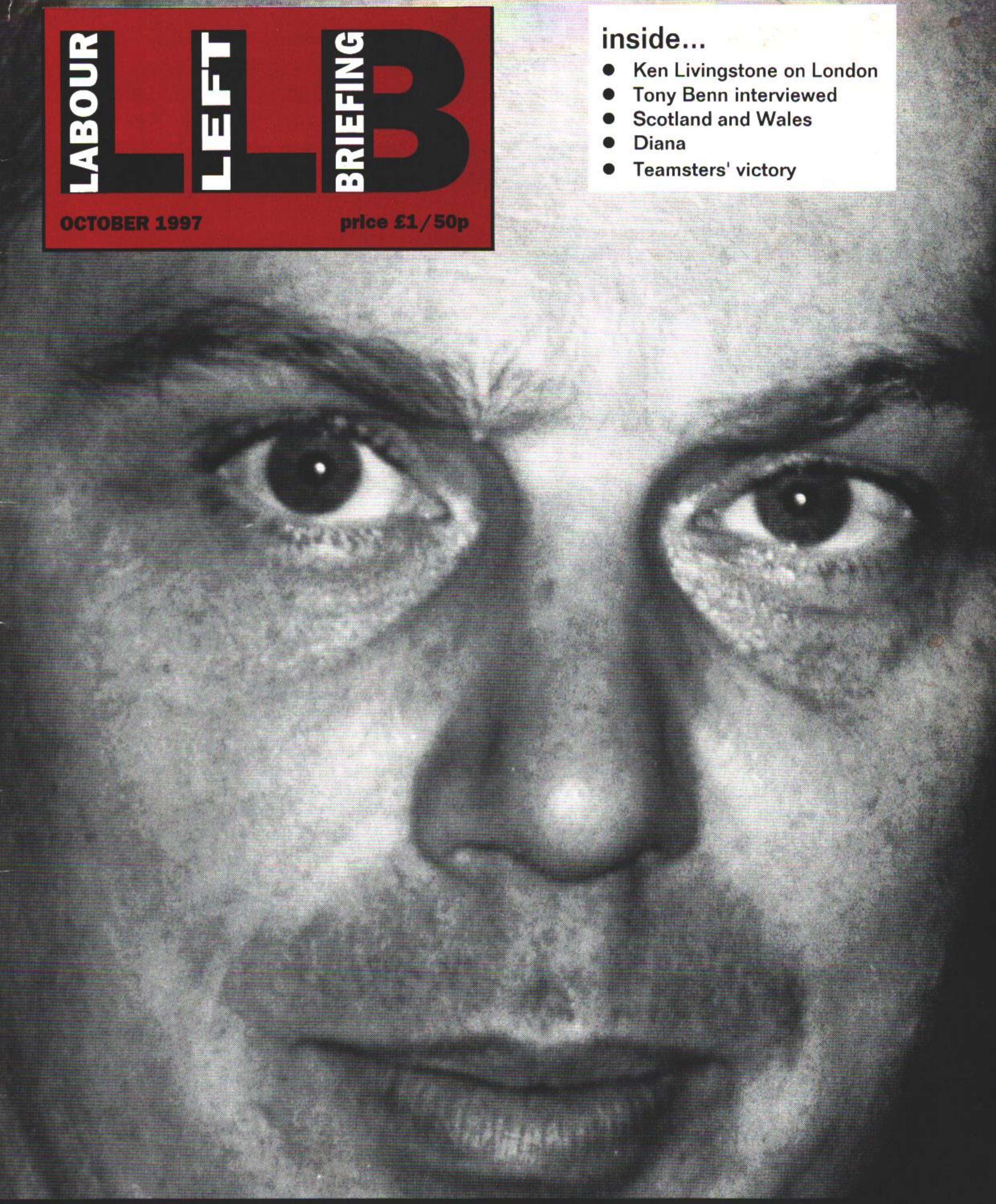
LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

OCTOBER 1997 price £1/50p

inside...

- Ken Livingstone on London
- Tony Benn interviewed
- Scotland and Wales
- Diana
- Teamsters' victory



It's my party
- no, it's ours too!

Labour Left Briefing

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Front cover design: Alistair Ward

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John Edmonds was right

"FLEXIBILITY" IS a word that should make us all "shiver". It means a low-wage, casualised economy, permanent insecurity for workers of all kinds, management tyranny in the workplace, a threadbare, coercive welfare state, and ever increasing inequality. Tony Blair made it clear to the TUC that his government would not compromise on "flexibility", and on this matter we should take the Prime Minister at his word. The problem with the New Labour Government is not that it has done too little or moved too slowly; it is that it has done the wrong things and is heading too hastily in the wrong direction.

Nothing if not brazenly cheeky, Blair chided the unions about their relationship to "the real world". But Labour supporters live in a "real world" in which rising interest rates are hindering growth and a rise in unemployment is likely next year.

The £1.2 billion Gordon Brown pulled out of the hat for the NHS has already been eaten up by outstanding deficits and a crisis in NHS provision is looming; local authorities around the country are making deeper and deeper cuts. Five million people live in workless households; 150,000 are homeless, 14 million live in poverty according to EU definitions, including two out of five pensioners; welfare benefits leave an average household £36 a week short of an "essentials only" budget; according to the Rowntree Trust life expectancy for female manual and semi-skilled workers is three years less than for managers and professionals; male workers' life expectancy is five years less.



Meanwhile, corporations and wealthy individuals enjoy the lightest taxation in western Europe; half of all employees enjoy no statutory protection from unfair dismissal; one in four earn less than £4 an hour. Half of all entry jobs are now paid less than £4 an hour. Britain now has the longest working week in Europe. More than one half of all new jobs are temporary. Workers are victimised for exercising the most elementary human rights. Labour's success in government will be judged in the end not by its skill at "news management" but by the difference it makes in the "real world". But the Government will only respond to the priorities of the "real world" if these can make themselves felt inside the Labour Party. Unless the inner circles of the Labour Government are democratically anchored in the broader layers of the movement they will float off into their cyberspace of "flexibility" and leave the rest of us trapped in a "real world" that is even less satisfactory than it was under the Tories.

If *Partnership in Power* is passed at this year's conference the capacity of Labour Party and trade union members to influence the conduct of the Labour Government will be drastically reduced. *PiP* institutes a form of "managed" policy formation in which all debate and decision-making is filtered through bodies with a built-in leadership domination. In place of specific, transparent mechanisms for representation and accountability, *PiP* offers a nebulous and highly unequal "partnership". Conference will cease to be sovereign in any meaningful sense, the trade union influence will be substantially restricted, and constituency parties will be bereft of anything other than social and electoral functions. In many respects *PiP* does to the Labour Party what handing over interest rates to the Bank of England has done to the economy, and rests on a similarly dubious rationale. Policy here becomes the preserve of "experts", who are insulated from democratic scrutiny or accountability. Ironically, this leaves both Labour and the Bank of England more vulnerable to those special interest pressure groups (principally City and corporate lobbies) which New Labour claims to rise above.

Whether it is aircraft for Indonesia, the minimum wage, workplace rights, universal benefits, public sector pay, pensions, privatisation, tuition fees, deaths in custody — if we want the leadership to listen to us we must have a constitutionally guaranteed voice in the making of policy. We have to have institutional structures which ensure that our voice is heeded. We have to be able to say "no" to the leadership.

If we are now at long last to have some measure of self-government in Scotland and Wales, it is not because these benefits were handed down to us spontaneously by a benign Prime Minister; it is because the commitments to Scottish and Welsh devolution were so deeply entrenched in Labour policy that Blair had no choice but to proceed with them. And they became deeply entrenched in Party policy because the structures of the labour movement on the ground were able to reflect changing popular aspirations.

We have to defeat *PiP*, and if we cannot do that we must seek to postpone any decision until a proper debate has taken place. Of course, the leadership is understandably eager to push *PiP* through this year — while the honeymoon lingers and before the Government enters into conflict with its supporters, notably under-paid public sector workers. *PiP* has implications not just for the Labour Party, but for the overall health of democracy in Britain. It severs yet another precious thread tying our political elite to the world outside the TV studios. It threatens to disenfranchise politically the majority who support increased taxation to fund improved public services, who want to see some redistribution of wealth, who oppose further privatisations, who want to see equal employment rights for part-timers and temporary workers, who want stronger trade unions, who want resources transferred from military spending. *PiP* will profoundly exacerbate what Tony Benn has called the "crisis of representation". *PiP* is not something the Party will be able to repent at leisure. It could be irrevocable, and if it passes, it leaves all the left, and in the long term the entire labour movement, with some hard thinking and difficult strategic choices. Blair himself has made it clear where he stands: the regime of "flexibility" will be imposed whether the labour movement likes it or not. The question is not whether to oppose this regime, but how, when and where.

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Welsh victory!

By Ceri Evans, Joint Yes Campaign Co-ordinator for Cardiff West CLP

ANY FOOTBALL team would happily celebrate a scorline of 4-0 in their favour. And so it is with Labour's electoral record in 1997. First came the tremendous election victory in May, now followed by a double YES vote in the Scottish referendum on September the 11th and a YES vote in Wales on September the 18th. An incredible 74% voted in favour of a Scottish Parliament and 63% in support of tax-varying powers. The vote in favour of a Welsh Assembly was won by a much narrower margin of only 0.6%.

Some Tory killjoys might suggest that the final scoreline should read 3.5-0, but in politics, as in football, there is no such thing as a half goal. Indeed, the Welsh result is in many ways the more remarkable, given that the 1979 referendum was lost by 4-1 (Scotland had a 52-48% majority).

The Scottish result confirms the will of the Scottish people. Indeed, opinion polls taken a few days before the vote showed that a majority of Scots expect their Parliament to increase taxes and were still in favour of tax-varying powers! In Wales referendum night was a cruel mixture of agony and ecstasy for those who campaigned in favour. The first results, from areas in North Wales close to the English border, showed significant majorities against. Then came a number of results in favour, before what seemed to be the body blow: a large NO vote in Cardiff.

Doom and despondency reigned until results trickled in from the valleys. Neath and Port Talbot voted 2 to 1 in favour, Rhondda by a majority of 15,000 and Caerffili by a majority of 6,000. With only one result still to be announced, the NO vote had a small majority but was still short of the winning post. That final result was from Carmarthen, an area which includes important working class areas like Llanelli, the Gwendraeth Valley, Ammanford and Carmarthen Town itself. These areas registered a massive 65% in favour, based on on a high turn-out and the YES vote scraped home by a majority of 6,721. The "YES for Wales" celebration party went berserk. It was a truly historic moment.

What is most significant about these results is the pattern of support which they reveal. Unlike Scotland, support for an Assembly is very uneven in Wales. It is concentrated in the working class areas which suffered most under the Tories. Contrary to what the NO campaigners claimed, it is not simply linguistically based, since predominantly English speaking valleys and areas contributed as much to the victory as did Welsh speaking areas. Welsh speaking Ynys Mon (Anglesey) only narrowly voted in favour!

Notably, in every area where rebel Labour MPs campaigned for a NO vote, or cast doubts on the proposals, the vote was overwhelmingly in favour. This is a firm rebuttal for Allan Rogers in the Rhondda, Llew Smith in Blaenau Gwent, Ray Powell in Ogmore and Alan Williams in Swansea, along with doubters like Denzil Davies in Llanelli and Ted Rowlands in Merthyr. The role of Llew Smith is particularly problematic, since his appalling stand on the Assembly has done a great deal to discredit the Labour left. He is the only Campaign Group MP in Wales and his stance has allowed opponents to lump together all his positions as representing "old-style state centralist socialism". This could have particularly damaging consequences for any socialist campaign against Maastricht and EMU.

There are currently huge illusions within both the Welsh Labour Party and Plaid Cymru about the prospects for Wales in a Maastricht Europe. Llew Smith's stand on the Assembly will make it all the easier for people to dismiss his arguments against EMU as emanating simply from a London-centred, British nationalist perspective. There are already calls for his deselection, with the most likely replacement being a pro-Assembly Blairite.

However, despite the closeness of the result and despite some problems for the left, the vote on September 18th was a massive step forward for the people and the politics of Wales. The creation of an Assembly gives socialists an exciting opportunity to reinvigorate and enliven political life in Wales. It will give us an elected body which can be both a forum for debate and a focus for demands and campaigns.

Activists in Cardiff West CLP have proposed a number of key points, which we are confident enjoy broad popular support, in relation to the Assembly. We will continue to campaign for an Assembly which:

- Abolishes the vast majority of the quangos. Those that remain, such as the Welsh Development Agency and the Welsh Tourist Board, must be under tight democratic control.
- Dismantles the huge bureaucracy created by the Tories in the Health Service and opposes further hospital closures.
- Ensures that women are equally represented in the Assembly and that black people are fairly represented.
- Ensures that members of the Assembly do not enjoy any special privileges, and trips around the world, while cuts are being made in other areas. Assembly members should be paid the average wage of a skilled worker in Wales, in order that they stay in touch with ordinary people.

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RIGHTS FOR WORKERS NOW — NO MORE DELAYS

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Scotland: the big crunch is to come

Dave Smith from the Campaign for Socialism reviews the thumping victory for the Yes Yes campaign and takes a look at the new political landscape in Scotland.

THE TV commentators seemed to want a low turnout. Even when it became clear that the poll was over 60%, they were saying how low that was compared to a General Election. The reason for this gloomy view was that a low turnout would undermine the result and give succour to the Tories as the bill makes its way through Westminster.

The gloom was totally unfounded. Considering that the register is almost a year out of date, that because of Diana's death we had to squeeze ten days campaigning into three, that the media were still distracted even then, that the resources used were on a par with local rather than general elections, that it was held in a holiday period, and that the weather was poor, the turnout was good. Better still, 74% voted for a Scottish Parliament and 64% for tax powers.

Significantly for some, the percentage of the total electorate voting for the first question easily surpassed 40%. Though only a psychological hurdle this time around, this was the barrier that created great bitterness after it dismissed the 1979 referendum result, despite a majority having voted in favour.

The No No camp mostly resorted to scare tactics, although some of their campaigning undoubtedly had the effect of scaring people into voting Yes Yes. Thatcher's visit was warmly welcomed by pro-devolution campaigners as an opportunity to remind people of one of the best arguments for a Scottish Parliament — the poll tax, which was imposed on Scotland a year before England and Wales.

One of the most unusual aspects of the campaign was the bonhomie between parties and individuals who have in the past been venomous rivals. Some people believe that a Scottish Parliament will show a different way of doing things, getting away from personal attacks, empty rhetoric and confrontation for its own sake. Others think this a sad delusion, and if comments from the likes of Calum McDonald MP (Western Isles) are anything to go by they are right. Before the count ended, he compared the SNP to midges (small but annoying and always there).

Even if not reflected in the higher echelons, activists' experience of working together may have a lasting impact when coupled with the effects of the voting system, which is proportional within each Euro constituency (using Westminster seats for first past the post, plus seven additional members for top up). Typically, this will give a seat to any party that can get 5.9% of the vote in their area, and in some circumstances, they will get a seat with less than 5.5%. The Green Party surpassed this in the 1989 Euro elections, and the Scottish Socialist Alliance was halfway there in Glasgow in the General Election this year. Given that these were effectively protest votes for parties which had no real chance of election, we must expect to see more than four parties represented in a Scottish Parliament. Coupled with the different political climate, some realignment is also inevitable; the only questions are how much and when.

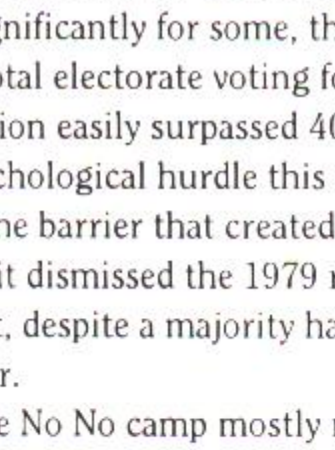
One crunch point will come when the Scottish Parliament first votes on tax increases. These are likely to be supported by Lib Dems, SNP and smaller parties, but Labour's leadership has already given a no-tax commitment for the first years of a Scottish Parliament.

