue policies which will boost the economy and provide resources to restore a welfare state based on universally available high quality services; and they will need to defend themselves against any government which thinks that there is scope for efficiency savings in the public sector.

- A progressive taxation policy based on shifting the tax burden on to those who can afford it.
- Bringing back into public ownership the major privatised utilities including British Telecom, British Gas and the electricity and water companies.
- A programme of investment in the public services to provide for the current social needs in housing, health, education, the environment and transport to improve general living standards and by doing so create employment.
- Restoration of positive trade union rights for all workers.
- A minimum wage of at least half median male earnings.
- A strategy for reducing working hours with no loss of pay.
- No pay restraint policy. Conference is totally committed to the concept of free collective bargaining in the public sector. After years of Tory attacks the time is long overdue for the fall of public sector pay to be redressed.
- The end of enforced tendering and of privatisation through private financing initiatives. Opposition to voluntary as well as compulsory competitive tendering.
- Opposition to the economic convergence criteria contained within the Maastricht Treaty. Unless the criteria are substantially changed in favour of economic growth and full employment UNISON will campaign against joining the single currency.

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Hillingdon: UNISON sell-out challenged

The strikers need your support more than ever. Jacqui Brown, UNISON Housing Associations Branch Women's Officer, reports.

UNISON'S London Region at its AGM on 13th February voted overwhelmingly to continue support for the 53 sacked Hillingdon Hospital strikers.

The women were dismissed when private contractor Pall Mall took over the cleaning contract and imposed a pay cut. They have now been on strike for 17 months, and have vowed to continue fighting for their jobs, despite the recent decision of the Union's Industrial Action Committee (by four votes to three) to withdraw official backing for the dispute, and being locked out of the branch office on union instructions.

An emergency resolution from Lambeth called on the NEC to reinstate strike pay and official support and instructed the Regional Committee to launch a massive campaign amongst Pall Mall employees around a claim for a minimum wage of £4.26 an hour. This received huge support from the delegates present. A call for a card vote, demanded by the right wing, backfired when it delivered a 71% vote in favour. Regional Convenor Geoff Martin had already pledged his commitment to support fully the Region's decision and we now look for a new impetus to the campaign. The national mobilisation agreed by last year's National Conference has failed to deliver any practical campaigning and has left most rank and file union members in ignorance of the issues.

The decision of London Region is in stark contrast to the bureaucratic manoeuvrings at the National Women's Conference earlier the same week. With General Secretary Rodney Bickerstaffe addressing the conference for the first time, the word was clearly out to ensure no embarrassing decisions could be taken. The Standing Orders Committee, in a blatant move to stifle any discussion, ruled out of order a number of resolutions supporting the strikers. In a closed session, it was claimed that advice from UNISON's solicitors was that even to discuss the issue could place the union in "severe legal difficulties". If true, this indicates that the standard of advice provided by the legal department clearly needs a serious overhaul.

Attempts to challenge the ruling failed, and it was clear that many delegates had only a sketchy knowledge of the dispute and therefore felt unwilling or unable to challenge the committee's ruling. However, in a rare spirit of rebellion, Conference voted for suspension of standing orders to allow one of the strikers to address the meeting, and gave her a standing ovation. The anti democratic nature of the right was made evident when a large number of the National Women's Committee and some of their supporters on the conference floor, walked out.

The conference went on to pass resolutions supporting a minimum wage and restoration of trade union rights, without any apparent recognition of the hypocrisy of holding such policy positions while withholding practical support from those fighting for these rights in practice. All attempts by contributors to the debate to bring the discussion back to this reality were ruled out of order by the chair.

It is clear that, for the strike to be sustained, there is a desperate need for rank and file members to respond. The dispute must be broadened and taken to Pall Mall with a campaign to recruit and organise around the demand for a minimum wage. The strikers need both moral support on their picket line, and financial support to keep on fighting.

- Send donations to the Hillingdon Strikers Support Campaign c/o Cllr. Wally Kennedy, Hillingdon Civic Centre, Uxbridge, Middlesex. Support the picket line at Hillingdon Hospital, Pield Heath Road, Uxbridge. Bus U2 from Uxbridge tube.



Hillingdon workers lead the way.

PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Equality in the air

INTERNATIONAL Women's Day will see the launch of a campaign against sex discrimination in civil aviation and at sea by the International Transport Workers Federation.

Female attendants want recognition for their skills, which increase with age. Until recently, Thai Airlines had a discriminatory retirement policy and openly gave "top priority to looks" when recruiting. While men continued working until 60, women had to retire at 45. But following a union campaign, this discrimination has been ended. Some airlines seek to exploit the popular image of "air hostesses" as sex symbols — Air Jamaica requires them to put on a fashion show! Brazilian airline Varig has banned male attendants in business class — on the grounds that businessmen prefer to be served by women. Canadian Airline's in-flight magazine ran an interview with a frequent flyer whose fantasy was to have "more young air hostesses".

Passengers are put at risk because this image devalues and undermines the real role of attendants. In emergencies their skills can save lives. But some airlines still require female crew to wear high heels even in the terminal and during boarding — where they are helping to load heavy hand luggage — and during the dangerous times of take-off and landing.

Singapore Airlines requires women to wear restrictive uniforms during training so that they can get used to moving and swimming in them. Many airlines have restrictions on employment during pregnancy (more than is needed for safety) and some dismiss female staff when they marry.

ITF's campaign will be aimed at both trade unionists and the travelling public and will involve women's organisations and airline safety campaigns. ❑

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DOCKERS SPAN

International solidarity

Chris Knight (London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers) reports on the Dockers' International Week of Action.

IT WAS as if the planet skipped a heartbeat. Workers in 105 ports across the world have become involved in action in solidarity with the 500 sacked Liverpool dockers. Backed by the International Transport Federation, the action directly hit shipping in at least 13 countries in the week beginning January 20th. Scanning the record-books, it may have been the mightiest example of international action in direct support of an industrial dispute this century. Yet — remarkably even by recent standards of media manipulation and control — the British public still don't know anything happened. The transfer of the national press to Fortress Wapping was planned for contingencies like this.

Let's turn to the foreign press for enlightenment. Here is the *Los Angeles Times*, one of the leading United States dailies, reporting (January 21st 1997) on how the action hit the West Coast of America:

"Pacific Rim trade sputtered to a halt and dozens of mammoth cargo ships sat idle in their ports as union dockworkers from Los Angeles to Seattle stayed off the job in a one-day show of support for striking longshoremen in Liverpool, England... At the Los Angeles-Long Beach harbour complex, the nation's busiest, 33 ships were either stranded in berths with no one to handle their cargo or were anchored in the San Pedro Bay with nowhere to go...".

Or take the *Tribune Business News* (January 21st, 1997):

" 'The industry is again a mess,' said captain Karsten Lemke, chairman of the Steamship Association of Southern California and a vice-president with Zim-American Israeli Shipping Co. Inc. in Los Angeles. 'This is going to cost us millions of dollars in delays... Half a billion dollars in commerce is shot... down the drain', said Wilmington trucking executive Mike Johnson, President of the Port Intermodal Operators Association."

As the action started, all Oregon ports including Portland were shut for 24 hours. Los Angeles, Long Beach, San Francisco, Oakland, Tacoma, Seattle and Dutch Harbour (Alaska) were shut for eight hours. In Los Angeles alone, over 100 cranes were stopped, with 32 ships in harbour and another 16 due that day. Shipping lines affected included Maersk, American President Line, Evergreen, Hapag Lloyd, NYK and OOCL. In addition to newspaper coverage, viewers across the United States watched dramatic CNN television coverage of the action as it happened, augmented with videotape footage of the international picket of Seaforth Dock, Liverpool, in February last year.

Comparable stories and local coverage reached audiences in several countries, while lesser actions, financial contributions and expressions of solidarity, not directly affecting shipping, came from many others.

Given the scale of the international action, and the media attempts to conceal it, it seems important to place on record the details. Below is a survey based on information gleaned by the Liverpool stewards from foreign press cuttings and well over 220 faxes sent in from supporters worldwide. Where no date is given, read January 20th — start of the week of action.

Some of the stoppages lasted only a few hours: remember, though, that a modern container vessel is vast, and that even a short delay usually means missing a tide, with massive knock-on effects and costs to the

Canada: the ILA-organised port of Saint John, New Brunswick, was completely shut down for the whole day, from 8 am to 7 pm, despite legal threats to the Union. CAST and CanMar offices on Quebec were occupied on the day, following a meeting in which, for the first time ever, 500 longshoremen got together with checkers and railway workers in the port of Montreal. The Cast Elk and CanMar Spirit were delayed as the Syndicat des Debardeurs discovered equipment in urgent need of maintenance at the three container terminals.

Japan: Action in solidarity with Liverpool hit 50 ports, backed by the 40,000 strong National Council of Dockworkers Unions (Zenkoku Kowan); workers downed tools while meetings were held under the slogan "Stand Against Deregulation: Strengthen International Solidarity". Shipping lines affected included OOCL, Evergreen, NYK and P&O. The union has written to the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company threatening more unless the Liverpool dockers are reinstated.

Sweden: all ACL and CAST container vessels in the ports of Gothenburg, Malmo, Helsingborg and Stockholm were immobilised on Monday January 21st in a 24-hour solidarity stoppage organised by the Hamnarbetaforbundet and by rank-and-file members of the Swedish Transport Workers Union.

Denmark: mass meetings to discuss Liverpool were held on January 20th in the ports of Arhus and Copenhagen; each meeting led to a 24-hour solidarity stoppage.

Holland: in the giant European Container Terminal at Rotterdam, the Morline/Baltic Line Mor Europe was delayed by a work-to-rule on the night shift of Monday 20th; two gangs then refused to service the vessel the next morning.

Germany: the ACL Atlantic Conveyor was held up for two hours in Bremerhaven as the OTV (the main dockers' union) called all dockers to the canteen to discuss Liverpool.

Le Havre, France: an OOCL vessel was delayed on the evening of January 19th; dockers from the port also attended a rally in Paris of 1,500 supporters of the Liverpool dockers and Women of the Waterfront.

Greece: a three-day seamen's strike from January 20th and a general strike on January 23rd involved dockers in holding up the Gracechurch line, which trades with Liverpool.

Australia: the Zim Australia was diverted from Sydney Harbour, and the Zim Sydney faced disruption in Sydney and Melbourne. The Israeli-owned Zim Line trades with Liverpool.

New Zealand: the day of action began with a seafarers' picket of the three major container terminals in Auckland, Wellington and Lyttelton at the commencement of the morning shift. Members of the Waterfront Workers and Harbour Workers' unions honoured these pickets, as did truck drivers in Wellington. Vessels were held up in Auckland and Lyttelton; there were meetings between seafarers and crew members aboard the P&O Mairangi Bay while this ship was held up. The P&O operates in the Port of Liverpool.