Questioned on this, Brian Wilson said that he did not think Labour would be in a minority when it opposed such increases. He didn't say why. Labour is extremely unlikely to have a majority in the Scottish Parliament. To fend off tax increase proposals, they will almost certainly be relying on Tory votes. Such an alliance would soon get up a lot of peoples' noses and to make it worse Labour's commitment will be portrayed as one that has been imposed by Westminster.

In the long run, of course, the campaign partners have different aims. The SNP want what they call "Independence in Europe" (an oxymoron if ever there was one); the Lib Dems want a federal system; while the Scottish Labour Party, though setting the current agenda, includes many who would support extensions of the proposed powers.

The next big question is the impact of a Scottish Parliament on the rest of the UK. Not just Wales and London, but the English regions, many of which, despite less well-defined identities and little public discussion or campaigning on the issue, have shown percentage support for devolution running in the high thirties.

In Spain, devolved governments for Catalunya, Euskadi and Galicia led to the rest of Spain demanding their own regional assemblies. Could the same happen here?



GROUP OF THE PARTY OF EUROPEAN SOCIALISTS

Greetings to comrades at Conference

Keep up the struggle for socialism

Hugh Kerr MEP

New London — new bureaucracy

Ken Livingstone MP calls for a London authority with more democracy — and more power.

ALL THATCHER'S arguments for abolishing the GLC have proved false. London is now dirtier, more congested and poorer. But the Green Paper *New Leadership for London (NLL)* is disappointing. Londoners should use the consultation process to press for improvements before legislation is published.

Despite the manifesto commitment, no one has yet given a convincing reason for a directly elected Mayor. The London Mayor would dominate the proposed authority, with Assembly members playing a minor role. Think of the negative publicity if I had led the GLC with similar powers! The idea is part of a dangerous trend to de-politicise public affairs, leaving one person in control of large resources. The lesson of the USA is that personality-based politics is the bedrock of corruption.

Some London Labour politicians have urged that the Mayor be paid a very high salary to make the position attractive to the great and the good. But there was never a shortage of candidates amongst very poorly remunerated politicians for leader of the GLC. Londoners are unlikely to accept any excuses for paying the Mayor more than MPs. Indeed, MPs should be allowed to stand for the post, as long as they only draw one salary. The political support for the last GLC administration was much stronger for having a voice in Parliament through MPs like Tony Banks, and there is no more conflict between being a London MP and London Mayor than being a Cabinet minister with a big department and an MP.

According to *NLL* the Assembly would "examine and approve the Mayor's budgetary and strategic proposals", with the power to propose changes. What if the Assembly wishes to reject the Mayor's budget? As *NLL* suggests "we need mechanisms to avoid unnecessary conflict" but the paper does not suggest what these might be.

The best way to resolve this is to have a Mayor elected from the Assembly's largest group. At least the Mayor and the Assembly should be elected simultaneously for the same term of office, reducing risk of conflicting political priorities. John McDonnell's proposal for a Mayor's cabinet made up of Assembly members could also ease the accountability gap.

NLL has a number of passages dealing with the relationship between the Assembly, the Mayor, and other bodies. In response, London CLPs should support ways to strengthen the Assembly as the broadest and most representative body on offer. An example is the welcome proposal for a London Police Authority, which would be solely appointed by the Mayor. It would be simpler and more accountable for the GLA to directly assume that job, either by meeting as a Police Authority, or by electing the authority's membership from its own ranks.

This principle should apply to the election for the Assembly itself. The GLA will be responsible for one of the largest cities in Europe, but *NLL* suggests that it have only 24 members, about one for every three parliamentary constituencies. This is a ghastly prospect. The only way to get a real strategic authority is for every borough and area to be properly represented. If anything I think it is worth considering two representatives for each borough, with one seat in each reserved for a woman.



Ken Livingstone

In terms of new powers, *NLL* declares: "we do not propose to abolish the City Corporation". This undemocratic and archaic institution sits on huge resources — particularly in the form of corporation and business rates — which should be available to every Londoner. The Corporation must be abolished, with functions passed to neighbouring boroughs and the new Assembly, and the City's separate police force brought into the 'Met' Police under the new Police Authority.

The document could be stronger on its own priority of London-wide strategic issues. For example, the GLA would assume planning functions currently exercised by the Government Office for London and the London Planning Advisory Committee. The GLA will need powers of direction which could be enhanced by transferring powers which the Secretary of State for the Environment has over London.

The whole section on transport and environment is disappointing. *NLL* assumes that the GLA should produce a transport policy "consistent with national transport and planning policies". But if we ever have a Tory Government concreting over green spaces the GLA should not constrain itself within such a framework.

The new London Transport Authority will be appointed by the Mayor, with the Assembly approving the appointments. The Assembly must assume these responsibilities, with powers to co-opt borough councillors or others as it sees fit.

The GLA is an historic opportunity to integrate public transport in London, but *NLL* weakly suggests "we will consider ways which will enable the LTA to influence decisions made on rail services". Londoners should have the right to expect that their strategic authority can decide what happens to their local rail commuter services. *NLL*'s approach to rail is repeated for the M25, the Thames, bus/cycle priority routes and London-wide bodies such as the London Ecology Unit. London would benefit enormously if all of these were under GLA control.

What will make or break the GLA is whether it can raise the resources to deliver better services for Londoners. The GLA should become a house building authority (something not envisaged by *NLL*). *NLL* repeats the big myth of post-Thatcher Britain - that you resolve deep-seated problems of society without paying for them: "Any additional spending in setting up the GLA would need to be offset by savings".

Tackling London's transport chaos, environmental degradation, poverty and unemployment requires resources and the GLA must be able to raise them. For example *NLL* says "we are not currently persuaded of the merits of a business levy to finance transport spending." But the tube system needs around three quarters of a billion pounds of extra money each year. The corporate sector benefits from public transport. It is in its long term interest to pay to modernise it. The GLA must be able to draw on precepts and levies on the London boroughs and, more significantly, on a London Corporation Tax structured to ensure that struggling businesses are not hit.

Londoners should make their voices heard before 24th October to make sure that we can look forward to a GLA with real power to improve the lives of Londoners. The London Labour Party has a special role to play in expressing that progressive agenda.

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Beyond Republicanism

Chris Knight argues that Diana's death exposed cracks in the monarchy which socialists ignore at their peril.

I ALWAYS thought the fall of the House of Windsor, when it finally got under way, would be a seismic event. So — not wanting to miss anything — I went to the funeral, walking through deserted streets towards the Abbey. All London seemed to be on strike. Shops, building sites, news stands — "Closed Out of Respect". Around the Abbey, a sea of silent faces — all ages, classes, races, faiths. The air filled with the distant strains of the National Anthem.

Inside, Tony Blair read from Saint Paul on "Love", the theme echoed outside by the flowers, kisses and red paper hearts strewn like so many Valentine cards. Saint Paul himself, no doubt, had in mind something more spiritual. But Elton John's re-rendering of the song for Marilyn Monroe corrected any possible misunderstandings on this score: the love in popular demand is of the tangible, cuddly kind — as represented so colourfully in the tabloids, courtesy of the paparazzi. We need such physical love, according to the Diana legend, when we're dying of AIDS, when a landmine has shattered a leg, when sleeping rough. We need it when single; and equally when suffering in marriage. Diana showed this, and that's why everyone's here.

As Elton's last note faded, the masses broke the rules. You don't clap at funerals. But here was a power which had forced the Palace flag to be flown at half-mast and an unscheduled Queen's Speech to be made on demand. It wasn't reverting to mindless protocol now. Everyone clapped. Inside the Abbey, by all accounts, it sounded like a cloudburst pounding on the roof — mysterious because the sun was evidently still shining. Someone inside began clapping, then had to stop, embarrassed.

Then came Earl Spencer's breathtaking insolence in challenging the Windsors over the upbringing of his sister's sons - his "blood family". The clapping was now thunderous, penetrating the Abbey walls, rippling among the dignitaries and soon forcing all but the Windsors into compliance. It was the moment when fear changed sides.

What did it all mean? Faced with myths, our task is of course to expose them, not collude. In a way, the tabloids have done their bit — prying behind the scenes, exposing royalty's all-too-human foibles, stripping monarchy to its underwear and beneath. There's obviously a place for such secularism. The perfect mother? When Diana died she hadn't seen her kids for weeks: she was far away, cavorting with a millionaire playboy. Diana the campaigner against landmines was starting her new life with — of all people — Dodi Al Fayed, still raking in money from his uncle Adnan Khashoggi's vast arms dealing empire. Friend of the poor, Diana's priority had been to spend £10,000 a month on her own clothes, £3,500 a week on make-up and hairdos.

I've always been a republican. But I've also followed Marx in linking monarchical sentiment with other forms of superstition and religion. Secularism hits a problem when people resist factual information out of emotional need. If reality appears tiresome, why not wallow in dreams? Religion takes deep hold when people are forced to live in a heartless, callous world; they then seek solace on some other plane. In this context, a religious community, however illusory, may seem better than no community at all. For this reason, as Marx explained, the solution to the problem of religious irrationalism is not to rail against the dreams. It is to fight to change reality, storming the gates of heaven so as to establish Jerusalem on this earth.

Days after the funeral, I saw Buckingham Palace still under siege, then mingled at dusk among worshippers at Kensington Palace, principal site of the new religion. Tree-shrines sparkled with night-lights, branches weighed down with gifts. Cards recalled lost relatives, spouses, children. People came prompted by their own sorrows, needing some authentic ritual and potent symbol allowing emotional connection with others. Crying can be therapeutic, but it's painful in isolation. How much better it feels when at one with millions of others! In short, people were insisting that, contra Thatcher, there is such a thing as society. Their demands may have stopped well short of republicanism. Yet they also reached beyond it — beyond the goal of a Presidency, of men in grey suits.

This may or may not signal impending constitutional crisis. All I know is that Charles is now unlikely to be king, and that millions have lost their fear. Should the Queen hang on for a further decade or so, the Windsors could perhaps by-pass Charles in favour of William. Despite Earl Spencer's talk of "blood", descent in the royal lineage is patrilineal. William is therefore a Windsor; the family firm could on that basis survive. I suspect there would still be a popular cry to "liberate" poor William from the horrible fate awaiting him, a demand we should support.

But socialists don't just speculate; we intervene. Any crisis of succession would provide an opportunity for republicans. The most serious threat experienced by the current monarch has come from Diana, whose causes aligned her with New Labour and with roughly that constituency which threw out the Tories in May.

Naturally, I agree with the "plague on all your houses" curse when applied to actual or aspiring royal lineages. But if the immortalised Diana is conceptualised merely in these terms (just as part of the British Monarchy) the whole point is being missed. Diana was in effect being treasonable to the actual Queen. She was constructing herself, for whatever ambitious and complex personal motives, as the popular antithesis of the Queen. Any republican with the smallest grain of sense would have delighted in this and sought to exploit its potential. No monarchy has ever fallen without internal cracks appearing first. The point is not just to keep saying you are a republican. The point is to demolish the monarchy, taking advantage of whatever cracks may appear.

Those who came out for Diana did so in rebuking "the firm" which had stripped their fairy-tale princess of all royal status. They called not for a different Windsor as monarch, but for "the Queen of all our hearts" — Diana the bulimia sufferer, the single mum, the glamour queen, the spurned wife who had at last found love. Press manipulation? I think it was at least the other way around — popular myth-making pressure forcing both monarchy and media to respond.

All magical fairy-tales set out from a simple idea: contrary to neo-liberalism, some things are sacred. The truth is that human community is sacred, or can be asserted so. My argument against the Diana legend is not that no-one should have fairy-tale magic in their lives. Everyone should have it. Beyond republicanism is revolutionary socialism — when through solidarity of kinds yet undreamed of, the palace gates are stormed and the powers of royalty reclaimed. ❑

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The sleep of reason breeds monsters

Mike Marqusee, Islington North CLP, argues that the response to Diana's death represented a retreat from reason which re-enforced the centrality of the monarchy.

LET'S start with two simple propositions. First, the institution of the monarchy and the broader principle of inherited status and privilege are irrational and incompatible with a democratic society. Second, whatever her merits, Diana Spencer's contribution to public life did not justify the reaction to her death, which was disproportionate by any sober criteria.

For at least a week, both of these eminently reasonable propositions were banned from public discourse. Diana-sceptics were bullied into silence. It was an alienating and at times frightening spectacle and a lesson in what the media, state and church can achieve when all are on message. I know there is a school of thought on the left which sees redeeming features in Diana-mania. Some point to the hostility to the Windsors and see an anti-monarchist dynamic at work. Others see the large numbers of people on the street, note that Buckingham Palace was forced to yield to popular pressure, and believe the experience could give the masses an all-important taste of power. It is argued that Diana's associations with progressive causes — AIDS, landmines, homelessness — and her willingness to be photographed with black people made the mass mourning an affirmation of inclusive social values. The popular revulsion against tabloid intrusiveness is also cited as a welcome development. No one on the left has to be lectured about the perfidy of the tabloids. I've seen these bastards at work and it's an ugly sight. But the claim that Diana was hounded to death by the press is neither literally nor metaphorically true and is one of the key falsifications on which the Diana cult has been built.

The rich and famous (Bob Geldof, Michael Jackson, Tom Cruise) have bellowed loudly for a "privacy law" that would protect them from public scrutiny but leave the rest of us as vulnerable as ever to media misrepresentation. Let's face it, there was no more skilful or ruthless manipulator of the media than Diana Spencer. Her relationship with the tabloids was a symbiotic one. They needed her fame and she needed them to sustain her fame. Together they constructed Diana, Queen of Hearts. The *Economist* observed "The development of global media and entertainment industries has turned fame into a commodity in its own right...The globalisation of the media creates a special market for universally recognisable faces and stories", and there was no more universally recognisable face than Diana's. She was the acme of the global celebrity culture and in her death she extended the range and power of that culture.

Sales of the tabloids, as well as other publications, soared in the week following Diana's death. Nothing Earl Spencer said seemed to make a dent in the market place, in contrast to the effective boycott of the *Sun* in Liverpool following the Hillsborough nightmare. Indeed, the tabloids appointed themselves "spokespersons for the nation", admonishing the royal family (and by extension the rest of us) on the proper tribute due to Diana. Did they generate or merely reflect the popular mood against the Windsors? In this post-modern hall of mirrors it's impossible to tell. Chris Dunkley in the *Financial Times* observed, "By the time of the funeral, the crescendo felt like the human equivalent of the electronic phenomenon known as "howl-round", in which a sound system picks up its own output, amplifies it, and feeds it back into the circuit to produce a louder and louder wail."

What was revealed in the aftermath of that car crash in Paris was the extent of the tabloidisation of the media as a whole, and along with it much of our public culture. In a letter to the *Financial Times*, Marion Bowman, ITV's "controller of factual programmes" defended the television overkill by arguing that: "We were witnessing a constitutional crisis and television was midwife to the most important moments in post-war British history." The breathtaking arrogance, philistinism and sheer empty-headedness of this statement is characteristic of the performance of the much of the rest of the media, notably the BBC, whose editorial judgements were wildly awry. By and large, our intelligentsia made fools of themselves, substituting psychobabble for social analysis and indulging in the most uncritical waffle about "the nation" and "the people".

The widespread sense of dislocation which followed news of Diana's death, shared even by people who thought they took little interest in her affairs, was testimony to the sheer inescapability of the global celebrity culture, which seems to be colonising an ever larger share of popular consciousness. But the meaning which was quickly assigned to this sense of dislocation — and which no one, for a while, was permitted to question - was an artificial construction.

Among its authors were not only the tabloids but also the BBC (which initially accepted uncritically the Al Fayed claim that the paparazzi killed Diana and which identified and sanctioned Buckingham Palace and Kensington Palace as shrines to the dead princess) and Tony Blair, who dubbed Diana "the people's princess" and who, like the tabloids, set himself up as mediator between the people and the palace. William Hague's complaint about Blair's exploitation of Diana's death would be perfectly justified if it wasn't for the fact that he would have done exactly the same if he had been in Blair's shoes.

Diana-sceptics have been accused of "sneering" at ordinary people, of failing to respect the emotions felt by so many millions. On the contrary, it seems to me that it is those who refuse to treat their fellow citizens as intelligent beings who are really guilty of condescension. Of course, emotions are emotions. None is "more real" than another. But this does not mean that all are equally justified or equally healthy or equally deserving of approbation and cultivation. Some commentators claimed to see in the response to Diana's death an abandonment of the stiff upper lip, new British expressiveness and emotional maturity. In fact, I found this officially sanctioned keening quite cruel. People's emotions were appropriated, assigned an explanation and an outlet by forces alien to their interests. The man who could not cry for his dead wife but wept for Diana was held up as an emblematic national figure, when he was clearly a deeply disturbed human

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being, alienated from his most intimate feelings (or perhaps just a wily self-publicist). What happened here was a massive and orchestrated displacement of emotions from immediate and concrete causes and effects to a realm of fantasy. So Britain has entered the world of pre-packaged, Oprah-style, emotionalism! If that's maturity, I'll stick to adolescence.

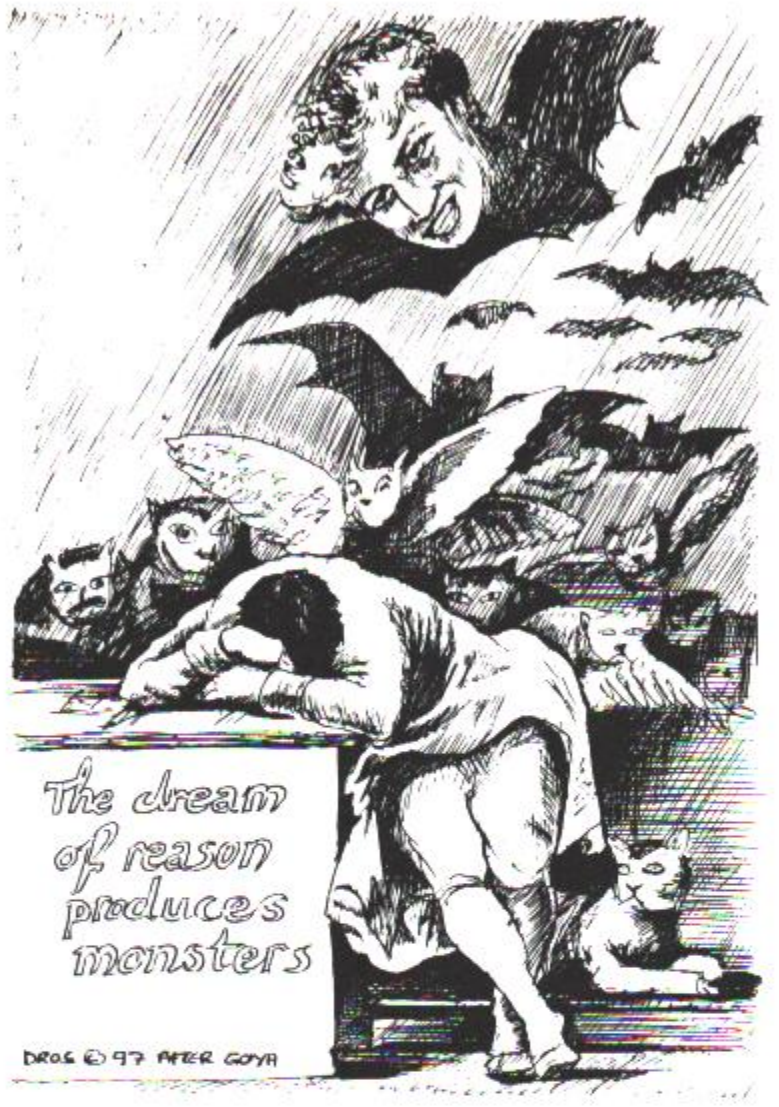
When the Italian visitor who had pinched some flowers from the Diana shrine left court after being sentenced, he was thumped by an aggrieved member of the public. According to most of the press, this thug "spoke for the nation". It was the logical evolution of all that had come before.

This royal death served the purpose of so many royal occasions: it breathed life into the old idea that we are a single nation, a single people, with a particular identity. Much was made of the affection for Diana crossing the boundaries of class, creed and colour. On the evening of the funeral, Gavin Eslar, speaking for the BBC, claimed that the past week we had "come together as a people and learned who we were." What a sad comment on Britain at the desperate end of the twentieth century that its sense of nationhood has to be constructed on this fragile bauble.

Of course, large numbers of people in this country kept their heads and their sense of proportion. 41% of the population did not bother to tune in to the funeral at all. Most people did not lay flowers or sign condolence books or line the funeral route. But somehow we are not representative of that magical confection, "the nation".

Populism is not the same as democracy and this distinction is becoming ever more critical in a world shaped by mass communications. Our rulers and managers, including Tony Blair and Peter Mandelson, would much prefer the nebulous bubble of "popular mood" (not to mention the "national will") to the rigours of accountability and representation and the public contest of ideas and social options.

Diana was the people's princess in the sense that her friend Richard Branson is a people's capitalist. Both terms are self-contradictory and highly deceptive. In her battle with her former in-laws, Diana mobilised popular sentiment, just as Branson did in his battle with BA, but she no more challenged the prerogatives of the monarchy than Branson challenged the priorities of capitalism. Far from having weakened the monarchy this whole episode has re-enforced its centrality in the way the nation is defined. Yes, the Windsors are widely regarded as a bunch of mean-minded arrogant tossers. But would the monarchy be any more acceptable if it was "staffed" by more sensitive and attractive individuals?



The response to Diana Spencer's death is symptomatic of the retreat from reason and democracy which appears to be characteristic of this phase of capitalism. In her life and death the pre-modern met the post-modern, the world of feudal right and blood status entered the media-refracted "society of the spectacle". The result should alarm not only socialists but all those who want to live in a community shaped by informed, critical, genuinely pluralist debate.

Lifelong learning — or debt?

Helen Grayshan, co-secretary of the Campaign for Free Education, questions New Labour's proposals and the NUS's response.

THE SILLY season has had a new twist this year with the debate over the funding of higher education. Despite Labour's 'wait until Dearing' attitude in the run up to the election, it gave us its response to Sir Ron's 'wish list' before he had actually reported. The debate sank to new depths with the NUS's inadequate, if not inaudible, reply to the proposed introduction of tuition fees and the abolition of the grant.

Of course, the NUS sacrificed its commitment to the grant for a "place at the fees negotiating table" two years ago, a treacherous move which led to the formation of the Campaign for Free Education. CFE provided the only opposition to the Government's proposals in *Dearing Watch*, with our chair, Kate Buckell, even being called upon to debate on *Newsnight*. The NUS leadership, by a strange coincidence mostly members of Labour Students, is now in the uncomfortable position where it must organise action against Labour's proposed cost of £1,000 a year for tuition fees, while at the same time telling its student members that a £4,000 per year debt for maintenance is perfectly OK.

Thankfully, CFE members have no such dilemma. The majority of students, not to mention parents, lecturers and even Labour MPs, are fully aware that pricing higher education in this way is both morally and economically unjustifiable. Crucially, the Government's plans do not plug the estimated £3b shortfall in university funding and do not absolutely rule out top-up fees. This has naturally led severely cash-strapped universities to threaten to charge students hundreds of pounds for entry on top of teaching fees. Despite the best efforts of the last Tory Government, there is still not a great culture of debt amongst ordinary people in this country. Anyone who believes that the prospect of a £15,000 debt for a three year course will not deter people from continuing in education is kidding themselves. Higher education will return to being a privilege.

As a committed member of the Labour Party, I spent most of the summer in a state of shock that my party, the party of 'the many, not the few', could even contemplate abandoning the principle of free and fair education. Even if, as may well happen, we beat off tuition fees, a Labour Government will have betrayed those who depend on it to give them the opportunities denied to them on the basis of money and class.

Many students voted Labour too, but like me they voted for lifelong learning, not lifelong debt.

- For more information about CFE, contact Helen Grayshan at The Union Society, University of Newcastle, Kings Walk, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8QB.

PiP will not suppress the downtroddens' voice

Alistair Ward interviewed Tony Benn MP about *Partnership In Power (PiP)* and its effect if passed.

Q: What is *Partnership Into Power (PiP)*? What does it represent?

A: It's part of a strategy, worked out some time ago, for the creation of a new political party called New Labour. It is openly admitted that it is a new party. The strategy has been unfolding with the abandonment of Clause IV, which was about a democratic commitment to control economic power. Then came the *Road to the Manifesto* which enables plebiscites. This is a top-down approach. The leader or leadership works out something and then you can say "yes" or "no" to it, but you can't use the vote to put forward what you want. Then the manifesto which deliberately didn't promise very much. Soon after the election there was a whole series of moves to broaden the base of New Labour to include other parties. Mrs Thatcher was asked to No. 10 to advise on Europe. Heseltine was appointed to the Millennium Commission. Mellor was appointed to the football task force. Liberals were brought onto the Cabinet Consultative Committee (with Ashdown speaking about the possibility of a coalition). Then you have the *PiP* which is designed to establish a much firmer control at the top. Increasingly, Conference will be a highly structured American Convention, where ministers will make statements and there will be a structured response. The Constituencies will not be allowed to choose the candidates for the NEC because there will be a filtering process. The idea is to establish a top-down party, very much on the American model.

Clinton was re-elected by adopting the policies of Newt Gingrich. Only one in five Americans voted for him. Eight out of ten Americans didn't register, didn't vote, or voted against him. In Europe the same thing is happening. Control is to be handed to a Central Bank, which won't be elected. In China the leaders have recently said they have got to be competitive. Market forces will mean mass unemployment in China. The Asian tiger economies have authoritarian political leaderships in order to open the way for global market forces to operate.

The whole strategy is yet to be completed. If there is resistance to cuts in the welfare state, neglect of pensions and so on, there will be, inevitably, some response. At that stage the British establishment will call explicitly for a formal coalition. The situation is very similar to 1931. The Labour Party has gone along with this because it wanted to defeat the Tories, but I don't think the Labour Party itself has changed very much. What has happened is that unemployment, legislation and huge media campaigns have demoralised the trade union movement and others. People now increasingly are moving into single issue campaigns: civil liberties, pensions, environment, women's rights, anti-racism. In every country you will find similar movements. I recently had an invitation to go to San Francisco for a conference organised by trade unions about privatisation in the North American free trade area. It brought in people from all over Latin America. We must establish closer links with people in other countries. The Internet is very useful for that purpose. It is a sort of modern version of the soapbox.

Q: What are the consequence that will eventually follow *PiP*?

A: A coalition. First informal and then formal, combined with very tough Party disciplinary measures. If trade unions are won over to *PiP* next year or soon after two things will happen. One is the state funding of political parties. This will cut the unions completely from the Labour Party. Second is proportional representation. It has surfaced for the European elections. As far as I can make out, Euro-constituencies will still be allowed to choose their candidates but when all the candidates have been chosen, the leadership will decide who's at the top of the list. So "difficult" people will be left at the bottom of the list. Links are being built up in the European Parliament between socialists and greens. I read that this has led to a statement from Party HQ that links of that kind would lead to disciplinary action. Compare this with the links with the Liberals, which are now formalised, even though they fought against Labour candidates because they are, dare I say it, a powerful anti-socialist force. The Liberals are admitted to the inner councils whereas the green movement, which has a socialist element, is to be excluded.

In once sense, it's the end of the Labour Party if *PiP* is carried. On the other hand, you can't stop dissent, debate, discussion, campaigning, and therefore I think that the life of the Party will go on but in a way that isn't directly connected to the Parliamentary leadership. It may be that in the end, as with MacDonald or George Brown or Roy Jenkins, that it is the leadership who move off. It

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Whatever is happening to the Labour Party?

Long-standing commitments go down like ninepins. Retired people are told that their pensions will not be linked to earnings. Local Councils are warned of continued financial stringency. Tax-cuts, not jobs, are given top priority.

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would be a terrible tragedy if the response was to leave and move into sectarian politics. Arthur made a mistake. The Socialist Alliance got it wrong. There are too many socialist parties and not enough socialists. If people leave the Labour Party they are contributing to the process of handing it over to New Labour. If left MPs left the Labour Party it would delight the leadership. I'm getting hundreds of letters saying "I've just left the Labour Party. I voted Labour for certain things which haven't happened". Some may go into sectarian parties, but there is another, more threatening possibility that if people become absolutely disillusioned and feel that their votes on May 1st led to nothing, a swing to the right will occur. I do not believe that a New Labour enterprise, using the machinery of the Party, with the money of the Party, could really be able to prevent the Labour Party from performing its historic functions. The desires for jobs, homes, education, rights and racial equality are going to be there and will be expressed. I am an optimist.

If you look at the world today you see appalling problems of despair, poverty and ill health. If there is a global market it just doesn't work. We must not allow a sense of doom to persuade us that there is no alternative. That was Mrs Thatcher's most dangerous phrase. If we were to believe that now we would surrender everything to the establishment because people wouldn't try. People will have to try, but they'll only try if they think there'll be success. It's rather like rebuilding the Party from the bottom up as we did in the 19th and early 20th centuries.

This is not the end of the Labour Party, but the attempt to use the Labour Party as a foundation for building something new. You can't separate yourself from your roots. It's like a tree deciding to cut its roots and just grow upwards. The tree will collapse — as we saw with the SDP. Many SDP ideas are reappearing through New Labour and there's always been a desire by the British establishment to build a party that had no links with the labour movement, no socialist convictions, no pride or knowledge of its history.

Q: If these changes to the Labour Party democracy go through, you're suggesting that they can be reversed?

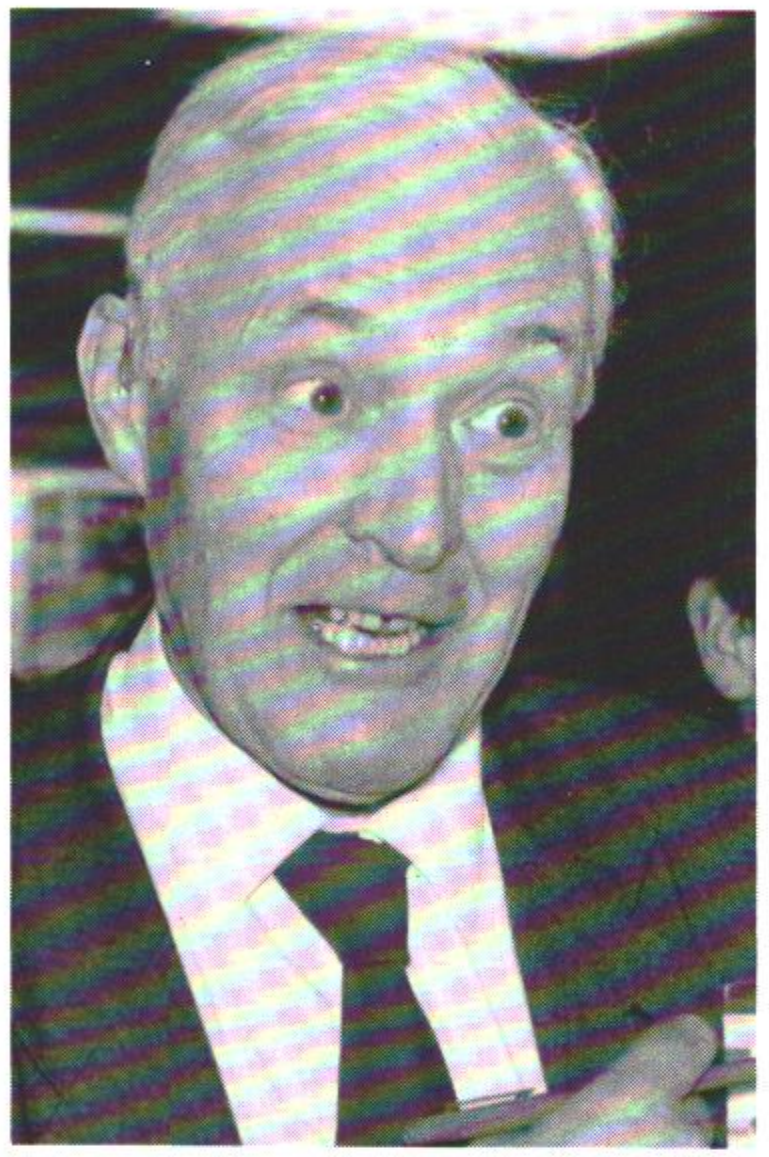
A: Everything can be reversed. If you look at high hopes in 1985, look what happened to them. It's very easy, particularly if you're young, to think "oh well, this is the end". If the Conference loses its vitality, which I think it may do, then life will begin on the fringes. I've always thought for a long time that the fringe is in some ways more interesting than Conference. Maybe that's where the resolutions will be passed — you can't stop resolutions being passed at fringe meetings. But I'm not suggesting a new party.