Liverpool: on Monday 20th, the port was successfully occupied by a combined team of dockers and environmentalists who tricked security by pretending to be scabs and driving into the port — to occupy three wind-blasted cranes for 27 hours on the coldest night of the year. The effect was to hold up the Lake Eyrie for the duration, while a noisy and high-spirited 1,000-strong picket was mounted at the gates of Seaforth Container Terminal.

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THE GLOBE!

rocks the bosses

owners. One reason for the varying times and places is that the action was targeted to coincide, where possible, with the arrival of a container ship doing trade with the scab port of Liverpool. Note, though, that many portworkers worldwide struck anyway, just to make a point.

The full picture is more impressive than this brief and sketchy survey can convey. VIDEO NEWS should be contacted for a chance to see their marvellous video coverage of the international day of action, which includes magnificent CNN footage. We will probably never know precisely what happened during that extraordinary week in January when the dream of a workers' international — by the workers, for the workers, of the workers — came closer to realisation than for half a century. Even supporters in countries with no ports did what they could — in the Swiss case by occupying the Rhine Shipping Company in Basel and by gluing all door locks at the British Consulate in Zurich!

Messages of support, donations and reports of actions have been flooding in from as far afield as Kaliningrad, Mombassa, Mexico City and Mauritania. With such messages come internet addresses and permanent links, which are then reinforced and integrated into the dockers' international alliance which the dispute has inspired.

In a subsequent message, Liverpool Port Shop Stewards Secretary Jimmy Nolan said it all:

"The Week of Action was a magnificent achievement for the international dockworkers' movement and for workers worldwide. We thank you all. We would ask that the supportive actions are maintained right up to the moment when the Liverpool Dock Workers march proudly back to their jobs within the Port of Liverpool."

That day now looks within reach. Make no mistake: the dockers are winning this one. As we prepare to celebrate a change of government, don't be part of the problem. Join your local dockers' support group, march with the dockers on the EuroMarch and Carnival for Social Justice in London on April 12th — and be part of the victory.



Marching for jobs — and social justice for all.

Striking on the dock of the bay

Doreen McNally of Women of the Waterfront describes the political journey from the kitchen to the world stage travelled by the women of Liverpool docks.

WHEN THE Mersey Docks and Harbour Company took on the Liverpool dockers wives and partners they hit steel. The MDHC is discovering how strong women are in struggle. Our planet is being destroyed. Our children face slavery and every gain our forefathers fought for and won is being eroded because of unprecedented greed. We have such an important fight on our hands. We are standing with our men in defence of trade unionism, in defence of basic human rights, in defence of the future.

In 1989 Liverpool docks was the last port to return to work, defeated in the fight against the abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme. One by one the other ports had caved in. The MDHC then embarked on a demoralisation programme — changing identities as registered dock workers and stevedores to port operation workers. Democratically elected shop stewards were de-recognised. The men were forced to sign contracts under threat of 90 days notice and in some cases liquidation. Eighty young men were dismissed because the company refused to pay the agreed contractual overtime rate.

The women had watched all of this unfolding, each of us waiting to see how MDHC would engineer the sacking of the Liverpool dockers who had been proclaimed the best in Europe by Lloyds List. Most of the women had never met. But the intrusion into family lives forged a bond between us. We held a meeting. Women of the Waterfront (WOW) was born.

The journey from the kitchen to the world platform was travelled with ease. Using the tremendous dexterity with which we organise home life we now arrange fund raising events, deal with the world's media, and battle against the popular press blackout.

We have broadened our political awareness, politicised our children and widened our vision. Most importantly we support each other and our men, while we continue to deal with the most harrowing experience of our lives. We have attended more than a thousand meetings around this country and abroad. Sue Mitchell and I represented the dockers at the third Open World Conference in Paris and were instrumental in setting up an international support committee.

We now see an increase in the import of toxic waste through our port, possibly because of cheap casual scab labour. But we also see a decline in shipping and a substantial drop in share prices. Our support is increasing. We are the caretakers of the future. We are determined there will be one for the next generation.

Everyone who cares should stand by us. The Liverpool dockers and their families cannot and will not return defeated to their homes. A victory for the Liverpool dockers is a victory for all.



PHOTO: JACQUI BROWN

Despite the best efforts of the Tories, trade unionism lives on at GCHQ. This years march on January 25th, perhaps the most spirited ever, may be the last as hopes rise that full Trade Union rights will soon be restored.

Southwark axes Trade Union Support Unit

Denyse Whillier, President of Southwark Trades Council and Chair of the Southwark Trade Union Support Unit Management Committee, lifts the lid on the manoeuvres that threaten the future of a valued trade union resource.

Trade unionists across Southwark were shocked and dismayed to learn that funding for the Southwark Trade Union Support Unit (STUSU) was to be withdrawn by the Labour controlled Council as of April 1997.

The unit is one of only three in the country and renowned for the excellent service it has given to the community as well as to affiliated trade unions over the past thirteen years.

Following a series of Council Committee meetings in December 1996, the Labour Group voted to withdraw funding of the Unit completely, after 'advice' that there had been a 'hard left' take-over of the Trades Council and STUSU.

In fact, a new Management Committee had been elected charged with the task of restoring proper working conditions within the Unit after the previous Management Committee had failed to resolve an internal dispute over workers' terms and conditions. The New Management Committee was told that funding had been withdrawn because of the previous administration's failure to meet Council targets.

The Council did not, however, see fit to allow the new Management Committee the opportunity to demonstrate that these targets could be met.

In what can only be seen as a fit of paranoia, the Leader of the Council (and PPC for Bermondsey), Jeremy Fraser, interpreted the change in the Management Committee as an attempt to undermine his political credibility in the run-up to the general election.

On the basis of misinformation and political scaremongering, Fraser lobbied Labour councillors to withdraw funding and orchestrated a campaign to get trustees such as Harriet Harman, MP and Richard Balfe MEP to resign. What Fraser has managed to achieve is the alienation and anger of key trade unionists who would otherwise have been out on the streets working to reduce the Lib-Dem majority.

In a saga worthy of the Borgias, the actions of Southwark Council managers have gone from appalling to despicable. The Council withheld the final quarter grant cheque and is currently refusing to pay the wages of workers on their payroll. Two of the workers are continuing to work on a meagre subsistence allowance in order to defend the reputation of the unit and prepare a bid for April 1997.

The Trustees have all resigned and surrendered the deeds to the property to the Council without even consulting the Management Committee. The Council immediately sought to repossess the property, and I, along with the STUSU secretary, found myself in the squatters (High) Court defending the unit. Fortunately (and unexpectedly), a sympathetic judge dismissed the Council's affidavit as defective and referred it back to the County Court. This resolved the immediate crisis, but following legal advice, the Management Committee is now considering suing the Trustees for breach of trust and confidence in order to be able to pay the workers' wages and redundancy settlements.

The current Management Committee wants to get on with the business of preparing a successful bid to secure the future of the STUSU, with an added brief to develop projects to assist the large numbers of young unemployed in Southwark into work. The Management Committee collectively, in conjunction with the remaining workers, has the experience and expertise to bring such a project to fruition.

If the Unit is to be able to complete its fourth quarter work and bid successfully for funds for the new projects, it will need the support of trade unionists and Labour Party activists.

l Write to Jeremy Fraser, Leader of the Council, c/o Southwark Town Hall, Peckham Road, London SE5. Send donations to the Trades Council Fighting Fund, c/o STUSU, 42 Braganza Street, London SE17 3RJ.

Trade Union Notebook

Two weeks before Christmas, 41 skilled sheet metal workers were locked out of their company, Project Aerospace.

Project Aerospace is a small Coventry company supplying the motor industry. The workers, MSF members, have a long-running dispute over unsafe working conditions and lack of pension or proper sick pay schemes. After a strike ballot, industrial action started in November with an overtime ban and a one-day per week strike. The company sent out letters offering workers a 3% rise in return for signing a contract imposing new conditions and withdrawal of the industrial action. After withdrawing a threat to make 19 (illegal) redundancies, the company finally locked out the workers on 10th December, hours before a meeting between management, stewards and officers.

Since then, the company has refused to enter into negotiations either directly or through ACAS and has attempted to recruit scab labour, without success. The firm is believed to be in difficulties as a result of being unable to meet contracts. Skilled workers in other firms or from agencies are refusing to work there, not only because of the dispute but also due to the dangerous conditions. An inspection by the Health and Safety Executive confirmed the union's complaints about asbestos, water dripping onto machinery, excessive noise and other unsafe practisces.

MSF is backing the dispute, and all union branches and regions are urged to make donations to: Project Aerospace Strike Fund, c/o Coventry Trades Council, Unit 15 The Arches Industrial Estate, Spon End, Coventry CV1 3JQ.

Seventy textile workers who occupied their factory in north London in protest at not being paid their wages have won a partial victory.

For ten days from 24th January they maintained a round-the-clock sit-in at the Tudorgold factory in Tottenham.

Many of the workers are Turkish and Kurdish, others are African, Indian and Pakistani. The workers produced 400-600 jackets per day, earning between £120-£200 per week. Depending on the size of an order, they could be expected to work up to 80 hours per week, seven days a week, although there is meant to be a basic 40 hour week.

The company declared itself bankrupt, a move which the workers view as a ruse to

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avoid paying debts, including wages.

It is common practice among many textile factory bosses to hide behind different company names and to declare bankruptcies in order to avoid paying wages, taxes and other debts. This enables big retailers such as Burtons and Principles (who were supplied by Tudorgold through middlemen) to make huge profits on unpaid labour.

At Tudorgold the workers received the active support of the TGWU North East London Textile Workers Branch. They managed to get back 40% of the wages owed to them before being evicted by the police and bailiffs.

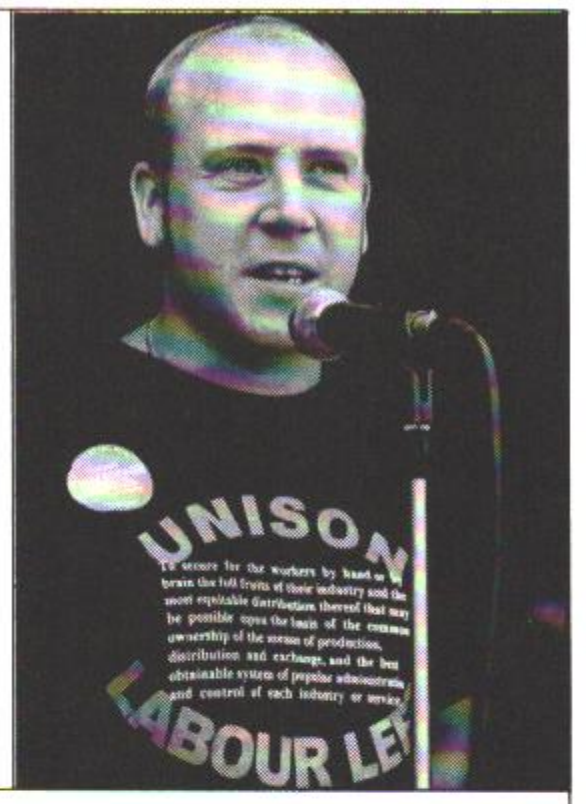
Their action follows on the successful strikes at JJ Fast Foods, Jenny's Designs and Euroscene, all encouraged by each other in the same north London area. The workers at Tudorgold thank all those who supported them morally and financially.

Magnet Kitchen workers in Darlington have organised a 24 hour picket against their sacking last September and threats by management to employ scab labour. They were sacked after threatening to strike when some workers were made a below-inflation pay offer and others not even that. Management refused to arbitrate and sought injunctions against eleven pickets, which were later dropped. The workers are asking for support with protests outside Magnet Kitchen showrooms in Balham, Charlton, Croydon, Fulham, Peckham and Kingston.

Levels of sleaze in MSF elections for General Secretary and NEC seats are causing left candidates to consider reluctantly taking their union to law. From past experience they know the union machinery intended to investigate malpractice is run by the same group responsible for the libels and attacks against the left. They have been accused of supporting the IRA and one candidate has been slated for being unemployed - as he is, after being sacked for trade union activity! Meanwhile right wing officials found using union facilities in South-West Region to promote support for candidates have not even been reprimanded.

NATFHE branch Secretary Pat Walsh has been sacked from Accrington and Rossendale College after leading a campaign against the employer's attempts to force 350 part-time lecturers into signing new contracts with Education Lecturing Services and so lose all their employment benefits. ELS is fronted by Richard Eve, until recently a senior NATFHE head office official. The remaining full-timers have voted overwhelmingly for indefinite strike action from mid-February to demand Pat's reinstatement. Messages of support c/o TGWU, 2a Abbey Street, Accrington, Lancashire.

the Geoff Martin column



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

● Off to Brighton at the start of February to lend my support to the Brighton FC supporters currently locked into a battle for survival with the club's Board of Directors.

The Brighton faithful had issued an appeal to other supporters to join them in a protest under the banner of 'Fans United'. As there were no Premier League games on the day thousands of us answered the call.

Now I don't give a toss whether Brighton win, lose or draw on the pitch (as it happens they won five-nil against Hartlepool); what I do care about is bastards like former Lib-Dem MP David Belotti trying to asset strip clubs like Brighton in the interests of profit.

All power to the Brighton supporters in their struggle and thanks for a cracking good day out in a good cause.

● The Hampshire Popular Front (Fighting Democratic) will love this one. Wading through a pile of backlogged post I came across a letter telling me that if I donated £20 immediately I could avoid a leap into the unknown with New Labour.

Thinking that this might be a communique from the 'Mandelson Concrete Boots Club' I read on eagerly. The thrust of the appeal went wildly off the rails with a claim that Labour is dominated by the trade unions. I wish. Yes, you've guessed it. The letter was from Brian Mawhinney.

● As I'm writing this I'm preparing to do a slot at the Cuba Solidarity Campaign Valentine's Day bash. I went to Cuba a few years ago on a COHSE delegation. We were carting a load of medical supplies over for some hospitals we were twinned with.

Guess who was given responsibility for looking after an artificial leg for the orthopaedic hospital? You try walking through Heathrow customs with a false leg under your arm.

The other big mistake I made was laying into the Guinness at Shannon Airport while we waited for the connecting flight from Moscow. Nobody had warned me that Aeroflot planes have outside toilets. Anyway, if Blair and his mates are such big pals of Clinton why aren't they telling him to get his hands off the throats of the Cuban people?

● How about this for a description of New Labour's attitude to the trade unions: 'It's a bit like standing in a pub and buying someone beer all night who not only never buys you one back but also repeatedly gobs in your own pint in front of your very eyes.'

Cheers Helen!

● From analogies to anagrams - you get it all in this column.

Which leading political figure becomes: 'Pus from the sore on the devil's arse' with a bit of juggling around?

Top marks for anyone who guessed Ann Widdecombe. I know it's not a perfect anagram but who cares?

● Finally, speaking at a recent Socialist Campaign Group supporters meeting someone asked me why I never mentioned Fulham in this column.

Why the hell should I?

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

The threat of a joint union strike across the entire workforce of Lambeth Council in South London has forced a climbdown by the hung council, which has abandoned plans to cut annual leave and maternity pay, and to add an hour to the working week for white collar workers.

The lesson of this dispute is that attacks on conditions of service can be defeated, provided that the trade unions show unity and determination. This lesson now needs to be applied in other local authorities, such as Haringey, where attacks on locally negotiated conditions are planned, and to the implementation of the new national agreement on "single status" for local government manual and white-collar workers.

INTERNATIONAL WOMENS DAY
MARCH 8TH

Equality: still at the top of women's agenda

Councillor Liz Davies, chair of Islington's Women's Committee, rebuts notions that we live in a "post-feminist" world.

IT'S A hard time to be a feminist! But was there ever a good time? We used to be derided as "man-haters", bra-burning women with chips on our shoulders. Now the attacks are even more pernicious. We are derided as "old-fashioned", not in touch with modern women. We are held responsible for creating youth crime, vandalism or any other social evil hyped up by right-wing ideologues. We are accused of alienating men or betraying "ordinary" women. We are told that we have achieved our aims during some Golden Age of Feminism and that history has passed us by.

If there was a feminist Golden Age, some time between the birth of second-wave feminism (in the late 60s) and now, I must have blinked and missed it.

Spare Rib and *Everywoman* have folded, the *Guardian* Women's Page barely exists, and concentrates on lifestyle celebrity interviews.

Perhaps the most insidious attack on feminist ideals comes in the form of identity politics. The "vote for me because I am a woman" appeal uses the language of feminism for the purpose of individual careerism, which is why it is accepted by men anxious to avoid any real challenge to their power.

We see it in the Labour Party's "shoulder-pad brigade". The drive to increase the number of women Labour MPs through all-women shortlists took place at the expense of women Labour activists' real power exercised through the Labour women's organisation. The demands for autonomy for the women's organisation (that women's seats on the NEC be elected by Women's Conference, that the women's organisation be entitled to put motions to Annual Conference) were ditched in favour of increasing the number of individual women in Parliament.

Of course, it is unacceptable that, in 1997, only 9% of Parliament is female and the fact that, after the next election, there will be 60 or 70 Labour women MPs is to be welcomed. The absence of women MPs inevitably means the absence of women's needs and demands from the larger political agenda. But having more women MPs in itself will not necessarily improve the lives of working-class women. The way to ensure that feminist demands are raised in Parliament is by having more



women MPs committed to a broad programme for the betterment of all working-class women and accountable to a vibrant and democratic women's organisation. Unfortunately most of the women PPCs selected are more interested in loyalty to the Party leadership than arguing the feminist corner or being accountable to grass-roots women.

The feminist movement has achievements to be proud of: the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts, increased access for women to higher education and non-traditional sections of the labour market, increased child-care, more widespread awareness of rape and domestic violence as crimes of violence, increased control for women over their reproductive rights. Yet women still earn on average 79% of male earnings, four out of five working women are working in women's traditional jobs, and on average women do an extra fifteen hours unpaid (domestic) work per week. Women are still poorer overall than men and far more likely to experience domestic violence than men.

The truth is that, for all the derision of the word "feminist", young women's expectations have changed. Helen Wilkinson, in *No Turning Back: generations and the genderquake* (published by Demos) supported her claim that feminism was out-of-date by arguing that young women were no longer interested in social change and were more confident, less emotional and more risk-taking than in the past. But her statistics disclosed the sharp conflict between expectations and reality: 79% of young women want to develop a career, 43% would like help with child-care from their employers, 69% said that men should do the same domestic work as women. Young women have expectations of equality. Yet only 9% of employers provide help with child-care, 69% of women in dual-earning relationships continue to shoulder the main burdens of domestic labour and women still find themselves up against glass ceilings in the professions and business.

A study in the US found that 51% of women identified themselves as feminists. The figure rose to 71% when the women were provided with a dictionary definition of feminism!

While the word "feminist" may not be regularly used by many women to describe themselves, the demands of the feminist movement have entered women's consciousness.

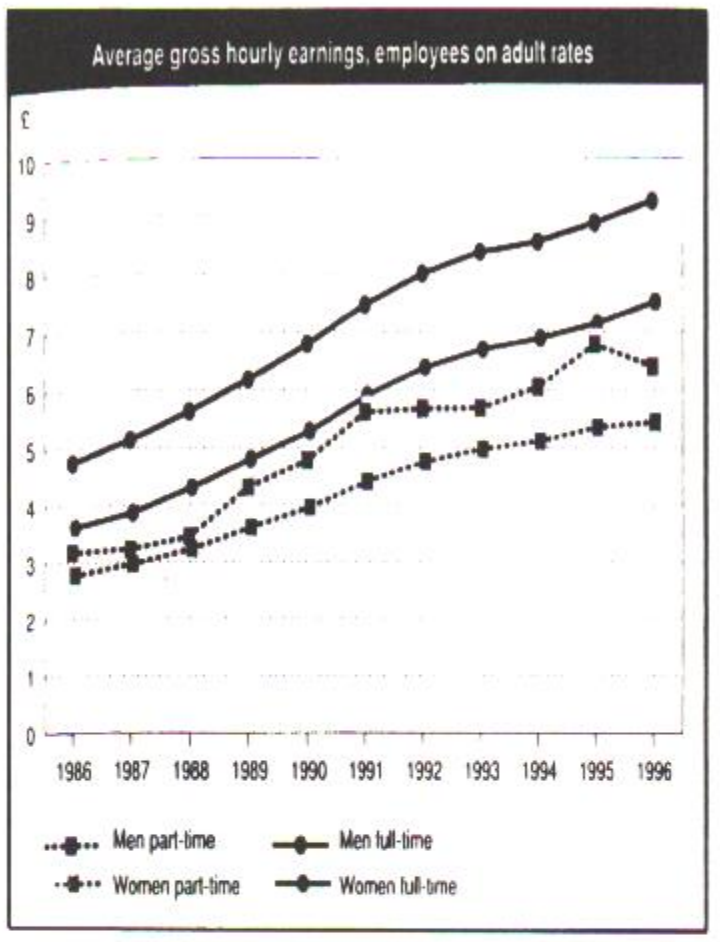
Activism among women is still strong. While there are no longer Reclaim the Night marches, the Hillingdon Hospital strikers have been on strike for months against wage cuts. I have worked with groups of working-class women campaigning to save nurseries and adventure playgrounds. The Women of the Waterfront are taking the struggle against victimisations and for decent wages to all parts of the country.

So, despite the concerted attempt to persuade us that we live in a post-feminist world, the basic demands and perspectives of feminism are as valid today as they were in the late 60s, and women will not cease to organise as women until we have achieved equality.

●The position of feminism today is discussed at greater length in *Feminism after post-feminism*, by Liz Davies, European Labour Forum, £2.00.

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Pay gap yawns into the future



Dave Statham, Brent East CLP, examines the gap between women's and men's earnings.