Roy Hattersley has just written a book called *Fifty Years On*. On its last page he says "the prophets of New Labour succeeded where the Militant Tendency had failed, they took over and established a political party and recreated it in their own image. The panache with which they operated was breathtaking. And they created an election machine which fought a brilliant, single-minded campaign, but the ideas which had inspired a century of democratic socialism were ruthlessly discredited". I wouldn't want to be separated from the man who wrote that, even though in many ways, when he was with Neil Kinnock, he pioneered some of the changes that have led to New Labour. But he's not a part of New Labour, and neither am I.

The only circumstances in which it is possible to imagine a new political formation would be if two things occur. A formal coalition and proportional representation. Proportional representation would undoubtedly restructure the British political system. But even so I wouldn't want to find socialists fighting each other in separate socialist parties. I see the Labour Party standing against the coalition Government as it did during the 30s and that led to the landslide.

Q: That's almost like arguing for Real Labour candidates.

A: Well yes, I don't like these phrases "new", "old", "real". I am a member of the Labour Party! I joined it in 1943 and I would like to die in it. There is a very strong cultural and historical attachment to Labour, which I feel very strongly. I'd be very sorry as far as Members of Parliament are concerned. I don't think it's going to be possible to vote for things you don't believe in — particularly those which weren't in the manifesto like tuition fees or cuts in single parent allowance or some complete restructuring of the welfare state.



Tony Benn

Pressure can be brought — and historically has been brought — from within the Labour Party upon the Labour Government. That process lit a very important flame which is still burning. There are lots of people about who if they thought there was a chance of things being done would pour back into the Party with commitment — unlike some of the New Labour recruits who join on a direct debit basis. I don't think many of them are likely to remain if things go wrong. They didn't join with commitment. Some of this new membership will fade away when the going gets rough, which it will. So this story is by no means over.

Labour Reform

"Delegates to the 1997 Brighton Labour Party Conference, including delegated representatives of the affiliated societies, should vote against the *Partnership in Power* proposals unless the leadership makes an unequivocal commitment to further consultation that is sufficient to satisfy members' demands for the highest standards of transparency and reasoned debate on all aspects of the reforms. Delegates should vote for delay and then, if a motion on delay is remitted or not carried, delegates should vote against the proposals".

LLB **Labour Party Conference fringe meeting**

Reclaim the Labour Party

7pm, Monday 29th September

Royal Albion Hotel, Brighton

Speakers include Tony Benn, Ken Livingstone, Christine Shawcroft (chair CLPD), Geoff Martin, Mary Macpherson (*Defend the Constitution of the Labour Party*), Michelle Gildernew (Sinn Fein ard chomhairle). Admission: £1

- **End of Conference *LLB* quiz night, 8:45pm, Thursday 2nd October, Royal Albion Hotel, Brighton.**

Partnership in Power - sleeping partners get screwed

Christine Shawcroft, Chair of the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, puts *PiP*s proposals under the microscope.

THE *Labour into Power / Party into Power* "consultation document" has now transmogrified into *Partnership in Power (PiP)* to be put before Conference. It is practically identical with the original "draft". Interestingly, the Millbank Tendency made little attempt to pretend their draft would ever be changed. I spoke at a meeting in the summer where the supporter of *PiP* stated openly that the final proposals would be exactly the same as the draft for consultation!

The proposals:

- The National Policy Forum of 175 members will include 54 constituency reps elected by regional groups of constituency delegates at Conference. There will also be members from the PLP, EPLP, the Cabinet, and the whole of the (leadership dominated) NEC.
- The 32-seat NEC includes the Leader, deputy leader and treasurer, 3 members of the Government, 3 seats for the PLP and EPLP, the leader of the PLP, 1 Young Labour, but no women's division.
- Trade unions, with 12 seats on the NEC and 30 on the NPF will be heavily outvoted on both bodies.
- The Joint Policy Committee, dominated by the leadership, will decide the parameters of discussion.
- The right of affiliates to send motions and amendments is abolished. Affiliates can send in motions on a subject "not substantially addressed" by NPF or NEC reports, or emergencies. They would be subject to a priorities ballot at the start of Conference. The CAC would decide if a motion qualified for a priorities ballot.
- The Women's organisations are effectively not "stakeholders" in the Party. The Women's Division on the NEC is replaced by quotas in other sections — so women are not elected by, and accountable to, women.
- MPs will not be allowed to stand for the constituencies section on the NEC.

Rule changes enshrining these proposals are being put to Conference. They must all be opposed. The resolutions and amendments opposing *PiP* are to be composited to maximise support for key principles, such as the right to submit resolutions and amendments to Conference, and the right of MPs to stand for the NEC. Delegates must oppose all the rule changes and support all the composites.

No carte blanche for Blair

Pete Firmin, Network of Socialist Campaign Groups' officer, argues that the adoption of *PiP* would be very difficult to reverse.

TONY BLAIR wants *PiP* rule changes because he knows the Government is not going to sustain its current popularity. In particular opposition will develop among trade unionists. Blair wants to prevent the movement holding the Government to account, as happened with the 1974-79 Government.

To win Blair needs the support of major unions. Only UNISON is entirely uncritical of the proposals, with other unions varying from outright opposition to discontent with specific proposals (especially the curtailing of the right to submit resolutions). However, General Secretaries of some unions whose conferences overwhelmingly rejected the proposals are now prevaricating. Some calculated that "something is on offer" on union recognition, so they should vote for *PiP* in return. Whatever Blair offers it won't be much. Blair's hectoring sermon to TUC and the announcement of the pay freeze for public sector workers are a more likely indication of what is in store than any sop on union recognition.

Adoption of these rule changes would not be just another policy defeat. It will not only make it very difficult to win policy victories in future, it will also make it very difficult to reverse these changes themselves — the mechanism will no longer be there. If we win at Brighton on the rule changes we know that Blair will try again. If we lose, this won't be the last of the "counter-reforms". Either way, the left has to recognise that Blair is attempting to change fundamentally the way the Party works and make it an explicitly capitalist party.

Challenging the Labour Government's capitalist policies will require a level of organisation across the Party and unions which most of the left have not really addressed in the past. The Network of Socialist Campaign Groups hosted an emergency meeting on 13th September on *PiP* and is building the recall conference on November 1st — along with as many organisations as possible in the Party and unions — to discuss where we go after Conference.

- The Network of Socialist Campaign Groups fringe events at Conference: Sunday, 28th, 8pm meeting for left delegates at the Arts Club. Wednesday 1st, 6pm at the Brighthelm centre. Thursday 2nd, 7pm at the Royal Albion Hotel.

PiP the unions

Leonora Lloyd, Vice-President of London region MSF, writes: **Blair urged unions at TUC Conference to follow his example and modernise. This must have sounded like music to some trade union leaders who have been trying for years to reduce accountability and democracy in their unions. But the whole point of trade unions is collective action and that can only be effective when there is democracy. Individuals are weak against their bosses, united they are stronger. But they need leaders who will carry out their collective decisions.**

If *PiP* were translated into trade union terms, we would see an even greater tendency towards treating union members as "customers" who buy the right to cheap insurance and holidays. Branches would be encouraged to treat meetings as social get-togethers and unions would determine their policies by "consultations" and focus groups, with annual rallies to pay homage to their leaders. If policies continued to get passed by some accident, then the leadership could simply put out a postal vote to try to override any decisions they didn't like. Well, that's how it works in the NUT, anyway.

The leadership will continue to be elected on the basis of brief, usually coded statements, backed up by canvassing — usually against the rules — and pressure from unelected full-time officers doing their master's bidding. Well, that's how it works in MSF, at any rate.

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Voting for peace

FRANK ALLAUN, President of Labour Action for Peace, writes: When conference delegates gather in Brighton, there are two vital issues on which I believe they can win — even if the leadership opposes. The first is the attempt to take away their right to submit resolutions direct to the annual conference, our supreme policy-making body.

The second is the demand to stop the spending of £22bn (twenty-two thousand million pounds!) a year on "defence". We are not impossibilists asking for the moon. The resolutions ask for spending on the military to be reduced to the same average proportion of gross domestic product as in the other west European Nato countries. This would save the sum of £5.7bn a year for other and better things: housing, health, education and social welfare.

In Britain, 40% of all government research funds goes to military research and development, compared to only 13% in Germany and 5% in Japan. So it is hardly surprising that these countries have outstripped the UK in the design and production of non-military goods, such as computers, TV, motorcycles, cars and even ships.

For six successive years the Conference has carried a similar resolution by massive majorities. One year there was a five to one majority on a card vote. Last year, too, there was arms-cutting resolution on the final agenda but it was not reached. There are eleven resolutions and sympathetic amendments on the final agenda this time and if there are ten or more, they must be debated and voted on.

The labour, trade union and peace movements fully understand that some arms workers would lose their jobs. This is why these resolutions in past and present years insist there should be diversification for those factories affected. There is plenty of alternative work that badly needs doing: building civilian aircraft and ships, advanced medical equipment for hospitals, machinery to harness wind and wave power and the building of houses to let. Why do we want nuclear submarines, bombers, tanks? Who is going to attack us? The Cold War ended ten years ago when Gorbachev unilaterally withdrew his forces from Eastern Europe. Only the arms manufacturers benefit.

I have no doubt that the Labour leadership believes that reducing the armed forces will frighten the electorate. The reverse is the case. An *Observer* opinion poll showed that a majority of the electorate believe that arms spending is the least popular of all government expenditure.

Labour Party notebook

A dozen constituency parties have met to organise against arbitrary suspensions and interference by Blair's machine. Called by the campaign to Defend the Constitution of the Labour Party, the meeting was held at Conway Hall in London on 14th September. Amongst those determined to fight back are the Birmingham CLPs, suspended because they might select Asian candidates, and Leeds NE CLP, suspended for refusing to break the rules.

The meeting agreed on publicity at Conference — look out for some interesting events! DCLP also intends to circulate information about suspensions, impositions of candidates and other interference. The Blair/Mandelson apparatus relies on isolating individual CLPs and members. Few realise the number and range of unjustified suspensions and candidate impositions. The campaign is appealing for anyone aware of suspension of a Party unit or member, the imposition of a parliamentary or local candidate, or any other illegitimate interference with local democracy to send or phone in brief details.

The meeting also agreed to contribute in any way possible to the fight against *Partnership* [sic] *in Power*, the blueprint for an irreversible Blair dictatorship over the Party. As one participant said afterwards: "If the *PiP* rule changes go through, suspension won't matter much — Party democracy will be reduced to one Blair one vote."

- Contact: DCLP, c/o Celia Foote, 24 St Martins Drive, Leeds LS7 3LR, 0113-262 4667.

The full-time regional Labour Party officials in Yorkshire have continued their attempts to undermine the left in Leeds North East constituency.

Three months after their original suspension, the two new suspendees were invited for an interview to establish the facts. Neither was told the nature of the charges against them. One, Councillor Garth Frankland, was able to attend this initial inquiry but was not given any indication when the process would be ended. He is fully backed by the 80-plus Labour group on Leeds City Council.

Three wards in Leeds North East were re-instated and asked to hold their AGMs again despite the fact that nobody had complained about them. The fourth, Chapel Allerton, continued to be suspended on the basis that it was operating a shadow branch because some friends had continued to meet under the name of "Not the Chapel Allerton Labour Party". One Labour Party branch in the Midlands was re-instated precisely because it continued to meet after its formal suspension!

The suspended members and their many allies in Leeds are continuing to campaign for full re-instatement and an inquiry into the Labour Party regional office — the same office that allowed the scandals in Doncaster and Hull to fester.

Tower Hamlets is not known for being first at the barricades. Nevertheless Regional Office has taken a close interest in the formation of the panel for the May council elections. All nominees were interviewed and now over twenty (nearly a quarter of all nominees) have been barred from the panel. These miscreants include seven sitting councillors, the current and previous Mayors, and nominees who have been councillors in the past.

Councillors with long track records have been barred for not being committed to the role of councillor. Councillors who have never broken the whip have been barred on the grounds they might break the whip in the future. All the sitting councillors on the banned list have voted against privatising contracts, and it seems old scores are being settled. The question is: if they're prepared to do this in Tower Hamlets, where else is going to get its collar felt in the next few months?

Building from the bottom up
Labour Reform
Conference fringe meeting
Queens' Hotel
9pm, Sunday 28th September
Speakers: Diana Jeuda from the NEC, Austin Mitchell MP

No to private finance for public transport

An RMT activist argues that benevolent capitalim is a myth.

TONY BLAIR wants us to modernise. I agree. Let's start with Covent Garden tube station falling apart at the seams, frighteningly overcrowded, crying out for modernisation. Those of us who work in transport, be it trains, tubes, buses, ferries, even air traffic, can think of plenty of modernisation schemes. These schemes need two vital elements: money and political will. Both are in short supply.

Transport items at Labour Party Conference used to be sincere re-statements of received wisdom (publicly owned, accountable, safe, integrated transport, etc.) rather than debates. It's frightening to see how the political terrain has shifted since the privatisations of the National Bus Company, Sealink, BAA and most recently British Rail. They are now all accepted by the Labour leadership as facts of modern British life. It would be nice to hear that the Labour Party's ultimate objective was to take these back into the public domain. It would be nice to be debating the feasibility, the cost, the timetable, the mechanics of re-nationalisation.

It would be nice to have a go at the Labour leadership for not carrying out its policies. But the problem now is with Labour's policy itself. To be fair, we've had plenty of warning. Labour has been committed to involving the private sector in transport for a number of years. As transport was not high-profile during the Tory years, this fact has caught many members by surprise. For years the manifesto has sneaked in talk of involving private capital in new ventures — many members hadn't noticed. So it's not simply that the pressures of being in office have caused a sudden shift. The policy degeneration started years ago.

The trade union leadership used to call for patience — that victory was just around the corner. Now we're being told to "give them a chance". A chance to do what? They haven't promised us anything more than Tory policies. They're not even disguising the fact!

The discussion now is how best to accomplish this grand idea of a "public/private partnership". Should it be composed of benevolent capitalists who run the services in the public interest rather than for profit? (Touching innocence). Should there be a massive sell-off with the public owning a controlling interest? Should the public own core industries with private industry running the subsidiary services?

On the already privatised industries, the discussion centres on how hard to slap the wrists of those companies who do not offer an adequate service. The sorts of financial penalties threatened, for example, by the Rail Regulator are laughable considering that the post-BR rail operating companies are still receiving massive subsidies.

Labour started well by putting the Transport Secretary under the umbrella of the Department of Environment. Many have argued for years that transport is more than a 'business' concern of getting people to work on time. It is an environmental, health, safety and a women's issue and has already featured prominently in the debate on the new authority for London.

It's time to start a "Back to Basics" campaign. We must revive the quaint old-fashioned ideas of public and social interest and accountability. Private finance has no place in the running of public transport. The trade union movement should not be waiting around to give the new Government its honeymoon period — the Labour Party has been preparing us for the worst for years.



Red in High Places

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Briefing

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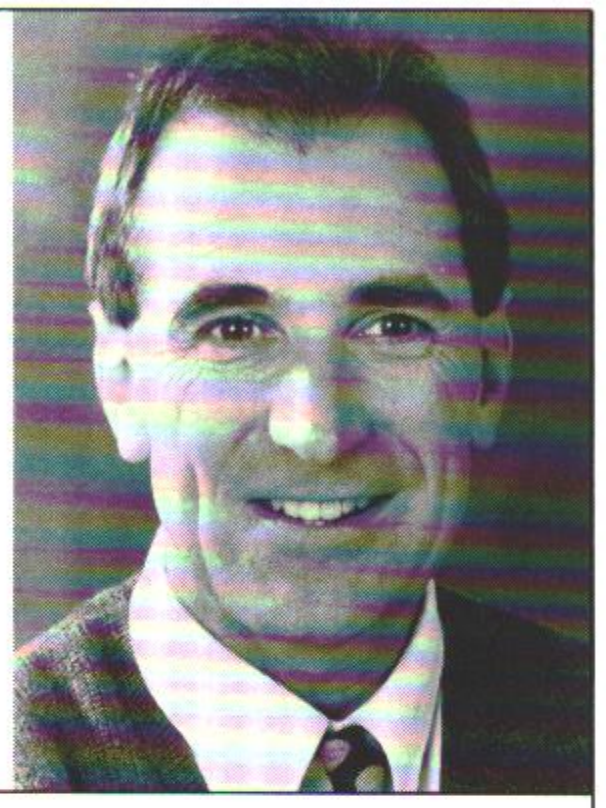
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the Alan Simpson column

The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.



THE EARLY summer saw a flurry of criticism about Lord Simon's continued ownership of BP shares. Whatever entertainment value this had, none of us should have been deceived into believing that this was the main issue at stake. More relevant might have been an exploration of his views on the company's practice of paying towards the work of the Colombian security services, videoing protesters outside BP plants and the subsequent beatings, arrests and intimidation which followed when the tapes were passed on to the Colombian authorities. But this too avoids the big picture.

Labour now has a whole series of people in positions of central policymaking power, whose origins are remote from democratic accountability. Forget the former Tories whom we have mistakenly pampered. We ought to question the extent to which "captains of industry" are assuming control of the ship of state. No less important is to ask whether this is by accident or design.

Lord Simon's position is best understood from his involvement in a hugely influential body known as the European Round Table (ERT). Set up in 1983, it is made up of the heads of 45 of Europe's biggest transnational corporations. Shell, Fiat, Daimler-Benz, ICI, Nestlé, Hoffmann-La Roche and BP are all there. They meet in plenary session twice a year, and their role is not that of any other lobby group. It is unashamedly about painting the big picture of a Europe fit for corporate interests.

Of the six companies represented from Britain — BT, British American Tobacco, ICI, BP, GKN and Pilkington — David Simon was by far the most prominent advocate of their global corporate agenda. ERT corporations may have a combined turnover of 550 billion ECU but they are also hungry for greater power, greater wealth — and greater government handouts. In many ways, their agenda has not simply been about the destruction of the personal welfare state, but its replacement with the corporate welfare state.

Low taxation, deregulation, benchmarking, completion of the single market and competitiveness may all be central themes of the European political agenda, which they have been foisting on governments since the early 1980s, but they also wanted a better system of self-reward. Their first report, *Missing Links* (1984) demanded a publicly funded programme for trans-European motorways, with plans for 12,000 kilometres of new motorways across Europe. The taxpayer would of course pay the costs and the main firms connected with ERT and the official Motorway Working Group would expect to get the bulk of the work. When progress slowed down on this, ERT successfully lobbied heads of state, and the 1992 Edinburgh Summit agreed to an extra seven billion ECU to keep the corporate show on the road.

THE questions we need to ask about Lord Simon's role as a Labour minister are symbolic, structural and political, rather than personal. His role in the European Round Table has been to advance the future agenda of corporate Europe. The ERT has spawned an array of working groups and associate organisations to pursue this. Its hands have been on every piece of European legislation to have emerged in the last 15 years. Its reach spans from monetary union to the biotechnology agenda, from competitiveness policies, to a mock "green" pretence about sustainable development. We should not be surprised that the ERT wants to see its board members making government policy, but we should be worried that a Labour Government invites them to do so.

I have tried to ask questions about just how far the corporate embrace now reaches into the Labour Government. There is a predictable reticence about the replies which have come back but the imprint of corporate, free trade, flexible labour market thinking on Labour policies is hard to miss.

Two paths stretch out ahead. One is constructed around the priorities and values of civil society, the other around those of corporate society. They have very different constituencies: the citizen versus the shareholder. Those who argue that we are both should look at the huge number who are not and the larger sense in which citizenship rights are being made subordinate to shareholder ones.

No Labour government has ever emancipated the poor by strengthening the power and influence of the rich. Lord Simon needs to be seen in relation to a corporate world, driven by the parable of the talents and the philosophy of "to them that have shall be given and to them that have not shall be taken away". For those steeped in very different Labour values, we ought to re-examine whether this was the sort of "redistribution" that Labour was elected to pursue.

In the church where God is money

THE UNIONS ARE OUR GREATEST STRENGTH

KEEP THE LINK

SOCIALIST GREETINGS TO ALL CONFERENCE DELEGATES

John Cryer MP



Dockers' international

The Liverpool dockers have done it again! On 9th September, they stopped the world's ports. Chris Knight (London Support Group for the Liverpool Dockers) gives some of the highlights.

North American west coast: All ports, from Mexico to Alaska, shut down for eight hours. Nearly 100 ships made idle. At first, the employers' association (the Pacific Maritime Association) blustered about refusing to tolerate an eight-hour stoppage.

Only when they realised that their attitude might provoke instead a 24-hour coast wide stoppage did they back down. Unlike the last International Day of Action in January this one included Vancouver and other ports along the Canadian west coast.

According to Jack Heyman of ILWU Local 10, "Rank and file longshoremen here, angered by the treatment of their brothers in Liverpool and inspired by solidarity actions from dockers in South Africa, have turned a new page in their struggle. If time is money, then these solidarity actions are going to be costly to those who trade with scab labour until the dispute is resolved and the Liverpool dockers are reinstated."

Canada: Saint John, New Brunswick, shut for 24 hours. Showing of Ken Loach film, with debate on Liverpool and other struggles of dock workers. Halifax shut for five hours on morning shift after pickets appeared at the port gates. Over 170 workers from three locals representing longshoremen, checkers and gearmen refused to cross. ACL and ZIM vessels immediately hit. According to the *Halifax Herald*, "the timing couldn't have been worse for the port, as hundreds of delegates from the international shipping community arrived in town to attend Port Days at the World Trade and Convention Centre". The Port Days event is designed to show the world shipping community the "strong, co-ordinated team we have here in Halifax". "It was totally irresponsible on the part of these foreign workers, coming here and shutting down an operation in Canada," said David Bellefontaine, President of the Halifax Port Corporation. The employers accused the longshoremen of "conspiracy", threatening sackings in the event of further action. Lloyds List spoke to ACL in New York, who admitted the disruption is affecting the company.

Sweden: All ports stopped, backed by the Swedish Dockworkers' Union. CAST and ACL container vessels halted for four hours, hitting all trade with Liverpool and Sheerness (which is owned by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company).

Denmark: Arhus on strike for 24 hours following a secret ballot. Nine ships affected. In Copenhagen, a canteen meeting was addressed by Micky Tighe and Sylvia Tighe, leading to a 46-4 vote to walk out until next morning. Three ships affected.

Social justice, jobs, a future

The Liverpool dockers shop stewards committee have recently issued a statement to Parliament demanding the reinstatement of the sacked dockers and calling on the Labour Government to intervene in the dispute. This is an abridged version of that statement.

❝ In September 1995, 500 Liverpool dockers were dismissed by the Port Authority, the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company. The original dispute arose when young dockers, many of them the sons of MDHC dockworkers, experienced a breach of contractual arrangements regarding overtime work. These 80 dockers were employed by a company called Torside Ltd.

MDHC claims that Torside Ltd is a wholly independent stevedoring company. Yet the 80 young dockers were all interviewed by senior MDHC management in that company's head office. Indeed it was two MDHC managers who informed the Torside dockers of the unilateral changes to their contract of employment. When these young dockers sought advice from their shop stewards, a number of them were dismissed immediately, without warning and without the right of appeal.

The dispute spread as other dockers were asked to support the Torside dockers. For defending a basic trade union principle, refusing to cross a picket line, dockers employed by MDHC and their subsidiaries were deemed to be in breach of contract and were sacked. A few days later, on 6th October, 1995, the sacked Liverpool dockers voted to return to work. They were locked out.

Much has been written about the illegal and unofficial nature of the Liverpool dockers' situation. Following the de-regulation/privatisation of all UK ports in 1989 with the abolition of the National Dock Labour Scheme, MDHC was effectively one of the few port authorities which maintained union recognition and guarantees of no casualisation. Since 1989 MDHC has developed its own internal market in the port of Liverpool, effectively privatising a number of its own operations, while maintaining overall control. Numerous satellite companies were established — all controlled by the Port Authority, MDHC. Under current legislation, it was legally impossible to have a joint ballot as the dockers were deemed to be employed by individual/separate companies, although they were all directly owned subsidiaries of one company, namely MDHC. It was this unjust dilemma that confronted the Liverpool dockers who would have welcomed the opportunity to take part in a secret legal industrial ballot. The Liverpool dockers have consistently stated they are not on unofficial/illegal strike, they were dismissed for breach of contract. They were locked out.

Beyond doubt, the dockers' situation was brought about by MDHC making full use of unjust laws that allow employers to dismiss workers without any rights of redress. These same laws are now embraced by the newly elected Labour Government. They should be repealed.

The Liverpool dockers have enjoyed magnificent and meaningful support from Labour MPs both locally and nationally. They now believe that the new Labour Government should make it a priority to achieve justice for sacked workers.

After years of financial mismanagement and abuse the Mersey Docks and Harbour Board was rescued from financial collapse in 1970 by the government, which took a controlling interest of 21%. Between 1971 and 1989, millions of pounds of taxpayers' money was invested in the "reconstituted" Mersey Docks and Harbour Company (MDHC). The status of the MDHC is that of a semi-nationalised company.

The Liverpool dockers have consistently sought a public inquiry into the funding and actions of MDHC. They maintain that such an inquiry would uncover serious malpractice that has directly undermined the economic and employment regeneration of Merseyside.

LLB page 16

strikes again

Portugal: 24-hour stoppage in Lisbon. For seven hours from 8am, all workers assembled in a plenary, watching Ken Loach's film *The Flickering Flame*, then debating the Liverpool and international situations. A motion to donate one day's pay was agreed. Similar meetings and stoppages in Leixoes, Serubal, Aveiro, Figuera da Foz and Sines.

South Africa: Liverpool docker Mark Crichton addressed meeting of 60 port stewards in Cape Town on 6th September. 9th September declared National Port Action Day. Mass demonstration in Durban, despite threat of legal action. TGWU boycotting all trade with Mersey Docks, including Liverpool and Sheerness.

Australia: Ken Loach film screened Australia-wide on 7th September. On 9th September, Sydney, Fremantle, Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane and Newcastle were among the ports affected by stoppages of five hours or longer, backed by Maritime Union of Australia. P&O Ports appealing to Australian Industrial Relations Commissions to prevent repetition.

Amsterdam: Dockers held all-day stop-work meetings on international issues including Liverpool and on their own dispute.

France: On 10th September there was an eight-hour action against OOCL Canada in Le Havre.

Spain: "Stop-work" held. The Coordinadora (which organises 80% of Spanish dockworkers) is organising a Southern European dockworkers conference in order to plan Europe-wide campaign including 24 hour stoppages targeting trade with Mersey Docks.

New Zealand: The Auckland "stop-work" meeting on 8th September was 90% effective.

Belfast: Overtime ban implemented from midnight, Sunday. Physical action by dockers and maintenance men began 5pm Monday against Coastal Containers (owned by Mersey Docks), affecting three ships. The Belfast to Dublin vessel was on the verge of completion when workers walked out. Management came in as scabs to complete operations; the vessel sailed to Dublin. Here, a picket line was set up but the action collapsed as men crossed it and worked the coastal vessel from Belfast.

London: Thirty members of Reclaim the Streets picketed the house of Mersey Docks Chairman Gordon Waddell in West London from 7am to 11am, displaying banner: "Injustice is not Anonymous: it has a Name and Address". A sympathetic neighbour brought tea on a tray. The group then went to Charles House, Regent St, the offices of scab-supply agency Drake International. Thirteen protesters managed to enter the building and occupy the offices for over 30 minutes. Ten members of the London Support group picketed Sheerness on 8th September. The dock workers had been called in to work early, but there was a good response from car transport workers.

In 1994 profits rose by over £13 million to £33.6 million. This was a period in which the sacked dockers contributed to the profitability and efficiency of MDHC. Following the dismissal of 500 dockers, profits fell by over £2 million. MDHC admitted that the dismissal of the Liverpool dockers was costing over £1 million a year. The company has set aside £10 million to pay off the sacked dockers. The fall in share values since 1995 has cost in excess of £70 million. The cost of policing the long-running dispute is to date almost £2 million.

Despite the announcements by MDHC the port is in a state of financial and trading stagnation as a result of the international boycott of the port. This decline in the fortunes of our once great port will only end when the sacked Liverpool dockers are reinstated.

At the heart of the dispute rest the historic abuses of casual employment, recognised at the turn of the century as being indefensible. Direct links exist between MDHC and the new Government as the Government remains a major shareholder with a 14% shareholding. The Labour Government could oversee a settlement to the docks dispute through reinstatement. ❞

- A copy of the full statement can be obtained for £1 from the Liverpool Docks Shop Stewards Committee, c/o Transport House, Islington, Liverpool.

Drake International

The following document was recovered from Drake International's offices in London during the occupation by Reclaim the Streets in support of the Liverpool dockers on 8th Sept. Drake International is the Canadian company that provides the scabs at Liverpool docks.

"After hearing the plight of the poor down troden [sic] Liverpool dockers the World Wildlife Fund have decided to declare the dockers an endangered species....The World Wildlife Fund are going to set up a captive breeding program in Knowsley safari park....These poor unfortunate creatures of very low inteligence [sic] are beleived [sic] to be decendants [sic] from a branch of dinosaur called Dickheadasaurus...."

All for One
World Wide Dockers Action for Liverpool

New Video, 21 minutes, VHS PAL (UK system only), £5
(+£2 postage if outside UK). NTSC Version also available.

This unique video was shot by Liverpool dockers and independent video makers in Liverpool, San Francisco, Tokyo and Stockholm. As dockers and environmental activists occupy the grain terminal and faxes pour in from around the world, dramatic footage from the Liverpool picket line is intercut with mass meetings in Tokyo, an interview with a dockers' leader in Sweden, where all dock work has stopped and a confrontation with the British Consul in San Francisco.

All proceeds go to the Port Shop Stewards Appeal Fund.

Available from: Merseyside Port Shop Stewards, Transport House, Islington, Liverpool L3 8EQ. 0151-207 3388, 0151-207 0696 fax.

Trade union notebook

As we go to press, Islington Council trade unions are balloting members for strike action against the Labour Council's plans to privatise refuse collection, street cleaning and vehicle maintenance. In an earlier consultative ballot, GMB, UNISON and TGWU members voted 95% in favour of moving to strike action if the Council did not relent. The Council hopes the "joint venture" (in which a majority of shares will be privately owned) will enable it to save £1.25 million out of a total cuts' package of £16 million. Local Party members have largely opposed the move, seeing it as a short term solution to a budgetary problem that will cause long term grief to both the public and the workforce. In the past, Islington's in-house bids under CCT have been highly successful. However, the Council workforce have not even been allowed to make a bid for the contract. This is not CCT, remember, but PFI. Neither of the two companies bidding for the business — Onyx and John Doyle construction — are even claiming that they can or will offer a better service to the public. It also seems that both intend to use government training schemes to fill out a slimmed down workforce. A bin strike in the run up to local elections in May could hit Labour's chances in Islington hard.

Trade unionists everywhere will have welcomed the restoration of union rights at GCHQ. However it should not be overlooked that the deal signed by the Government and the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union includes a no-strike agreement. The union has been given an arbitration procedure which cannot be enforced in the courts. The deal is a watering-down of previous Labour commitments — given regularly over the last 13 years — to restore all trade union rights at GCHQ. If collective action is out of the question, then trade union recognition is little more than a sop.

Members of the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) and the Public Services, Tax and Commerce Union (PTC) are being balloted on controversial plans to merge. Each union held a special conference in September to discuss the draft rulebook. Only one motion from the respective NECs was debated and each was defeated by a 2-1 majority. Despite this, each NEC is proceeding with the ballot and urging members to vote Yes.