THE EQUAL Opportunities Commission (EOC) has calculated that at the present rate of progress, or lack of it, it will take until 2040 to achieve equal pay for women. They calculate the 45 year wait because between 1975 and 1995 the average hourly pay gap closed by nine per cent. They also note that the gap widens with age, with women in their fifties being in the worst financial position relative to men. In the hope of speeding up progress towards equality, the EOC has introduced a new Code of Practice on Equal Pay which comes into effect on 26th March.

Latest Government statistics (the revised results of the New Earnings Survey 1996) put the hourly earnings of women in full-time employment at 80% of those of men, a gap which has remained largely unchanged over the last decade (see graph). The position for part-time workers is similar: the figures for men working part-time fluctuate, but this may in part be due to the small number of male part-timers in the NES sample.

Among non-manual women and men, the earnings gap is even greater, with women at only 69% of the hourly pay of men. Since more than five million people now work part-time in Britain, the majority of them women, the gap between part-time pay rates is a major concern.

The evidence above is reinforced by a more detailed study published in the Department for Education and Employment's Research Series which looks at two "cohorts" of people in their early thirties. This study attempts to find explanations for the differences as well as setting them out in great detail. They note that in 1978 the pay gap for full-time employees was 37% (down from 58% before the Equal Pay Act) and by 1991 the gap was 26%. They also noted that the gap in pay between women employed full-time and part-time was widening and that this was attributable, in part, to part-timers' "low status occupations".

The trade unions and Labour Party are not gearing up to change the situation. While some unions have clearly defined policies aimed at improving the position of women members, the overall picture is of very little activity, and the Party leadership exhibits no interest in the matter whatsoever. Indeed the Blairites' adulation of "the market" will only reinforce present discrimination: the "low status occupations" which influence pay rates are a direct product of the market — the market in people.

No imagination

Liz Davies reviews Labour's policy document *Strategy For Women.*

THE 1996 Strategy for Women contains Labour's broad policy on women. Tessa Jowell states in the introduction, "New Labour's policies are not about narrow sexual politics", whatever she means by that. It competently criticises Government policies that affect women's lives and compares them with the reality of working-class women's lives. However, the solutions it offers are woefully inadequate.

The specific commitments are:

- access to parental leave;
- a national minimum wage (but no figure);
- simplification of equal pay legislation;
- the New Deal for the under 25s to get young people into work;
- partnership with employers to meet local child-care needs;
- homework clubs;
- new technology in schools;
- cutting class sizes to a minimum of 30 for 5, 6 and 7 year olds;
- a review of the law relating to rape and domestic violence;
- flexibility of the benefits system;
- a "flexible decade" in retirement;
- phased release of council housing capital receipts;
- ending the two-tier access to the NHS created by GP fundholding;
- easily accessible family planning and well-women clinics;
- reviewing the road-building programme;
- flexible services for carers;
- anti-discrimination measures for people with disabilities;
- increasing the numbers of women on management boards for the arts, sport and the media;
- a Minister for Women at Cabinet level.

Nearly all of these proposals come from Labour's broad programme. There is little imagination and thought put in to addressing women's specific needs. Public spending commitments, other than those paid for by the windfall tax or the abolition of the assisted places scheme, are scrupulously avoided. Terms such as "flexible services" are bandied around, but no money will be available to improve existing services. It is hard to see how services and support for carers, who are already massively over-stretched, can be made more flexible without some increase in spending.

Harriet Harman has announced plans to encourage single mothers into the job market. There is one specific proposal: after-school kids' clubs. Everything else is just around encouraging women in how to write CVs, apply for jobs etc. The proposal has shades of "workfare" around it. At present, single parents bringing up children under 16 are automatically eligible for income support if they are not working; they do not have to show that they are available for work. This is a practical commitment by the Government recognising the difficulties that single parents have in obtaining work while caring for children. Harman's proposals may be phrased in terms of "encouraging" single mothers to work, but from there it is but a short step to requiring single parents to be available for work, and cutting their benefit if there is any doubt about their attempts to find work. The Labour Party is struggling to reconcile its attempt to seem more woman-friendly, recognising the importance of women's votes, with its prohibition on increases in public spending. Without a commitment to provide resources for the services and facilities that women need to make any serious progress towards equality, Labour has a "strategy for women" in name only. ❑

South Africa leads the world in choice for women

While pro-life groups prepare for the UK General Election, a new abortion law in South Africa offers women one of the best legal situations in the world. Leonora Lloyd, Ealing Acton CLP, reports.

SUPPORTERS OF the National Abortion Campaign picketed Harrods on the last day of its sale to alert customers to the fact the shop's owner is the funder of the Pro-Life Alliance, a new party which proposes to put up 70 anti-abortion candidates at the General Election. The PLA plans to stand against pro-choice MPs.

Their party political broadcast will show a late termination using a method seldom used in this country. Even the established anti-choice organisations, such as LIFE and SPUC, are opposed to this venture. They say it is because they want the issue taken up by the main parties: the reality is that they know the cause will attract a derisory vote.

Meanwhile, in South Africa, on the same day as the Harrods picket, a liberal abortion law came into effect. It has some unique aspects.

First, a woman may approach any public or private health facility for help. She does not have to go through her doctor.

Second, there is no requirement for parental permission for minors, although they are to be encouraged to discuss the issue with their parents. A partner's permission is also not required — and this in a country where, under some tribal laws, women are regarded as permanent infants under the control of father or husband.

Up to twelve weeks, abortion is available on request. Between 13 and 20 weeks a woman cannot be refused if her mental or physical health will be harmed; if the fetus has severe physical or mental abnormalities; if she has been raped or the pregnancy results from incest; or if she herself believes that continuation of the pregnancy is impossible due to her economic or social circumstances.

After 20 weeks, an abortion is only possible if the life of the woman is in danger or if the baby would in any case die.

Health workers can refuse to participate in abortions on grounds of conscience except in an emergency. Nurses who have received special training can terminate abortions up to 12 weeks — another unique feature of this law, which recognises the simplicity and safety of modern abortion methods.

Confidentiality is required and women are entitled to counselling available from health facilities and voluntary groups before and after the abortion.

The new law is one of the best in the world, although 20 weeks is a little early to prevent abortions on any grounds other than risk to life. But when considered in relation to the previous position, it is little short of wonderful.

Needless to say, the patriarchy is not lying down quietly and anti-abortionists are threatening to unleash American-style terrorism. They have promised to fight to the death, but the Minister of Health has made it clear that the police would take action against any attempts to prevent legal abortions taking place.

Pro-Life, the main organisation involved, has said it will not resort to violence, although it does not condemn the killing of abortion clinic staff in the States, and says it will offer help to women seeking alternatives to abortion.

It will have an enormous job on its hands. During parliamentary hearings before the Bill was passed, pro-choice Christians explained their position on the basis of the actual problems they saw every day. Gynaecologist Eddie Mthlanga, director of Maternal Health in the Department of Health, described some of the horrific deaths he had seen.

White Catholic doctor Helen Moffatt said that she wanted the parliamentarians to know that there were pro-choice Catholics supporting the bill. She was pro-life, but said that black women suffered most under current legislation and: "as a comfortable, middle-class, white woman I realised I could not sit in judgement. Legislation must allow for the reality of women's lives."

No doubt for many years women in far-flung, isolated rural areas and those too frightened to claim their rights will still suffer ill-health and death. But a huge step forward has been taken which will result in vast improvements in women's lives, health and choices.

Writing for rights

In an open letter to ANC members of parliament before the new law was passed, Nomboniso Gasa wrote that deaths from illegal abortions were something she first became aware of as a child. Fetuses and dead new-borns could be seen in the rivers and woods around her village.

"The Termination of Pregnancy Bill ... will go a long way in communicating your commitment and willingness to stick your necks out for women. In this business of women's emancipation there are no safe zones... The legal frameworks, the groundbreaking gains made by the Constitution, will have little meaning if we are denied a choice that is intimate, private, personal and painful. A choice about our bodies and reproductive rights.

"This right is very painful to the culture of patriarchy that exists in our country...You have to decide if you want women to continue living these schizophrenic lives. You have the power! The time is now!"

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS

LONDON

The Women and Ireland Network holds a meeting to celebrate International Women's Day on Friday, 7th March, at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, WC1 (nearest tube Holborn). Further details are available on 0171-752 7393.

BIRMINGHAM

To celebrate International Women's Day, Birmingham Women & Ireland Group holds a meeting on Saturday, 9th March, at the Union Club, 723 Pershore Road, Stirchley, B29, from 2.00pm. A social follows at 8.00pm.

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Ecuador: women in the frontline

In February, Ecuador hit the headlines. For the British press, it was all about the antics of a president called "el loco" and those who claimed to succeed him. But the jokey reportage concealed a real crisis, created by the president's decision to make stringent cuts in the living standards of all but the richest, while flaunting the wealth he had showered on friends and relatives. Women's role in the resistance to the cuts went unreported here. Sue Lukes asked Patricia Palacios of the Women and Society Foundation what we could learn.

Q: How do women in Ecuador organise?
A: Ecuador was the first Latin American country to recognise women's right to vote, in 1929, but now, at the end of the century, less than 10% of the decision-making posts in the country are held by women.

However, women and the women's movement have been appearing in many more public, political activities since 1985. Three recent events are milestones in the fight for women's human, political and civil rights.

In February 1996, our Political Congress brought together about 800 representatives of women's organisations from all over the country. It set up the Ecuadorian Women's Political Co-ordinating Committee, known as the CPME, and approved by consensus a document called the *Ecuadorian Women's Political Agenda*, which promoted our main aims by section and theme. This document was handed to all the presidential candidates at the time, and some public agreements were established with them.

In July, a woman was elected vice-president of the Republic for the first time in our history, and Dr. Rosalia Arteaga took office in August. She was not formally supported by all the women's organisations but did make specific agreements with them and promoted the participation of women in the cabinet and other decision-making bodies.

The Government, centralised in the figure of Abdala Bucaram, then reduced the power of the vice-president to virtually nothing. Further, within the Government, several officers were publicly abusive to women, and denied women's rights, but were allowed to keep their ministerial rank.

In January 1997, the National Congress passed a law proposed by the Government called Employment Assistance for Women. It included a quota of 20% for women's involvement in social and public life, including political parties. This law did not cover the variety or magnitude of the demands made by organised women in Ecuador, who had been proposing for over a decade a series of law reforms aimed at ensuring fairer representation in elected and decision-making posts.

Q: What led to the recent crisis?
A: In February this year, we faced the greatest political crisis since the return to democracy in 1979, caused by popular discontent at the application of economic measures which had a strong social impact, nepotism, corruption and an informal and unstructured style of government.



Women in struggle — political demonstration in Ecuador.

Q: What role did women's organisations play in the mobilisations against the Government?
A: The popular mobilisation was called by the Frente Patriotico, which is based on the Social Movements Co-ordinating Committee, in which the CPME participates. It challenged the authority of the Bucaram Government and organised popular pressure to remove the president. Under pressure from the popular mobilisation, forces in the National Congress took action against the president but then assumed a right which did not exist in the constitution to elect another themselves.