At PTC's conference, delegates argued that the rulebook strengthened the NEC's position. The national conference and NEC elections will be held every two years, instead of annually as at present. The NEC will have power to submit major rule and policy changes to membership referenda, thereby giving themselves the opportunity to over-ride conference decisions. There was criticism of the rulebook's emphasis on organisation based on bargaining units such as executive agencies (which have no legal status) rather than the traditional Departmental-based structure. This will weaken the scope for campaigns across government departments. Delegates were also critical of the NEC's conduct of the merger negotiations. Many rule amendments demanded at Annual Conference were discarded by the NEC.

A Yes vote in the ballots should not be taken for granted. In each union the Broad Left will campaign vigorously for a No vote. In PTC, the progressive Unity faction appears split, with the majority opposed to merger but some key activists supporting it on grounds of industrial logic.

Trades Unions and Political Funding in Europe is a new report commissioned by Michael Hindley MEP, with research undertaken by the Labour Research Department. It gives a detailed breakdown of all the countries in the EU, looking at the financial and political links between unions and parties in each. The British Labour Party remains the European party with the greatest financial support from the unions. State funding of parties is now the norm in all but four countries — Britain, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands. New Labour is committed to weakening this financial link, so this pamphlet, as Michael Hindley argues in its foreword, provides a factual basis for the debate to come.

Do you remember when the Tories and the press complained that union leaders were left-wingers who didn't represent their moderate members? Well recently in the Benefits Agency members of the Civil and Public Services Association (CPSA) voted to reject their annual pay offer. So how does CPSA General Secretary Barry Reamsbottom respond? He writes to management accepting the offer!

Barclays Bank staff are currently engaged in a bitter dispute over pay. Management is trying to impose a performance-related package that is in effect a pay freeze for up to five years for 25,000 staff. An overtime ban has failed to bring management to the negotiating table, so now there is a new ballot for full strike action by UNIFI, the Barclays staff union, and BIFU, the general banking union.

According to recent figures from the National Statistics Office, approximately four and a half million workers are earning less than £4.42 an hour — the figure proposed by the unions for the national minimum wage. This includes almost half of Britain's six million part-time workers and one seventh of full-time workers.

From euphoria to realism

Scottish TUC delegate Manuel Cortes reports: After the curtailing of the annual Congress of the Scottish Trade Union Congress (STUC) earlier this year — due to the general election — a special congress was held on the 29th-30th of August in Glasgow. Congress assembled in a climate of generalised celebration among most delegates.

The return of a Labour Government, the very realistic prospect that a Scottish Parliament will soon be set up and the fact that STUC was celebrating its centenary had most delegates punch-drunk with genuine excitement. Fortunately it did not take Congress long to sober up. Motion after motion — although not directly critical of the new Labour Government — called for a very different set of policies to those to which a Blair-led Government is committed.

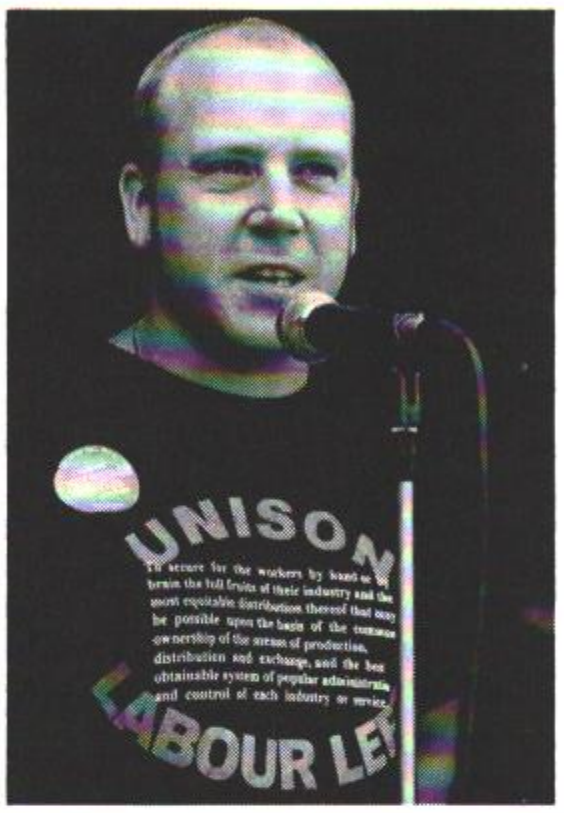
On Labour's proposed Welfare to Work programme, a motion from the STUC Youth Congress was passed, calling for the reinstatement of benefits for 16 and 17 year olds and for only voluntary participation in the programme without threat of benefit withdrawal. A wide ranging debate on the future of the public sector under Labour took place. The discussion centred on the need for more Government investment if serious deterioration in the level of service — together with job losses — is to be avoided.

On trade union and employment rights, conference passed a composite motion that called for measures to ensure the right of workers to take effective — including secondary — action, automatic recognition rights and common employment rights for all employees without a qualifying period. A motion in support of the Liverpool dockers urging the Labour Government to intervene to solve the dispute was passed. The banner for full employment was raised by a GMB motion that was passed unanimously.

It is clear from this conference that the Scottish trade union movement expects Labour to deliver a social and economic programme that is in line with the long-held aspirations of our movement. Blair will ignore these calls. Our challenge is to build opposition to Blair's policies among the grassroots so that his project is defeated and confined to the dustbin of history.

the Geoff Martin column

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



● After months of banging on about the phoney nature of the Millbank operation I was pleased to see that the wheels were well and truly off New Labour's slick PR machine over the issue of Cabinet pay rises. One minute Blair was counting out the fivers from his forty grand pay hike, the next he had the look of a man who was one bonus ball short of a lottery pay out. One minute the Cabinet were rolling out the barrel, the next they were dragged reluctantly into line after a late night phone call from John Prescott. And all of this from the most efficient political machine in the western world. Presumably, this temporary and reluctant display of restraint was supposed to impress our members working in the front line of the public services. And they tell us to live in the real world!

● On the same subject I was hauled in by the *World Tonight* to give my considered opinion on all this business. Not for the first time I found myself head to head with a Blairite MP I'd never heard of (Melanie Johnson). With a script fresh off the Millbank computer she told the nation that public sector pay would have to be held down until such time "as the fundamental weaknesses in the indigenous macro economy had been addressed". I pointed out that the staff talk about nothing else on the wards of my local hospital.

The recent round of mortgage increases doesn't even warrant a mention when the macros are uppermost in your mind. All of this economics mumbo-jumbo is bad enough, but even worse is the fact that Labour ministers have been briefing the media about how nurses and midwives have actually done very well in recent years under the Tories and how a pay rise below inflation wouldn't hurt a bit. This issue is now building up into the first major test of bottle for the unions in the public sector under this new government. With the long term squeeze on pay already starting to generate an angry mood on the ground, I for one will have no hesitation in campaigning for concerted national action to turn the tide.

● All this whipping up of mass hysteria around the death of Princess Diana makes my blood run cold. Orwell's *1984* painted a picture of a society where the mob could be whipped up into a frenzy in front of giant screens, where history and facts could be re-written and edited without question to fit in with the current mood and where normally intelligent people fell into line for fear of being attacked. That's what's been happening here over the past few weeks and it scares the life out of me.

● My attendance at the TUC this year was thankfully very brief. How the hell Blair got away with his stuttering, sweaty little performance is beyond me. I pointed out to the BBC's industrial correspondent that their coverage could have been packaged and processed in the Millbank editing suite but he wasn't up for the kind of heated discussion I was after. Anyway, I've managed to dodge the thought police and get myself onto the UNISON delegation at the Party conference although I've been axed from the line up at the *LLB* fringe after years of sterling support for this publication. Even so, rumours of a free transfer to *Socialist Outlook* are greatly exaggerated.

● **Editor replies:** Unfortunately the comrades in *Outlook* have looked a gift horse in the mouth. Geoffrey will be back next month and on our Brighton Fringe platform — he's got lots of scary mates!

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

Magnet workers fight on

Lynne Fawcett, Treasurer of the Magnet Women's Support Group, reports.

Two thousand gathered on Saturday 23rd August for our carnival led by a New Orleans marching band. For the children there were balloons, a stilt walker, face painting and a magic show. The atmosphere was amazing, friendly, and supportive. This was a show of unity with the message: Magnet Kitchens are a disgrace and negotiations should start immediately to reinstate the sacked workforce. Last year 10,000 signed our petition calling for talks.

Certain politicians have declared that we are making a "futile, obscure gesture". MEP Stephen Hughes, however, condemned the management as unscrupulous. In the year leading up to the strike, Magnet in Darlington made £10m profit while the workforce was in its third year of a wage freeze. A pay increase of £5-6 per week would not have crippled the firm. During the year of the strike, Magnet have paid £20,000 a week to a security firm — about the same as the rise would have cost. Long serving workers, many with 30-40 years' service, do not risk their livelihoods and pensions for a few pounds — the strike was also about conditions being imposed by a bullying management.

Now we have secured the services of Professor Brian Bercusson and John Hendy QC, both specialists in labour and European law, to challenge the mass dismissal in the European Court. Our own Labour Government must get off the fence and right these wrongs. While the anti-union laws help the employers, there is little protection for workers. Surely the Labour Party was formed to be our voice.

Please continue to support us. Don't buy a Magnet kitchen!

Teamsters

In August, 180,000 US workers won one of the most decisive victories for years paving the way for bolder worldwide initiatives against global attacks on workers' wages and working conditions. Jane Barrett of TGWU ACTS 1/28 reports.

UNITED Parcel Services, the world's biggest transport company, epitomises the global operations of modern day capitalism. The company has its HQ and biggest operations in the USA and operates in over 200 countries. It directly employs over a third of a million workers worldwide, including 295,000 in the USA. This does not include all those employed by associated joint venture companies and subcontractors. Its wholly owned airline is the ninth biggest commercial fleet in the world. UPS aircraft operate through hubs in the US (fourteen airports), Germany, the UK, Hong Kong, Singapore, Taipei and Canada (four airports). In 1996 the company generated $21 billion revenue with profits of $1 billion. It moves 12 million parcels a day worldwide.

While there are some differences from country to country in conditions of employment for UPS workers there are some striking similarities. Common complaints include the employment of casual and part-time labour and the subcontracting of certain functions in the name of "labour flexibility". Another grievance is the risk attached to the compulsory handling of heavy packages. Worldwide, the company has a reputation for attempting to avoid and undermine trade union representation. In the USA, it has attempted to circumvent shop steward representation and established disciplinary procedures by trying to introduce "team concept" arrangements.

The International Transport Workers' Federation set up a UPS World Trade Union Council in February of this year. It is the first workers' council of its kind in the transport sector. The first meeting, held in London, was attended by representatives of transport unions in eleven countries. A key decision of this meeting was to hold an International Day of Action to support a demand that UPS management meet the World Council to discuss issues including job security, full-time employment, union recognition, and the establishment of international safety and health standards. The Day of Action took place on 22nd May, with pickets, protests and rallies taking place in 25 centres worldwide. To date the company has not replied to the Council's request for a meeting.

The Day of Action was followed by a second meeting of the World Council in Washington in July. At the time the Teamsters were in negotiations for a new contract for US workers. A dispute was looming. By 3rd August, 185,000 Teamsters were on strike and World Council participants were ready to give solidarity.

The dispute in the USA was over four key issues: full-time employment, safety, control of the pension scheme and the right to strike. Nearly two thirds of UPS workers in the USA were on part-time contracts. Their hourly rates were much less than those of full time workers and had not increased since 1982. Many were working up to a 40 hour week (some for over ten years) but were defined as "part-timers". Effectively they were casual workers. The union demanded that 10,000 new full time jobs should be created from part-time jobs over four years (management's last offer proposed 1,000).

UPS has the worst record in the USA for complaints lodged with the government about health and safety. Most are related to injuries caused by lifting heavy packages. The Teamsters argued that there should be no disciplinaries for refusing to handle packages of over 70 pounds without assistance and that the existing company weight limit should not be increased without union agreement. UPS wanted to be able to increase the weight limit unilaterally at any time.

Pensions for UPS workers are administered by a multi-company Teamsters pension plan. UPS proposed establishing a company specific plan which would improve pensions provisions in some areas but reduce the influence of workers in investment decisions.

Teamster members have the right to honour union picket lines in the event of strikes by other unionised workers. Management wanted to make it an offence to refuse to cross a picket line. There was a further dimension. Ron Carey, a long standing activist of Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU), in 1996 defeated Jimmy Hoffa Jnr. in a contest for union president. The vote was

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strike key victory

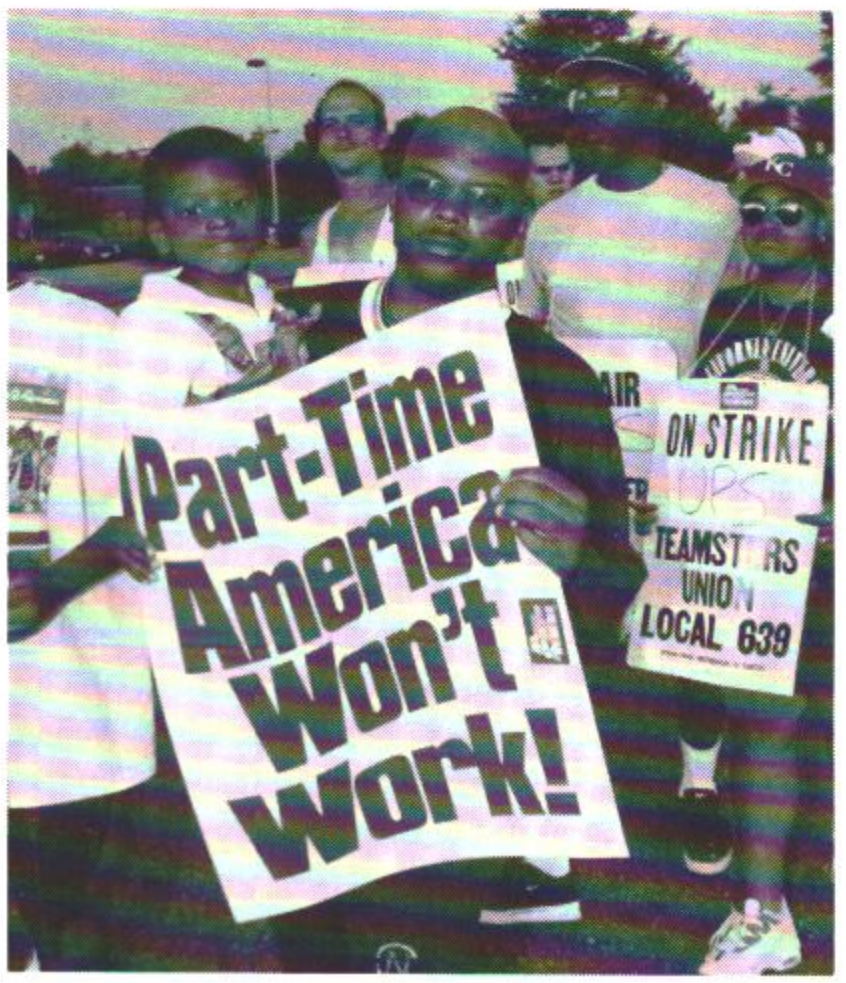
won by a relatively small margin and it was being challenged in court by Hoffa on a technicality. Whatever the outcome of the case it was important that Carey consolidated his political presence in the union. As a former UPS worker who has artificial knees as a result of years of heavy lifting, the dispute was close to Carey's heart.

Within hours of announcing the strike, UPS operations in the USA were down to about 5%. Although around 80,000 non-union workers continued to work, operations were all but stopped. Critical to this was the refusal of UPS's airline pilots to cross picket lines. Although organised in the Independent Pilots Association the pilots remained solid. When the strike was announced, those in other countries parked their planes and either hitched back to the US or linked up with local solidarity actions.

Local Teamster activists, and particularly those associated with the TDU, swung into action throughout the US. In almost every city and small town in the country, supporters organised non-stop fund raising activities and kept pickets fed and watered. There was no sign of the company budging. Massive support rallies were held in New York and Atlanta ten days into the strike. With its emphasis on "community" and "family" in contrast to insecure employment at low wages, the union mustered massive public support. The Teamsters received unprecedented media coverage — almost all positive. Despite pressure put on Clinton to stop the strike (using security legislation which allows this), the climate made this impossible.