Under our constitution, the presidential succession should fall on the woman vice president, who would take the post until the year 2000, completing the present term.

Q: So what is the significance of an Ecuadorian woman president?
A: This problem, which was never before aired so openly, that a woman in such a high position should be treated so badly, was publicly condemned by women's organisations, and specifically the CPME. When the crisis broke out, women in organisations and the women outside them mobilised in massive numbers and took part in acts of great symbolism, such as the occupation of the residence and seat of Government of Bucaram, the Hotel Crown Plaza. They did not arrive at a consensus about the presidential succession, or about formally supporting the Government of the first woman president of Ecuador, Dr. Rosalia Arteaga.

Q: You are a feminist: what is your view of all this?
A: The main factors that prevented women supporting the president in these crucial times were: the stigma of her association with the discredited ex-president; the (unlikely) risk that she would continue the Bucaram policies; the extensive criticism that she was overly politically ambitious.

This last is hardly critical from the feminist or gender-aware point of view, especially since she became vice president constitutionally via elections. So, like other women in our society, Dr. Arteaga found her time in power very brief, but she was also weakened by the empowerment of those women and by the criticisms they made of her social and political role.

●Patricia Palacios will be visiting Britain in March. Telephone 0171-359 1455 if you are interested in helping to organise a meeting with her.

Mass strike at the heart

Paul Field reports from Korea, where workers' actions have transformed the political agenda.

ON 26TH December, hundreds of thousands of workers in South Korea's key export industries downed tools in the first co-ordinated national general strike since 1948. The strike call came in response to President Kim Yong Sam's imposition of draconian anti-union labour laws and the introduction of extensive new powers of state repression in a secret pre-dawn session of the national assembly. One hundred and fifty-four members of the ruling New Korea Party were bussed in for the clandestine 6am session, where they passed eleven new laws in just six minutes without any trouble from the empty opposition benches, before leaving at 6:15 to be bussed back to their beds.

They did not anticipate that by 6:30 the illegal 500,000 strong Korean Confederation of Trade Unions would declare an indefinite general strike against this "parliamentary coup" which in the next four weeks would become a tidal wave of opposition encompassing every industrial sector.

First to hear the strike call were workers at Kia Motors who immediately left their assembly lines to march to the Catholic Myong Dong Cathedral, an established focal point for labour protests, to set up the KCTU general strike headquarters. They were soon joined by striking workers from Hyosung Heavy Industry, Daehung Machinery, Tongil Heavy Industry and Korea Fukoku. By noon 143,695 workers from 85 KCTU affiliated unions around the country had left their workplaces. By the end of the second day the figure had grown to 210,055 workers from 165 affiliated unions with another 120,000 in attendance at public demonstrations in fifteen major cities — Inchon, Suwan, Kwangju, Ansan, Changwon.

Workers from the manufacturing sector, especially those at major heavy machinery and petrochemical plants with unions affiliated to the KCTU, were at the forefront of the first strike wave. South Korea's four major autoplants — Hyundai, Kia, Ssangyong and Asia — were brought to a stand-still as well as the world's largest shipyard, owned by Hyundai Heavy Industries, and South Korea's second largest shipyard, owned by Daewoo Shipbuilding. In the south eastern industrial port of Ulsan, tens of thousands of Hyundai workers joined mass protest rallies against the laws. South Korea's auto industry, the sixth largest in the world, was completely paralysed as was most of the country's iron and steel industry.

In Seoul, 10,644 doctors, nurses, technicians and manual workers left their jobs at Seoul National University, Ewhas Woman's, Korea and Hanyang hospitals, while 9,399 members of the Seoul subway workers union brought major lines to a halt.

The KCTU has pursued a sophisticated strategy from the outset, taking care to maintain a skeletal workforce in essential public services while maximising the economic losses incurred by the Government and giant chaebol conglomerates. Dynamic new methods of struggle have been used to win over and activate wider working class and public support for the strikers.

Hyun Chung Mee, chairwoman of the health workers union at Seoul National

Celebration and solidarity

Between 22nd and 29th March local groups throughout Britain will be celebrating Central America Week '97. The theme is People, Power and Participation. Rachel Sieder, lecturer in politics at London University's Institute of Latin American Studies, surveys recent political developments.

The UN-brokered peace agreement in Guatemala of 29 December 1996 brought an end to the civil wars of the 1980s. Formal electoral democracies are in place in every country. Political violence has declined, but the situation remains uncertain. The old economic order has not fundamentally changed. Over 60% of Nicaraguans are unemployed and 70% of Guatemalans live below the poverty line. Central America's place in the global economy holds out little hope of a radical improvement: the region's main assets, export crops and cheap labour, hardly constitute a niche market. The growth of maquilas, export-processing plants in tax free zones, has meant fast profits for foreign companies but low wages and abuse of labour rights for many impoverished Central American women.

The victory of right-winger Arnoldo Aleman in Nicaragua may roll back the social gains made during the revolutionary years. Elements in Aleman's coalition continue to press for the return of confiscated land. But the FSLN and popular organisations still have considerable power.

The series of peace agreements in Guatemala provide a blue-print for national reform. Although they do not guarantee a change in the economic situation for the majority they are an opportunity for reversing traditional patterns of political marginalisation, racial discrimination and exclusion. The war left 150,000 dead and over one million displaced. Reconciliation will be long and difficult. Sustained international pressure will be essential if the peace accords are to be properly implemented. Turning the dominant international rhetoric of "strengthening civil society" and "participation" into reality means continuing to support those who have built dynamic grassroots organisations.

Poor and indigenous sectors currently have little influence over global processes of state decentralisation, but the experience of the 1980s in Central America has built up participative structures and organisation. Solidarity should aim to strengthen the ability of the poor to decide their future. Despite recent cuts in funding from UK development agencies, CAW continues to provide a popular focus for campaigning on the region.

- The CAW '97 Conference will be held on 22nd March at Conway Hall, Red Lion Square London from 9.30 to 5.00. For more information contact CAW '97, c/o NSC, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG.

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of the 'Korean Miracle'

University hospital, one of the largest teaching hospitals in the country, explained how the union had overcome public anxiety and existing social taboos concerning a health workers' strike. The decision to strike was taken in a unanimous vote at an emergency union meeting of 2,000 workers called on December 26th. In a pattern adopted by the 40 other hospitals across the country, 1,200 health staff withdrew their labour while 800 remained in post to cover cardiac, emergency and prenatal units. The KCTU insisted that, if Kim Yong Sam did not completely revoke the laws, this flexible strategy, sometimes called "the elastic general strike", would enable the unions to take militant industrial action up to the Presidential elections without alienating vital public support.

After a temporary pause "for the sake of public convenience" over the New Year holiday, KCTU chairman Kwon Yong gil launched the second wave of the general strike on 6th January. The second and third waves (begun on 21st January) saw thousands of public sector and white collar workers join the strike action initiated by the manufacturing unions. Workers at four major broadcasting companies, joined by the famous "necktie units" who led the revolt against Chun's dictatorship in 1987, including unionised workers from security corporations, banks and insurance companies, closed down their offices.

About 50,000 banking personnel joined the union in the first nation-wide strike since the banking system was introduced to Korea over one hundred years ago. On 8th January thousands gathered for "a white collar workers" assembly' in downtown Seoul that saw the entry of clerical workers, technicians, journalists, telecommunication workers, university employees and teachers into the struggle.

The Government's first response to this mass strike movement was to seek warrants for the arrest of 50 union leaders and to place police troopers on alert in preparation for a crackdown. However, as evidence grew of widespread public support for the strikers and international protests intensified, the Government became increasingly unsure of its hard-line approach. With one opinion poll indicating 88% of Koreans now opposed Kim's presidency and as the cost of the strikes passed the $3 billion mark, the President told the other parties that he deeply regretted the underhand methods used to introduce the new laws and would consider their revision in return for an end to their national assembly boycott.



PHOTO: PAUL FIELD

Kwon Yong gil and KCTU leaders defy arrest warrants to lead a mass demonstration through Seoul.

Conscious that the unions now speak for millions, the bourgeois opposition parties followed the KCTU lead in demanding nothing less than the complete nullification of the laws. Despite the ongoing impasse, the pressure of public and international opinion has effectively prevented the state forces launching an assault on Myong Dong cathedral aimed at arresting the movement's leaders, as many had anticipated.

On 25th January, four leading trade unionists were released and fifteen other outstanding arrest warrants for KCTU leaders were returned to court, thus invalidating them. Nevertheless, a further 420 warrants against labour activists from 55 unions across South Korea still remain in place should the Government opt for intensified repression. In partial response to the Government's call for a "negotiated solution" to the crisis and partly as a result of fatigue experienced by "front line" strikers after 23 days of continuous struggle without pay, Kwon Yong gil announced the all-out strike would be placed on temporary hold in favour of one-day walk-outs on Wednesdays and mass rallies on Saturdays. However, this respite would only last until 18th February, when the fourth wave of the nationwide strike would be launched with renewed vigour under the personal stewardship of KCTU president Kwon.

Speaking at a 200,000 strong mass rally at Yoido Square on January 26th Kwon declared: "When we began we thought not twenty but 2,000 leaders would be arrested". In response to the ruling party's charge that job security and improved pay and conditions are responsible for the steep downturn in economy, he pointed to the recent scandal surrounding the collapse of the Hanbo steel and construction chaebol (conglomerate) whose executives bribed state officials in return for $6 billion in government loans.

"Do you think a new labour law will revive our economy?" he asked, and was greeted by shouts of "No!"

"Who is killing our economy? It is the Government and the Chaebol!" ❑

Central America Week

Wednesday 19th March 6.30pm

The Price of Peace

Public meeting organised by Camden Nicaragua Association and SOAS students union at SOAS, Malet Street, London WC1.

Speakers: Vilma Nunez, FSLN and Centre for Human Rights, Nicaragua, Rafael Chanchavac Cux, Conic, Guatemala, Ed Brown, Lecturer in Political Geography, Loughborough University, Rachel Sieder, Lecturer in Politics, Institute of Latin American Studies.

Saturday 22nd March 9.30am-5.00pm

People, Power and Participation

A conference on Central America with speakers from Nicaragua and Guatemala £7 waged, £3 unwaged. Conway Hall, Red Lion Square, London WC1.

Pakistan's hamstrung democracy

Mike Marqusee reports from Pakistan, where the military and the IMF seem set to rule, whatever the voters' choice.

THIS WAS an election in which the two major parties agreed on the key policies. The campaign was a mudslinging competition among personalities. A low turn-out on polling day devastated the more "left wing" of the two parties.

The pattern is familiar. The fact that Pakistan shares it with other democracies ought to give pause to those in the western media content to blame the ills of the country on "corrupt politicians" and "excessively adversarial party politics". Certainly there is a widespread and well-founded belief that all wings of the political elite see elected office as a means to plunder the public purse. But if corruption was the central issue in this election one would have expected greater support for Imran Khan's Tehrik-I-Insaf party, whose sole appeal was its leader's vaunted personal honesty.