Meanwhile the union had dispatched a key official of its Strategic Campaigns Department and a UPS shop steward to Europe to facilitate international solidarity. The Teamsters do not have an International Department. Under Carey all international activity is integrated into the union's campaign department. Working with ITF staff at the organisation's London headquarters, international solidarity started to take off. By week one, Carey had received over fifty solidarity letters from ITF affiliates worldwide and the company had been bombarded with protest letters. Leaflets were distributed in five languages throughout the world and workers were considering local action. The Teamster representatives conducted a flying tour of UPS workplaces in the UK (Nuneaton), Netherlands, Germany, and Belgium to meet workers and explain the dispute. By the end of the second week of the strike there was every possibility of solidarity stoppages. A meeting of European UPS workers was scheduled for 21st August to co-ordinate action. In the event the strike was settled two days beforehand. There is strong evidence that possible European solidarity action played an important role in shifting the company's stance.

Despite protestations that it would not budge off its last final offer, early in the third week of the strike and in the face of growing local and international support for the strikers, UPS management softened. After intense negotiations a settlement was announced which conceded almost all the union's demands. This was two days before a national Action Day for Good Jobs was scheduled. Many of the planned actions turned into community victory celebrations.



Agreement was reached on the creation of 10,000 new full time jobs, increasing the hourly rate of part time workers, new limits on subcontracting, a guarantee of trade union negotiation in the event of changes to the package weight limit, and improved pension provisions under the existing Teamster pension plans. The single concession made by the union was that the contract would be extended to five years, in contrast to previous four-year contracts. Ron Carey's message was that "American workers have shown that we can stand up to corporate greed. After 15 years of taking it on the chin, working families are telling big corporations that we will fight for the American Dream. This is not just a Teamster victory — this is a victory for all working people".

The Teamsters' success holds lessons for all trade unionists. Within the US, it followed five months of solid campaigning on the part of the union. The consolidation of activist networks was encouraged by the union in general and by Carey and the Strategic Campaigns Department in particular. The media approach of the union was to link the UPS dispute with everyday concerns of ordinary people — low pay, job insecurity, and unemployment and to use a language understood by all. The public support of high profile popular figures and media personalities was sought but grass-roots activities were put in the forefront. The union issued an open invitation to the population to express their solidarity with the striking workers in whatever way possible. Despite a few scuffles and arrests the strike was remarkably free of violence, and the company did not dare hire scab labour for the duration of the strike.

On an international level, the UPS World Trade Union Council and the information already exchanged through that forum clearly facilitated a quick response on the part of UPS workers worldwide. The immediate release by the Teamsters of an official and a shop steward to concentrate on international solidarity and to work closely with the ITF was also critical. No time was lost in getting the message out to transport trade unions worldwide.

Most importantly, the unambiguous and militant messages emanating from both the striking workers and the Teamster leadership made it possible for the ITF and its affiliates to spread the call for solidarity. The Teamsters, the ITF and the international trade union movement should be able to build on the experience of the UPS strike and take the astonishing victory forward. ❑

No solution through exclusion

Michelle Gildernew, member of the Sinn Fein ard chomhairle (national executive), writes.

THE GREATEST challenge facing the people of Ireland is to resolve the causes of conflict and agree a negotiated settlement which can bring a lasting and true peace. There is a compelling urgency about this task.

The only way this can be achieved is through inclusive dialogue. We need all the representatives, of all the people, sitting around a table on the basis of equality, talking out our problems and staying at that table until a settlement is hammered out.

Sinn Fein is totally committed to achieving a democratic peace settlement. We have sought with honesty and integrity to contribute to the construction of a peace process which reaches out and embraces everyone as equals. Our objective is for an agreement that will earn the allegiance and respect of all sections of our people. The need for peace based on agreement arises out of a conflict that is the result of British involvement in Ireland and the deeply flawed and undemocratic nature of the northern state. This statelet has existed in a permanent state of emergency since it was established.

The partition of Ireland and continued British rule in the six northeastern counties is the product of British government policy. This policy has underpinned the climate of conflict and prevented real change from occurring. In fact, the negotiations process itself is a clear admission of the failure of that policy and of the northern state.

In our view, the claim of the British Government to sovereignty in Ireland is a key matter which must be addressed in negotiations. So too is the achievement through dialogue among the Irish people of an agreed Ireland. The objective political and historical evidence shows that political independence, a united Ireland, offers the best guarantee of equality and the most durable basis for peace and stability. It is also our opinion that the overwhelming majority of people throughout Ireland and Britain wish to see all parties participating in a meaningful and inclusive negotiations process. There can be no solution without equality and justice. There can be no solution without mutual respect and understanding of each others' position, and there can be no solution through exclusion.

What is required to achieve real and measurable change towards equality and what has been absent on the part of successive British Governments is the political will to do what is right. Equality should be at the heart of government decision making in London but it hasn't been: this must change. While the Labour Government has moved substantially further than the previous Tory administration much more needs to be done. Tony Blair now has a responsibility to change British Government policy on discrimination and ensure equality for all citizens. The equality issues which must be addressed by the British Government are properly not matters for negotiation: they are rights which should be respected. The British prime minister, who has made human rights a priority in his international agenda, has to place them at the top of his Irish policy also.

We need to see equality measures taken to promote the Irish language, culture and tradition, and the difficult issue of flags and emblems needs to be addressed. The Employment Equality Review carried out by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights needs urgent action. When the Fair Employment (NI) Act 1989 was being debated at Westminster, Labour was highly critical of its shortcomings and rightly so. It is now in a position to make the necessary changes. Dramatic steps need to be taken to address the policing system in the north. The RUC is unacceptable. We need a policing service under democratic control, that is representative of and supported by our community. We need an end to repressive legislation and to the biased and unjust judicial system.

Then there is the issue of political prisoners, their conditions, transfer and release. This must be tackled quickly. We welcome steps taken thus far but there is still a long way to go to reunite families, all of whom are victims of our troubled past.

Equality of course includes the rights of unionists as well as nationalists. Their civil and religious liberties must be protected. We need to achieve a democratic peace settlement that has the support and allegiance of all sections of our people and that celebrates our diversity as equals. Demonising, marginalising and refusing to sit down to discuss our future didn't work in the past and it certainly won't work now. That is why the unionist leaders need to engage in honest dialogue for the good of all our people.

Sinn Fein is an Irish republican party. We believe that the British presence in our country lies at the heart of this conflict. We are for the right of the Irish people to national self-determination. We are for an end to British jurisdiction and Irish unity. Others will enter the negotiations with a different opinion and analysis. Good. Let's all sit down around the table and discuss all of those issues. Let us commit ourselves to seeking agreement.

It is a time for truth, for plain speaking. It is a time for vision, for facing our common difficulties together, for a partnership for peace.

Working together I am confident that we can finally escape the past and move forward to a new future.



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Resisting neo-liberalism

Dinah Livingstone reports on the second Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity against Neo-liberalism.

"SO WHAT is neo-liberalism?" was the usual response when I mentioned to friends that I was going to this Conference in Spain. In continental Europe, Latin America and other parts of the world, neo-liberalism is the common word used to describe the aggressive global free-market capitalism, privatisation and retrenchment of the welfare state we knew in the 1980s as Thatcherism.

The Zapatista uprising on New Year's Day 1994 against NAFTA, the North American Free Trade Agreement — with its devastating effects on many of the poor of Mexico — was a heartening sign that the struggle continued. Last year the Zapatistas called an "Intercontinental Encounter" in Chiapas. The second "Intercontinental Encounter" took place in Spain this summer, from 25th July to 3rd August. It was attended by more than 3,000 people from many countries. It was an ambitious undertaking, with plenary sessions and many discussion groups or "tables", which dispersed to different locations all over Spain.

The "tables" discussed a wide range of issues, such as the neo-liberal economy, work, culture, education, information, self-determination, immigration, women's struggles, land, and ecology. This was a conscious attempt to make connections between all the struggles against global neo-liberal policies, to exchange experiences and to create a "network of networks" of resistance.

On the first Sunday there was a large demonstration in Madrid, attended by an array of sectors of the Spanish left, including historical antagonists, Madrid squatters and eco-warriors, and people from all over the world. There were indigenous people from many Latin American countries, eighty-year-old veterans, babies in backpacks, trade union banners, neat academics, golden dreadlocks, rows of young women with linked arms dancing and many more.

The final plenary was held on a squatted farm, "El Indiano", 90 km south of Seville. The organisers had hired a "revolutionary train" to transport the participants on the nine-hour journey from Madrid. Those coming from Barcelona had already travelled on it for nine hours to Madrid. The reports from the "tables" lasted all day and most have now been published on the Internet. The closing speeches were given by two masked Zapatistas.

Of course there were problems and frustrations and a limit to what could be achieved in discussions (slowed down by translations) with people from all over the world who had only just met. But the experience of meeting and talking to so many different people struggling in so many ways to resist neo-liberal policies was very encouraging.

- For further information and details of the next Intercontinental Encounter contact: HUMAN London Committee c/o BM-CRL, London WC1N 3XX, or http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/3849/encounter2dx.html

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GREETINGS TO LABOUR PARTY CONFERENCE DELEGATES

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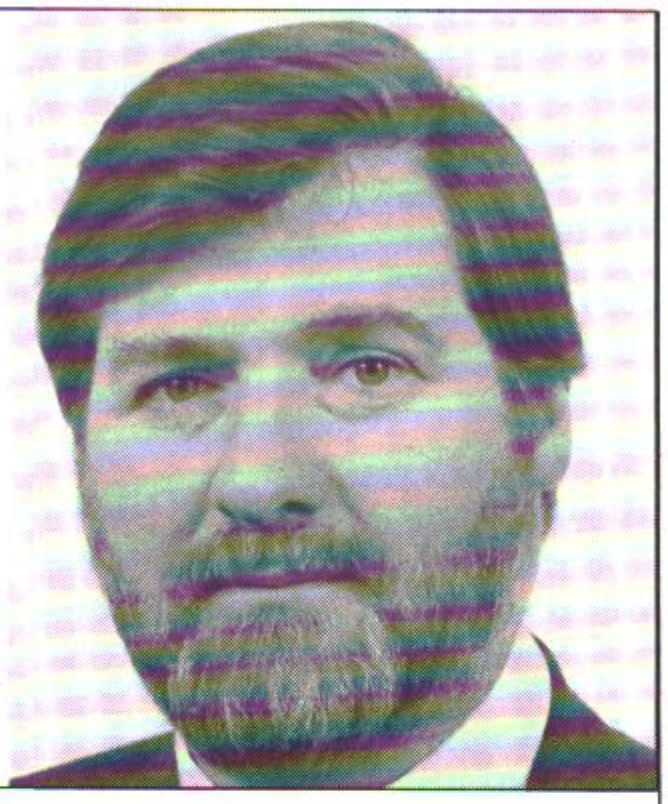
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Parliamentary Group of the Party of European Socialists



the Michael Hindley column

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



Have a banana

FOR SUCH a relatively modest fruit, the banana is having a disruptive role in world affairs. It is one of the world's most popular fruits: easily digested, nutritious, and widely and cheaply available. Its non-availability became a symbol of deprivation during wartime rationing (giving rise to the song, *Yes, We Have No Bananas*) and latterly a symbol of the lack of consumer choice in Eastern Europe before the collapse of the Berlin Wall. The swift availability of bananas in the former German Democratic Republic as a sign of what the west had to offer played a decisive role in the destructive rush to unification on strictly western terms. The world seems to have an insatiable appetite for bananas — and where there's demand there's supply, and where there's supply there's competition, and where there's competition there's a tendency to monopoly.

Britain traditionally obtained its bananas from the Caribbean small farm producers, Jamaica, Dominica, St Lucia and St Vincent. These favourable and special trading relations were taken with us when we joined the (then) Common Market. Britain received support for a protected market in bananas when Spain entered the (then) European Community — Spain has its own home production in the Canary Islands, from where the banana plants had been successfully transplanted during Europe's violent eruption into the New World. Within the European Union however, this protected market was challenged on the grounds of consumers' rights to cheaper fruit by the Germans and Dutch. A successful rearguard action was fought, in which the European Parliament and Labour MEPs played a conspicuous role. Encouragingly the European Union's "banana regime" was a rare example of Europe doing the decent thing of putting wider questions of economic welfare before the ability of multinationals' power to exploit the all-mighty excuse of consumer choice, for cheaper bananas could be supplied by the largely US owned banana plantations in Central America.

Scarcely was this victory secured when the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) provided the means for another attempt to bust open the banana regime. Broadly speaking the non-dominant economies had accepted the establishment of the WTO. It held out the promise of "rules based trade" and although there was no illusion that it would not be the major economic powers which made the rules, there was the prospect that the major trading powers themselves would be subject to rules. Some rules are better than no rules, the non-dominant economies argued, for no rules could only result in cut-throat competition dominated even more by the multinationals.

THE establishment of the WTO opens the possibility of binding arbitration in trade disputes. The danger lies in the fact that the international trade court could be driven by powerful litigants as so often happens in the USA. This is precisely what has happened in the banana trade. The USA has been persuaded by the Chiquita corporation to bring a case against the EU's banana regime and the WTO has found in the USA's favour. The court procedure emphasised how much the WTO is tilted against the small powers; for the USA could employ a range of well paid and well trained lawyers, yet initially two of the producer islands, St.Vincent and St. Lucia, found that when they hired outside help to advocate their case to cover their own lack of expertise their representatives were debarred because the WTO chose a strict implementation of procedure rules to insist that cases could only be advocated by state officials.

The EU and its Trade Commissioner Leon Brittan is now in a considerable dilemma as is, eventually, the British Labour Government with its commitment to "ethical foreign policy" which it will find is incompatible with its own commitment to market capitalism and competition. The EU will find it hard to maintain a united front, the Dutch and German governments will be reluctant to challenge the ruling from the WTO which actually supports their own earlier complaint against the EU. The EU really has only one realistic option and that is to rework its banana regime to make it WTO compatible, and yet make a clear decision to promote West Indian and Canary Island bananas.

As Labour prepares to take over the EU Presidency from January 1998 bananas raise quite a challenge. Of course, the Labour Government could weigh in with the fullest support for the Labour MEPs' campaign to persuade the consumer to shop ethically and eat West Indian bananas — the consumer can yet be king/queen. Peter Mandelson's talents of manipulation could be put to good use heading a more useful campaign than that colossal waste of money — the Millennium Project. Clare Short could also weigh in and rescue some of her reputation in the Caribbean after the public relations debacle in Monserrat. Robin Cook can say that ethical foreign policy means maintaining and furthering trade practices based on favouring developing countries and small scale family farms. Watch this space and eat bananas (from the Caribbean).

Labour Campaign for Lesbian and Gay Rights

Conference fringe meeting

Tuesday Sept. 30th, 5:45-7:00pm
Brighthelm Centre, Brighton

Speakers include Jackie Lewis (UNISON National Lesbian and Gay Committee), Alun Michael MP, Angela Mason (Stonewall) and John Little (*Independent* journalist).

Southall's tradition of solidarity

LLB interviewed Suresh Grover, co-ordinator of the Southall Monitoring Group-Unity, which draws on eighteen years of experience combatting racism and is organising a march for unity and against communal divisions on 12th October.

Q: Why has SMG-Unity called the demonstration on October 12th?