Imran's humiliation at the polls holds several lessons. First, the whole discourse of "corruption" had been hopelessly cheapened by the attempts of all parties, notably the caretaker government of President Farookh Leghari, to exploit it. Second, Pakistan's established political parties are well-rooted and more resilient than many commentators assumed. Third, bread-and-butter economic issues remain the principal concerns of most voters.

Polling was for the most part free and fair (though the presence of large numbers of armed soldiers inside every polling station carried disturbing connotations in a country where military dictatorship remains fresh in the memory). But the framework within which the elections were conducted left much to be desired.

Since the restoration of democracy in 1988, the term of every elected government has been cut short by Presidential decree. In upholding the latest dismissal, the Supreme Court appeared to rule that the President could remove the government of the day on the basis of untested newspaper allegations.

Leghari's caretakers promised a clean-up and preached "accountability", but were themselves accountable to no one. Shahid Javed Burki, a World Bank vice-president, was summoned from Washington and appointed Special Economic Advisor. He negotiated a new deal with the IMF which he claimed would stabilise the Government's perilous finances. What followed was not a change of direction but a deepening of the "Structural Adjustment" process initiated by the caretaker regime of 1988 and carried out fitfully since then by both Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto. The rupee was devalued, the budget was cut by nearly 10%, taxes were increased (though the regressive burden of taxation was not reapportioned), "uneconomic" railway lines were closed, and extensive preparations for further privatisation — of everything from the Water and Power Development Authority to PIA — were initiated. The unelected Burki slashed subsidies and insisted on "global market prices". The cost of ghee, wheat flour, milk powder, gas, electricity and petrol soared.



PHOTO: MIKE MARQUSEE.

PPP van on polling day — but where are the punters?

The price of sugar rose 30%.

Leghari and Burki went to great lengths to institutionalise their "reforms" and tie the hands of their sucessors. Five days before polling, Burki met with the National Economic Council to map out the country's financial future. The 45% of spending currently consumed by debt repayment and the further 40% soaked up by the military are to remain untouched, leaving future governments little scope for investment in education, health, job-creation, irrigation or electrification.

Worse yet, the caretakers entrenched the military's influence by establishing an extra-constitutional Council for Defence and National Security, made up of the heads of the armed forces, the President, Prime Minister and senior cabinet members. One leading businessman said the CDNS "will guarantee the continuity of economic polices"!

The winning party, Nawaz Sharif's Muslim League, emerged on the national scene as an electoral front for General Zia's state machine. It has now evolved into an autonomous centre-right party, with its own hierarchy and grass-roots organisation, and a strong, nation-wide base among the urban middle class. In the campaign, Sharif promised to transform Pakistan into an "Asian tiger". He mixed a vision of rapid economic development with pledges to promote Islam in state institutions. The "free market", privatisation and foreign investment were hardly mentioned.

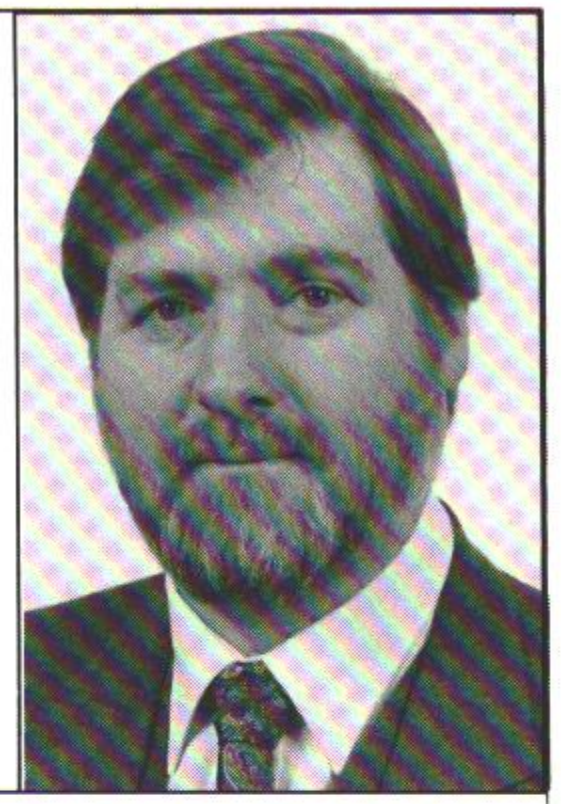
Benazir Bhutto struck an aggrieved tone, threatening erstwhile ally Leghari with vengeance, and monotonously decrying the persecution of her party. The rhetoric verged on the paranoid, but not entirely without cause. The hostility of the Pakistani establishment towards the People's Party (PPP) remains a puzzling feature of the country's politics. Benazir long ago abandoned socialist rhetoric, embraced privatisation, and accepted the prerogatives of the military. In the eyes of many, her father is the original sinner of Pakistani democracy — the man who first harnessed the power of the masses to an electoral vehicle — and his progeny and party are viewed with deepest suspicion.

Benazir relied on generating an emotional wave in her favour. But given her government's record, the old populist magic was found wanting. Millions of the PPP's traditional supporters chose not to vote. The rural and urban poor — and especially women, who had previously flocked to the polls to vote for Benazir — decided to administer a sharp slap on the wrist to "their" party.

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the Michael Hindley column

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



IT IS NOT so long ago that there was an annual resolution to the Labour Party Conference suggesting withdrawal from NATO to accompany that other hardy peace perennial, unilateral nuclear disarmament. But now the Cold War is over, Labour has abandoned all notion of having a peace agenda. Yet cancelling nuclear weapons, scaling down our massive over-expenditure on arms, would surely release more of the necessary funds to train and educate than the much trumpeted (and highly exaggerated) windfall tax on profits in privatised utilities with which Gordon Brown vainly promises to launch Britain into a new age.

I well recall hearing Robin Cook make one of the best speeches from the floor of the Labour Conference in the early 1980s denouncing Sir John Boyd for perpetuating the myth, as Robin put it, that first you have to build more bombs before you could get rid of them. Sadly, now Robin is on the brink of power in the Foreign Office, he is showing little inclination to use his intellectual ability to bring forward positive initiatives for the now-forgotten peace dividend.

The way NATO has survived is an illusion worthy of the magician David Copperfield. NATO had a clear logic starting from the premise that the western European establishment accepted that the USA had to stay in Europe as a guarantor of economic recovery for capitalism. It was NATO, rather than the European Union (EU), as the EU's own propaganda has it, that provided the framework for the West German and general west European post-war economic miracle.

Much of the drive towards European federalism is motivated by a crude anti-Americanism. A distaste for dependence on the USA to enforce peace in Europe is at the heart of the demand for a "European Foreign and Security Policy". It resurfaced most dramatically with the realisation that the much-cherished European Peace Initiatives in the former Yugoslavia would get nowhere at all without a guarantee from the USA, masquerading in the convenient fiction of NATO. Furthermore, and even more salutary, the peace in the Balkans could not hold without the Auld Enemie himself, the Russian bear.

"Europe" frustratingly cannot move without the twin-pillars of the Yalta settlement, the USA and Russia. One line of logic then surely leads to admitting Russia to NATO. Yeltsin, before he become comatose, realised this and offered Russia's nuclear weapons to help the west see off any threat. However, if Russia is in, then NATO will be dominated by Washington and Moscow; at least with Russia out, the Euro-dreamers in Brussels can pretend some equilibrium with the USA. Hence the Euro-federalists' opposition to Russian membership of NATO. There is now a real danger of turning Russia back into the requisite enemy.

One way for the Euro-dreamers is to improve their bargaining counter by developing a "Euro-nuclear" capability. This was the reasoning behind Chirac's calculated testing of the waters by mentioning the possibility of a German finger on France's "force de frappe" - previously reckoned to be aimed against Bonn rather than Moscow.

THE DILEMMA for an incoming Labour Government will become rapidly acute and curiously reminiscent of the exact situation some fifty years ago. Is our international future transatlantic or trans-European?

As the Labour Party becomes settled somewhere to the right of the Gang of Four, we could hear a resurrection of David Owens' cry for a European bomb from Robin Cook, who seems to be on the Euro side of the great divide. However, historically Labour's front bench has been notoriously the preserve of the far-right nurtured on transatlantic seminars of dubious funding. Besides, surely the gaggle of "learners from Bill" have been studying other things as well as electioneering techniques on their frequent transatlantic visits.

There is a way through all this of course. Simplistic as it sounds, there is real merit in a policy of non-alignment. Not only would it save a lot of money, but it would spare us from the debilitating great power posturing and allow us to play a role in contributing to the development of a just world order. As long as there are massive and growing disparities in the world between nations, the rest of the world will be the store house of resentment, a resentment which Saddam Hussain tapped into. The fact that such a monster could illicit widespread sympathy is an alarming indication of just how disenchanted the poor of the third world are with the west.

Throughout the non-European Mediterranean and the Middle East there is brewing discontent, all too easily dismissed as "Muslim Fundamentalism". In reality it is a rejection of the west's overweening arrogance in dictating that others' development must be at the cost of welfare cuts and a mad drive to attract foreign capital, policies which are destroying the social fabric of the west itself.

An independent foreign policy which stresses economic security rather than military security is not a dream but a must.

Premiere video showing

La Ballade des Sans-Papiers - The Ballad of the Sans-Papiers

(Big screen - English subtitles)

Friday 21st March 1997, 7pm-9.30pm

International Day of Action celebrating the first anniversary of the Sans-Papiers (people without papers) movement in France.

For venue call 0171-209 4761

First showing in England of this exciting 90 minute documentary on the 300 asylum seekers and immigrants from Africa whose movement of church occupations, hunger-strikes, women's marches, caravans and other actions has spread throughout France and beyond.

Non-alignment - the way out of deadlock

Ask an ethnic question...

A recent IPPR publication led to headlines like "Asians hate blacks" and "Asians more racist than whites". Mike Marqusee examines the methodology and implications of this report from Blair's think tank.

"THERE IS a particularly strong racist streak to many Asians," claims a new report from the Institute for Public Policy Research: "This is uniformly directed at the black community." It then claims that Asians are more hostile to immigrants and mixed marriages than whites and that they share with Jews a belief that the alleged criminal behaviour of Afro-Caribbeans harms good race relations. The British press will pounce on any hint of "reverse racism", and this study gave them a ready excuse.

Herman Ouseley, chair of the Commission for Racial Equality, expressed a common concern: "It is not helpful to pit one group against another in this way. It means that when we go to white people to talk about racism, they can just turn round to us and say well, Asians are racists, why lecture us about it?"

Condemning the report as "mischievous", Suresh Grover, co-ordinator of the Southall Monitoring Group, observed, "There is no question that within the Asian community there is prejudice — not only on the basis of colour, but also of caste, gender, religion. But what constitutes 'Asian'? All kinds of very different people are grouped together here. The real question, which is what constitutes racism in Britain today, is not asked: can the impact of 'Asian prejudice' on black lives be compared to the impact of state policies on all Asian and black people?"

The IPPR's findings were based on focus groups — defined by "ethnic background" — supplemented by an NOP survey of 282 "Asians". The sole aim seems to have been to identify prejudices common among particular ethnic identities. No attempt was made to define these identities, nor to examine how deeply held these prejudices were, nor to what extent they influenced behaviour. Nonetheless, the IPPR report is said to be the most extensive survey of racial attitudes since *Colour and Citizenship*, published by the Institute of Race Relations in 1969.

"It's a shame the IPPR did not ask us why we ceased conducting surveys of racial attitudes," said Jenny Bourne, of the Institute of Race Relations. "We came to the conclusion that feelings cannot be quantified by a superficial poll, that respondents do not answer truthfully on such matters, and that the phrasing of the question helps evoke the emotion which then frames the answer. More importantly, we have tried to explain that 'testing' an individual's prejudices is not the same thing as measuring racism, which is about the power to act in a discriminatory way, and is a phenomenon that goes way beyond a mere collection of prejudices."

A. Sivanandan, IRR Director, described the report as "a step backward from a hard won understanding that racism is not just about inter-personal attitudes. We are examining who hates whom, rather than who has what — the distribution of wealth and power. The strategy becomes one of changing attitudes, rather than changing the inequalities that breed these attitudes."



Yasmin Alibhai-Brown, co-ordinator of the IPPR report, defended it: "We can't pretend racial prejudice does not exist among Asians. We have to face it." But her comments in the weekly newspaper *East* undermine her report: "It works the other way too. Although it does not show up in *this* survey (italics added) black prejudice against Asians is also very apparent. For instance, black and white kids gang up together to pick on Asian children. Whites are envious of Asians. White liberal values have made a mess of family life and they are not comfortable with communities that hang together like Asians."

These remarks suggest that critics were correct in viewing the IPPR report as part of a wider attempt to "ethnicise" social relations. A 1993 Policy Studies Institute study of Labour Force Survey data treated groups like "Muslims" as homogenous social formations. In 1996, Oxford academic Ceri Peach published *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census* in which he predicted that Asians had a "Jewish future", while people of Caribbean descent faced an "Irish future". The recent media obsession with "moral standards" and "family" life often took on an ethnic dimension. Paul Barker in the *Guardian*, for example, praised the "Indian family" for its cohesiveness and contrasted it favourably with the allegedly irresponsible approach of Afro-Caribbeans.

Criticising the trend, the Campaign Against Racism and Fascism observed: "If you ask an ethnic question you will come up with an ethnic answer; if you generalise you will come up with simplifications — which together constitute a stereotype. What the ethnic argument never allows for is an understanding of racism and how it has impacted differently on different groups, depending on when they entered Britain, the nature of the job market, the sector they were recruited to, the health of the economy at that time and the skills, education, level of English, professional qualifications, capital, etc. that they came with."

In clouding the reality of racism and downplaying the impact of class, the "racial attitudes" study is of a piece with other IPPR publications, which argue that feminism is redundant; globalisation is inevitable and beneficial; the flexible labour market is a boon and universal welfare provision is outdated. The IPPR has provided an intellectual gloss on Blair's attempt to shift the burden of responsibility for poverty and inequality away from the economic realm and onto cultural factors. Come the next Labour Government, this report will provide a handy justification for a leadership that has no intention of being either "tough on racism" or "tough on the causes of racism."

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Tories tell asylum seekers to rot in jail

John Stewart of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns reports how hunger strikers at Rochester prison put asylum rights centre stage.

THE HUNGER strike by asylum seekers held at Rochester Prison in Kent hit the headlines towards the end of January when Jeremy Corbyn MP forced an emergency Parliamentary statement from Home Office Minister Ann Widdecombe. Television coverage that evening showed clearly the callous indifference of this Government to the fate of the hunger strikers. "There is no good reason for detainees to be refusing either food or fluids. It is clearly in their best interests to stop [the protest] now and I urge them to do so," Widdecombe told the Commons. Her real meaning was clear: even if they begin to die the Government will not be moved.

This will have been the first that most people heard of the hunger strike or of the way that people fleeing oppression in their own countries were routinely incarcerated in British prisons. Widdecombe's Commons performance and the hard line taken by the Home Office will have dismayed and appalled many people who didn't previously think about cases like these.

The hunger strike started on 6th January when between 60-70 detainees began refusing meals to protest at being jailed without a court hearing. Their grievance was clear: having committed no crime they were being held indefinitely in a criminal prison with no resolution to their cases in sight.

A statement smuggled out of the prison describes their reasons for taking action: "We are ... political asylum seekers... Many of us have already served two years or more. We are detained without charge or time limit. We make this serious and urgent plea to be heard in full by an independent body and judicial committee which must be independent from the immigration, and other detaining, authorities. Our action will continue until such time as the above request is in motion".

At first the authorities tried to break the protest by creating divisions among the hunger strikers, telling the East Europeans and Asians that it was an African initiative. They also tried to divide the asylum seekers from detainees facing deportation after serving a prison sentence for other offences. They were unsuccessful and the protesters stuck together knowing full well that their unity was their greatest strength.



Protest outside Rochester prison, 15th February. Photo: Ann Flowers.

At midnight on 27th January around ten of those still refusing food decided to stop taking fluids as well. After three weeks on hunger strike they were already weak and refusing liquids meant they could soon die. The protesters were angry that the Home Office had refused even to consider their demands and had simply dismissed the action as disruption by trouble-makers.

The Home Office has tried to downplay the action and to argue that the detainees are held in good conditions. However Rochester Prison has a long record of suicide attempts and self-mutilation by prisoners. Inmates have long complained about the poor quality of food and sanitation and the inadequacy of prison service medical attention.

Many of the 100 or so immigration detainees held at the prison have undergone extremely traumatic experiences. Almost half have been diagnosed as having mental or physical disorders following psychological and mental torture. To keep them locked up in a criminal prison when they have committed no crime simply adds to their torture.

Socialists, anti-racists and anyone with a commitment to basic human rights should support the Rochester prison hunger-strikers. They are simply asking for the right for their case to go before an independent authority without being held in prison for months and years.

Regular demonstrations and protests outside the prison and the Home Office, organised by the ad-hoc Rochester Hunger Strikers Support Group, have spread news of the protest to a wider audience. On 15th February protesters in grim reaper outfits confronted Ann Widdecombe at her Maidstone surgery and forced her to try to justify the Government's actions. Regular weekend protests outside Rochester Prison have encouraged the hunger strikers who can hear the demonstrators outside. In turn those on the demonstration have been cheered to hear detainees return their shouts.

Visitors to the prison who have managed to see the hunger-strikers describe them as walking skeletons. Several have been moved to the hospital at Maidstone. One who had been on the protest from the start and was critically ill was granted temporary admission to hospital and then sectioned under the Mental Health Act. Being deemed incompetent to make his own decisions he could then be force-fed or rehydrated by the authorities.

- Letters of protest can be sent to the Home Secretary Michael Howard at Home Office, Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT or faxed on 0171-273 3965/3094/2043.
- Protest letters can be faxed to the Governor of Rochester Prison, Malcolm Lewis on 01634-826 712.
- More information from the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns on 0181-503 6628 or 0121-554 6947.

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY AGAINST RACISM
Black Manifesto Launch
Bill Morris, Diane Abbott MP; Harry Cohen MP; Claude Moraes of the JCWI; Kumar Murshid; Lee Jasper.
Fighting Racism - What the Next Government Must Do
10am-5pm; Saturday 1st March
Conway Hall, Red Lion Sq.
London WC1 (Holborn tube)
Details from NAAR 0171 247 9907.

Urban futures, global problems

What kind of a world awaits us in the next century? Mike Phipps reviews The Urbanisation of Injustice, *edited by Andy Merrifield and Erik Swyngedouw, published by Lawrence & Wishart, £14.99, and* Globalisation and its Discontents, *by Roger Burbach, Orlando Nunez and Boris Kagarlitsky, published by Pluto Press, £13.99.*

BY THE YEAR 2000, half the world's population — currently 5.3 billion — will live in cities — big cities of millions of people. By then, only three of the world's 20 largest cities will be in the rich industrialised countries. The rest will be in the "Third World". The bulk of their inhabitants will live in shanty towns and squatter settlements. 60% of people in Asia alone will live like this.

Not all cities will be alike of course. The whole planet is organised for the benefit of some. It's a long time since London, for example, lived off the produce of home counties' market gardens in the way that Dakar in Senegal survives on the crops of local farms.

In the era of GATT and NAFTA, global free trade is the order of the day. Multinationals roam the globe, forcing down borders, leaving local economies at the mercy of these predators. Smallscale farming is undermined as 20 to 30 million people a year leave the land for the city — but not just any city: free trade doesn't go that far. For most people in the world, London, Paris and New York are off limits. The cities that await them are Mexico City, Dacca, Lagos — unprepared and polluted. It's estimated that the effects of GATT on agriculture will result in 1.9 billion of the world's 2.9 billion rural dwellers leaving the land.

So the big problems of the 21st century will be overwhelmingly urban — economic, social, environmental and human. *The Urbanisation of Injustice* touches on a few of them: exploitation, poor housing and homelessness, pollution, crime and racism. Some contributions are excellent, like Doreen Massey's internationalist overview. Some are offbeat, like Marshall Berman's on rap music. There are also concrete studies of East London and Liverpool 8, but this is an uneven and at times impenetrable collection, focusing too much on the minority urban experience of New York and London rather than the growing cities of the South.

Globalisation and its Discontents is a much more ambitious project, written by three important individuals, who for much of the time disagree with one another. Roger Burbach is a left-wing American academic who has written extensively on development issues; Orlando Nunez was a member of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua throughout the 1980s and now runs an organisation promoting rural workers' co-operatives; and Boris Kagarlitsky is widely known as a founder of the Russian Labour Party and an original and prolific writer of the new left.

As usual, the bleak overview of the problems facing the world is uncontroversial. The differences emerge, however, when it comes to solutions. Burbach and Nunez reject the statism of much of western thought, from the Enlightenment to Leninism. Drawing on both post-modern theory and the experience of the Zapatistas in Mexico, they reject a socialist strategy for the seizure of power, preferring activity that promotes the development of civil society, local organisation and self-reliance.

Kagarlitsky disagrees. Writing in his customary peerless style, he describes the situation in Russia as "the worst economic catastrophe in world history", setting the country back decades and eliminating most of the achievements of the post-Stalin era. The heart of the problem is privatisation, which has created uncompetitive new monopolies which exploit the consumer and manipulate the government. This process has been accompanied by a huge fall in production, the export of raw materials, capital flight at $20 billion a year, endemic corruption led by "a comprador bourgeoisie with a lumpen-criminal psychology", soaring crime and social polarisation.

His conclusion is that state ownership is the only realistic alternative to neo-liberalism. The Stalinist command economy may have failed but workers' co-ops, supported by the Russian left in 1990-1, haven't worked either. "We have to stand firm against those post-modernists who argue for 'stateless socialism'," he argues. "We need to reform traditional Marxism, not reject it."

So there's the choice. Burbach and Nunez see a new mode of production emerging in the self-activity of the marginalised - street vendors, garbage scavengers, petty drug dealers — and believe they could be potential insurgents. Both end up idealising quite reactionary trends such as the Nation of Islam of Farrakhan and middle-eastern Islamic movements as expressions of this process. Kagarlitsky, on the other hand, regards such activity as peripheral to either capitalism or organised socialist production, which alone can provide a way forward out of the crisis. "Russian communism failed, it is true, but the French Revolution also failed, the Renaissance failed." Marxism needs to be rethought, not abandoned. My vote goes to Kagarlitsky on this — a refreshingly lucid voice amid the confusion on the left.

TRIBUNE

60th Birthday free book offer



To celebrate its 60th birthday, *Tribune*, Labour's independent weekly, is offering a special reduced-rate subscription **plus a free signed copy** of Peter Hain's latest book *Sing the Beloved Country – the struggle for the new South Africa* (R.R.P. £12.99). This offer is open to **new** subscribers at a cost of £40, saving £5 on the normal twelve month subscription rate.

Tribune was a strong supporter of the fight for freedom in South Africa and it is fitting that the paper, in conjunction with Peter Hain MP and Chairman of the Tribune Board, should link its celebration with the building of the new South Africa.

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CORRESPONDENCE

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

Write to:

Labour Left Briefing
PO Box 2378
London E5 9QU



In New Zealand, the centre-right coalition government has set up working groups to look at how to privatise water collection and distribution. Conferences have also been held by business lobby-groups and new right local government executives. Guests have included chief executive officers of privatised water companies from Britain, including East Anglia.

I am a Member of Parliament for the Alliance, a left-wing coalition representing environmental, indigenous and democratic socialist parties. We are sceptical of the gains to the public made by privatising water. We would very much like to hear from people in Britain as to their experience of water supply pre-privatisation and post-privatisation. We are interested how individuals and families have been affected by privatisation.

I therefore extend an invitation to *LLB* readers to send their experiences, thoughts and feelings to me at Parliament in New Zealand. I would also be interested in water accounts pre-privatisation and post-privatisation.

Grant Gillon,
Parliament Buildings,
Wellington, New Zealand
e-mail: gillong@msmail.parliament.govt.nz

Mordecai Vanunu, the whistle-blower on Israeli nuclear weapons, has already served over ten years in solitary confinement, a most excruciating form of torture. Unless something is done about it, it looks as if he is going to spend another eight years there. As a consequence, his mind is already rapidly deteriorating. Each Saturday we have a vigil at the end of Kensington High Street, opposite Kensington Palace Gardens, where the Israeli Embassy is. (Turn right outside the High Street tube station to find us). I need not stress that the support of your readers is becoming increasingly urgent and all are welcome.

Helen Jones,
Sutton

Jeremy Corbyn talks about Blair dumping the left and making an alliance with the Lib Dems. Given that the Lib Dems are in favour of raising taxes, radical constitutional reform and a progressive approach to issues like civil liberties, isn't it more likely that Jeremy will often find himself voting with Paddy Ashdown against the Labour leadership? Outdated arguments about PR getting in the way of the Labour Party implementing a socialist programme need to be junked. The only thing which can rejuvenate radical politics in this country is introducing PR and having a coherent socialist alternative outside of the Labour Party. It might be the SLP, or a new party coming out of the Red/Green convergence.

Ian Wingrove,
Stoke Newington

LLB's Euro supplement against EMU membership begs a number of questions. Why are you giving space to an organisation called "Campaign for an Independent Britain"? Is this a cover for James Goldsmith's Referendum Party? If not, then the authors' arguments are long on tactics and short on strategy. It's a quaint concept that Britain or the Labour Party can be "independent" of anything, let alone the dominant rule of capital. Capital outgrew national boundaries more than a century ago. Since then, every gain for capitalism — collapse of the Soviet bloc, world-wide moves towards privatisation, the disappearance of exchange controls and the progress of GATT — has made capitalism well-nigh irreversible for any government undertaking the project. What irony! Capitalism pays lip-service to nationalism while extending its transnational reach and socialism pays lip-service to international solidarity but, in the guise of Labour economists, fusses about its own market economy.

Yes, EMU will bring some of the problems set out in the paper. Yes, as the economists say, holders of bonds and equity may suffer some adjustment problems (are you sure this paper is written by socialists?) but what a timid approach to the situation. The unemployed of Europe turn to their national governments for help, while the giant corporations criss-cross boundaries, playing one country off against another.

Instead of fretting about losing control of the Bank of England, we should be plotting legislation with our socialist comrades in Brussels to take control of the European Bank.

Rene Gimpel,
Bayswater

Let's adopt with enthusiasm this "Zero Tolerance" concept. We should rid our environment of these thieving parasites. Free ourselves from the misery which these menaces inflict upon us. They have no place in civilised society. The capitalist class should be completely cleared away.

Richard Hanford,
Henfield

AOB

"A peculiarly unpolitical politician and wholly suited to New Labour...When he says that he 'is not an ideologue' he is boasting" — *Roy Hattersley* on Tom Sawyer.

"It reminds me of family gatherings when I was 16, when my uncle would moan about the blacks and the unions until, after two hours, I'd tell him I didn't agree. Then my mother would say: 'Now now Mark don't spoil the dinner with an argument'" — *Mark Steel* on Blair's attitude to internal debate.

"Blairism does not have such deep roots as it claims, and Labour MPs remain the section of the Party with the greatest potential to challenge the new order" — *Martin Kettle*, deputy editor of *The Guardian.*

"We've lost everything...Would you have believed 30 years ago that the British car industry would be owned by the Japs and the Germans?...you see with Tony Blair, now he's really moving to the right to get in — and I'm really pleased with that" — Thatcher's biggest fan, *Michael Caine.*

"There are few, if any, circumstances I could envisage that would lead me not to vote Labour, but if I thought Labour wouldn't spend more on health and schools, or that they wouldn't adopt a more interventionist approach to the economy, or that they wouldn't raise my taxes then I'd have to think a bit. It is the absolute minimum that the public will expect of Labour" — *Alastair Campbell, The Spectator,* 1994.

"I want more people to become millionaires through success" — Tony Blair.

"That is a trade union point" — Labour MP *Alun Michael* on concerns that the Police Bill breaches lawyer-client confidentiality.

The 500 sacked Liverpool dockers
and Women of the Waterfront
together with the Hillingdon hospital and Magnet strikers
invite all who oppose this Government to a

March for Social Justice

Saturday April 12th
Assemble 12 noon, Kennington Park
March, dance and drum to 10 Downing Street

JOBS! HOMES! A FUTURE!

Planning meetings: London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers. Thursdays, 7.30pm, King's Head, Swinton St. (near Kings Cross). Tel. 0181-442 0090.

People's Charter for Social Justice

Launched by the 500 sacked Liverpool dockers and Women of the Waterfront

We, the people, demand social justice:

1. Immediate reinstatement with full trade union rights of the 500 sacked Liverpool dockers, the Magnet Workers, the Hillingdon hospital workers and all other unjustly sacked workers.

2. The right to join a trade union, to strike, to respect picket lines and to take solidarity action. Immediate repeal of all anti-union legislation.

3. The right to work, and to job security. Reversal of the policies of casualisation, privatisation and deregulation. Democratic planning to secure full employment. No compulsory overtime. Acknowledgement of the value of low-waged and unwaged work: equal pay for work of equal value.

4. The right to recreation and to assembly: repeal of the Criminal Justice Act.

5. Defence of the Welfare State. Abolition of the Job Seeker's Allowance. Free education including nursery and university provision. Free health-care; adequate pensions and benefits for all. Equal rights and social provision for people with disabilities, the sick and for all minority groups.

6. The right to a home. Emergency measures to house the homeless, including occupation of vacant or underused properties. Defence of the rights of travellers.

7. Repeal of all discriminatory legislation. Defence of the right of asylum. Equal rights for all, regardless of ethnic origin, nationality, gender, sexuality or creed. The right of community self-defence against racist, sexist, or other violence.

8. The right to citizenship within a democracy. Abolition of the Monarchy and the House of Lords. Withdrawal of British troops from Ireland. Repeal of the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

9. The right to a future for our children. Emergency action to reverse national and global pollution and devastation of the planet's resources. Action to curb the private car and road lobbies and to reclaim our streets; implementation of an integrated public transport system. The right to clean air, water and food. Abolition of the nuclear power industry.

HOMES! JOBS! A FUTURE!

Eurocarnival for social justice!

Chris Knight (London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers)

THE LIVERPOOL dockers are saying "good riddance to the Tories" with a Carnival for Social Justice set to drum through Central London on 12th April. "Our aim", according to Liverpool Port Shop Stewards' Secretary Jimmy Nolan, "is to celebrate our struggles and send a signal to any incoming government that we are not relying on parliamentary elections to defend our right to social justice". A *People's Charter for Social Justice* will be "nailed to the door of Number 10" as we pass. If by that time, Tony Blair is already inside, so much the better.

The event forms part of a Europe-wide campaign of resistance to casualisation and monetarist attacks. 12th April marks the beginning in Britain of Euromarch 1997 — a series of marches across Europe which converge on Amsterdam in mid-summer. With backing from many of the biggest trade unions in Europe, this Europe-wide action will undoubtedly be a massive show of labour movement strength.

Intended as a "Carnival of the People", the London event looks set to be a huge success, tapping into a new mood in this country of anticipation as a change of government looms. Those represented by the organisers go far beyond the dockers alone. For the past six weeks, planning meetings have been involving the Magnet workers, Hillingdon hospital strikers and a wide array of groups representing not only trade unionists but also pensioners, people with disabilities, the homeless, refugees, asylum seekers and environmentalists among others. The *Big Issue* magazine is taking an active role in mobilising for the event, as are a number of comedians and media celebrities.

The march through London will be headed by the dockers, together with the Magnet workers and the Hillingdon hospital strikers. Thirty two Campaign Group MPs have pledged to walk the route, behind a splendid new banner which has been made for them. Turkish and Kurdish drummers and dancers in traditional costume aim to get the livelier spirits dancing along the route, not merely dragging their feet. *Reclaim the Future's* smoke-breathing dragon will press against the gates of Downing Street backed by its own "royal entourage" — including 60 professional drummers from the Batteria Mandela — Britain's biggest and best Samba band. These electrifying drums will be with us along the whole route.

The assembly point for the 12th April start of the EuroMarch and Carnival for Social Justice is Kennington Park, 12.00 noon; we then process to Lambeth Bridge, across the Thames, past the Houses of Parliament and then up Whitehall. Those not wishing to march the whole route are invited to join at Lambeth Bridge at around 2.00pm. At Trafalgar Square, there will not just be speeches: the plan is to turn the place into a dance-ground, celebrating "Good Riddance to the Tories!" and anything else which comes to mind. Remember: this is your chance to send a signal to any incoming government. So join with the dockers, bring your drums and whistles — and let them know we're here!

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