A: In recent years our community has witnessed the growth of communal organisations and of organised physical attacks. If this is not checked, it could lead to tragedy. The only way to check it is to raise the issue in public by building a strong and conscious movement for solidarity and unity. We must also look carefully at the causes of these developments. Our community suffers serious social and economic deprivation with staggering rates of unemployment. We have no resources for youth — clubs, sports facilities, training, cultural activities are all scarce. The organisations built by the young people themselves, like the Featherstone Road youth club, have been cut by local Labour councils. In the past young people have played a pivotal role in the struggles for justice in Southall but they are now without a voice. Our demonstration will emphasise the grievances of youth and the role youth have to play in building future unity. It will place the communal conflict in perspective. There is a crisis among the youth, but the last thing it needs is media sensationalism of the kind that blames everything on so-called "Asian gangs". Six months ago I thought that much of the problem stemmed from the youth's neeed for some form of identity in British society but after talking to young people on the ground I changed my mind. We have to look at the activities of two key players: the Chalvey Boys, made up of Muslim youth in Slough, and the Sher-e-Punjab, made up of Sikh youth from Southall. The SP is effectively the youth wing of the "Council of Khalistan", an anti-secular, anti-Hindu, anti-Muslim organisation which pushes a puritanical philosophy. It fears the influences of modernity and pluralism on the Sikh community and promotes a rigid and exclusive form of Sikh identity. The Chalvey Boys are effectively sponsored by the Hizbut-Tahir, which preaches that it is the duty of Muslim boys to convert Sikhs and others to Islam. These gangs are small — not more that 40 at most — and they are in reality a youth periphery of hard-core, highly ideological and unrepresentative political groups — but with the capacity to polarise our community and undermine our struggle against racism. They have to be countered by political mobilisation.

Q: What do you say to those who accuse you of doing more harm than good by focussing on such a divisive issue?

A: Our communities have never been homogeneous. The press portrays us as monolithic; they like to have a single leader speak for all of us. They would have you believe that hordes of "Asian gangs" dominate our daily lives. The implication is that we are victims of our own culture, not broader socio-economic forces. The reality is that there have always been divisons and struggles within the community. Although we have communal traditions we also have a very strong and long standing tradition of secularism . During the 1965 Indo-Pak war, there was a conscious and political effort to defuse tensions, led by local political activists. Similarly in the wake of Operation Bluestar in 1984, which threatened to polarise Sikhs and Hindus, progressive people helped resolve the tension by taking a public stand, often at risk to their own safety. SMG-Unity has always taken a stand against discrimination and injustice whether it comes from within or without our community. Our campaign against domestic violence is at the heart of our work. We have also persistently raised the question of how our community deals with new arrivals, including the refugees from Somalia who have come to live in Southall.

Q: Do racial attacks continue to be a major problem in Southall?

A: We face increasing numbers of physical attacks across west London. SMG currently supports some 400 families suffering racial harassment ranging from persistent verbal abuse to arson to physical assault. This increase has been visible over a long period. A year ago we felt we could cope but in the last few months there has been terrible demoralisation. The police and the courts now routinely blame the victims of racial harassment rather than the perpetrators. Even when people have been attacked in their own shops, it is alleged that somehow the attackers are the victims. The cuts made by local authorities in groups like the Newham Monitoring Project and the Hillingdon Monitoring Group have made our work that much harder. It is vital that we challenge the continuing bias in the media reporting of racial attacks. Recently a twelve year old white boy was attacked in Hounslow, allegedly by a gang of Asian boys. This was heavily covered in the *Sun*, complete with graphic photos of the boy's injuries, and also in other papers, none of which have even mentioned the scores of attacks on Asians by white racists which have taken place in the same area over recent months. On the Butts Farm Estate, which is near where the attack on the white boy took place, we currently support 27 families suffering racial harassment. A 19 year old Asian youth was beaten up by a gang of 15 white teenagers outside Hounslow East station. He ended up in hospital with a fractured jaw. None of the national media reported the event. This is only one of twenty five documented cases of racially motivated physical assaults which have taken place in the Hounslow area in the last three months.

Q: What changes have you noticed since the election of the Labour Government?

A: There have been no improvements and there are none coming in the foreseeable future. There is little respect on the streets for Labour politicians and little faith that they will deliver the jobs, housing, and public services we need here. The abolition of the primary purpose rule is the only positive development. We need much more sweeping changes in immigration law and practice. The Home Office should be working on a new system that would be fair to people from the third world. At the very least Labour could reverse the Tories' decision to take away non-visa status enjoyed by Commonwealth countries from Pakistan, India, Nigeria, Ghana, etc.

March for Unity through Southall

Sunday 12th October 1997

Assemble at 1.00 pm, Dominion Road, Southall, (Southall BR).

LLB page 26

Re-unite the Onibiyo family: bring Abdul and Ade home

John Stewart, treasurer of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, reports.

LABOUR'S election victory has brought no relief to Joyce Onibiyo and her family from Kennington, south London. The Onibiyos are one of thousands of families across the UK threatened with deportation under the vicious array of immigration legislation introduced by successive governments over the years.

Joyce and Abdul Onibiyo first came to the UK in 1964 (before many *LLB* readers were even born). They made their home here and their children were brought up and went to school here. Apart from a brief spell when they returned to Nigeria, Britain has been their home — where they have worked and paid taxes — for the past 30 years. To their horror, they were informed that their stay in Nigeria meant they had lost their right to live in Britain and that deportation proceedings would be started against them.

Despite an impressive campaign to defend the family, mounted by their friends and colleagues with the support of both their local UNISON branch and the national union, Abdul Onibiyo was deported to Nigeria in October 1995. Abdul is a known opponent of the Nigerian military government and has been active in pro-democracy groups. On his arrival at Lagos Airport he was handed over by British immigration officers to Nigerian officials who arrested and placed him into detention.

Not content with tearing the father away from his family, the Tory Government then moved against their teenage son Ade. He was held in Campsfield detention centre for a year while the Home Office sought his deportation to Nigeria. At the last moment, following an intervention from MP Bernie Grant, Guyana offered Ade a "safe haven" and he was removed to that country in May 1996.

Labour's election victory should have meant that the Onibiyos could finally be reunited. They had strong labour movement support among trade unions and the Labour Party. In opposition Jack Straw and the Labour front-bench had supported the family's right to remain in the UK. The family have a letter from Straw, written in 1996, promising to "certainly do what I can to help the Onibiyos further".

Unfortunately, so far it has been impossible to distinguish any difference between the Conservative and the Labour governments in this case. Abdul Onibiyo managed to flee Nigeria in June 1997. Despite ill health caused by the beatings and poor conditions he suffered in detention, he made it to another West African country, where he tried to arrange a return to Britain. Scandalously, the new immigration minister, Mike O'Brien, refused him entry clearance and he is now marooned in West Africa with nowhere to go, thousands of miles from his family in London.

In August the Home Office announced they would not revoke the deportation order against Ade and so he would be forced to remain in Guyana. They also wrote to the Onibiyos' solicitors, informing them that Joyce's application for compassionate leave to remain in the UK had been rejected and that deportation proceedings, initiated under the Tories, would be continued against Joyce and her two youngest daughters, Toro and Yemi.

At a hearing at the Immigration Appellate Authority in mid September, the case against Joyce's deportation was adjourned when lawyers for the Home Office produced a document purporting to show that Abdul had lied about his circumstances in Nigeria and that the family therefore had no valid asylum claim. This is yet more "dirty tricks" against the Onibiyo Family in an effort to discredit them, similar to the fake "Interpol document" used by the Tories in May 1996 to claim that Abdul was under no threat from the Nigerian authorities. The case against Joyce and her daughters continues on 2nd October.

The Labour Government's conduct in the case of the Onibiyos raises serious concerns for Party members who care about justice and the right of black families to live in this country without the threat of being torn apart and forcibly deported. Despite his earlier promises, Jack Straw hasn't lifted a finger to help the family. Junior minister Mike O'Brien has dismissed representations from the Onibiyos' supporters with an arrogance that borders on contempt. No compassion has been shown in this case. The Onibiyos have been treated disgracefully by the Tories and now Labour continues that treatment. If Jack Straw is to redeem himself in this case he would immediately allow entry clearance to Abdul and Ade Onibiyo, withdraw all legal proceedings outstanding against the family and allow them to live together in peace.

LLB readers wishing to support the Onibiyo family should write to Mike O'Brien at the Home Office, London SW1, quoting reference number 0107625.

● The Onibiyo Family Campaign can be contacted c/o Lambeth UNISON, 6a Acre Lane, London SW2. More information is available on this and other campaigns against deportations from the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, 22 Berners Street, Birmingham B19. tel. 0121-554 6947.

Quadrant Branch of North Islington Labour Party

sends greetings to all comrades at Conference

and invites them to our booksale:

18th October, 12-2pm

at the Congregational Church Hall, Highbury Quadrant, London N5.

● **Donations of books etc. gratefully received. Tel: 0171-226 5116.**

Greetings from the 1967 **Golden Guineas Fund**, still raising money for socialist causes after 30 years.

*The **Golden Guineas Fund** calls for fairness for sacked dockers from Labour Government shareholders and for justice in East Timor.*

— Bill Sefton

Worse than poverty stricken

Bob Spooner, Leeds NE CLP, marks the Government's White Paper on education.

THIS WHITE paper, *Excellence in Schools*, could have been produced by the last Government. The mainspring of Tory policy was to destroy equality of opportunity. They sought a "ladder of opportunity", a pecking order of schools determined socially by whether they were independent, grammar, city technical college, grant-maintained, voluntary, greenbelt, suburban or inner city and educationally by their position in the league tables, their SAT results and their truancy figures, with OFSTED reports as icing or mould on the cake. They stopped LEAs distributing resources in accordance with need and centrally controlled both finances and the curriculum. Whereas the basics of comprehensive education involved respecting everyone's individual talents, Tory policy was designed to suit the needs of employers and pour everyone into the same mould.

Excellence in Schools enshrines all the malign elements of Tory policy and even develops them. Its vision of the twenty first century is of a new industrial revolution fuelled by state school children, whose role is to replace the machinery that fuelled the last one; "then it was physical capital; now it is human capital," it says. It dismisses the work that went into developing comprehensive education by saying that "the preoccupation with school structures absorbed a great deal of energy to little effect". With the new principal that "standards matter more than structure", Blunkett makes it clear that the Tory divisions are here to stay.

Unbelievably, it repeats the old Tory lie that the "search for equality of opportunity became in some cases a tendency to uniformity". This, coming from those who insisted on school uniforms, who designed the national curriculum and judged every child by narrow academic attainment alone, used to be a bad joke. Coming from a Labour Government it ceases to be funny. The abandonment of equality of opportunity as an objective is another example of "thinking the unthinkable". The thrust of the whole document is to pressure schools into concentrating on SATs and GSCEs, which suit conformist minds and reduce education to a rat race. The pressure on schools is built around targets, but targets always distort the educational process, destroying the self-confidence of those who fail to meet them.

Those who progress slowly and have different abilities which lie outside the national mould tend to agglomerate in inner-city schools; this puts their teachers under stress. Blunkett's solution is to increase this stress with what the document calls "unrelenting pressure". Good heads have always sought to relieve pressure on staff, knowing that successful teaching requires relaxed conditions. Blunkett appears to think that stress improves performance! This is just stupid; but when the pressure is confined to those working in the most difficult conditions, who he threatens with "zero tolerance", the policy becomes malign. One must suppose that Blunkett thinks that children and teachers fail on purpose and that a few threats will bring them to heel.

One characteristic of the document is that every minor gain is packaged to conceal a betrayal. Abolishing the assisted places scheme, while welcome, masks a failure to end the charitable status of independent schools. Using the money (which will trickle in over seven years) to fund the reduction in class size to 30 for five, six and seven year olds, masks the disgraceful acceptance that nothing will be done about over-large classes elsewhere. As 30 per class can be achieved in primary schools by stockpiling children in older classes, even this limited promise is suspect.

Those anxious to find something to praise might well point to the emphasis on early-learning provision. Vouchers for nursery education were obnoxious but the main objection to them was the boost they gave to profit-making, independent provision. Whether the policy advocated in this document will do the same is unclear, but the emphasis on "partnership" leaves one suspicious. Similarly, the establishment of a separate qualification for head teachers appears to be a better thing than it may prove. If it means that in future all heads will be careerist, hard-nosed, able to sell themselves and their products in a highly competitive world, with high IT skills but with independence, originality and nonconformity eliminated and humanity underrated, it may be a mixed blessing.

Bearing in mind how long we have had to wait for a Labour Government this is a desperately disappointing document. We expected the service to remain poverty stricken for some time but *Excellence in Schools* could make things worse. It is based on extreme right wing educational philosophy. It preserves selection by postal district, which is arguably worse than by IQ, and will even allow comprehensive schools to polish up their snob appeal under the guise of specialisation. Even the elimination of the surviving grammar schools will depend on how the ballot is rigged, in other words who is allowed to vote on the future of each school. Unhappily, the document's real message is that a Government, already committed to preserving divisions in society, will be committed to an education policy that exacerbates them.

UNISON Housing Association Branch says

Keep the trade union link

LLB page 28

Welfare to Work: old wine in neo-liberal bottles

Peter Frankental, Hornsey and Wood Green CLP, examines the cornerstone of New Labour economics and finds it wanting.

IT SEEMS strange that the Labour Government should be recreating failed Tory job creation initiatives. It is bizarre that Welfare to Work should be wrapped up as a New Deal, and a sad reflection on the current policy vacuum that it has become the centrepiece of Labour's social and economic regeneration strategy.

So why is this happening? Is this Labour's response to the moral panic engendered by disaffected and jobless youth? Is it a case of Blair mirroring his role model, Bill Clinton? Or is it merely another attempt to reduce the welfare budget by pushing more people off the register? Within the context of youth policy, Welfare to Work is a non-starter. Many young people will choose to join their peers making a living within the informal economy rather than be coerced into low-paid jobs. The growing number of youths with no aspirations of entering the job market represents those most likely to be engaging in anti-social activities and least likely to benefit from the New Deal.

The US experience of Welfare to Work offers some encouragement to Blair. For example, the state of Wisconsin, where the official unemployment rate is only 2%, is about to abolish unemployment-related welfare. All individuals, including those with learning difficulties and disabilities, will be required to enter into a compact with the state, committing themselves to full-time or part-time employment, sheltered work or training. Echoing the former Soviet Union, Wisconsin is abolishing the very concept of unemployment. What ought to be of greater interest to the Labour Government is the widely acknowledged reality in the US that there are not enough entry level jobs to go around, even at a time when the economy is booming.

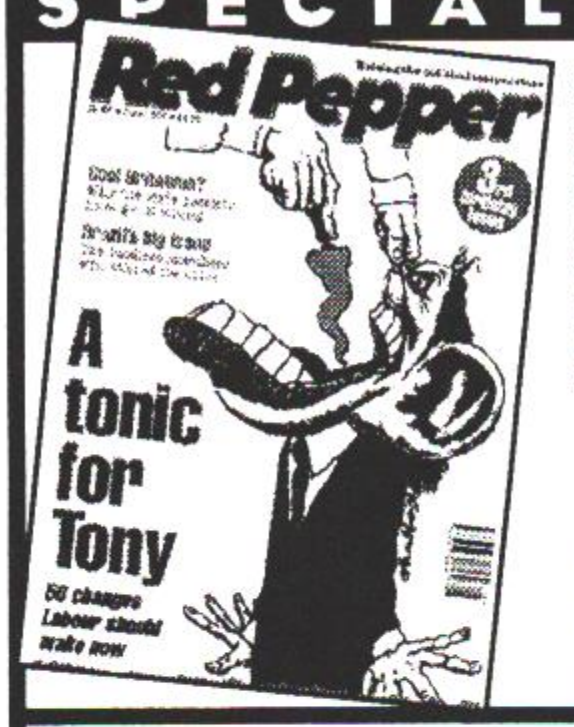
Of more comfort to Blair would be the knowledge that Welfare to Work in the US is having the effect of driving down wage rates for unskilled labour, contributing to a more competitive economy and greater exploitation of workers. Underpinning these low wage rates is a massive pool of illegal migrants, mainly from Latin America, who are willing to work for under $3 per hour (£2). No wonder the Labour Government is equivocal about a minimum wage!

New Deal is politically significant because the Labour Government has so much vested in it, both in terms of resources and credibility. The array of options and measures that form a part of New Deal makes this a more comprehensive package than the piecemeal job-creation programmes initiated by recent Conservative governments. None of this should be allowed to obscure the overriding reality behind New Deal, which is that a low-wage and low-welfare economy is an inevitable consequence of the global economic context. The Maastricht protocols put pressure on EU governments to keep down their rates of inflation and public sector borrowing requirements in order to meet the parameters deemed necessary for the single European currency to operate effectively. Workfare programmes fit the bill perfectly.

While Blair and Brown may be less ideologically committed to the free market than were Thatcher and her Treasury ministers, they are nonetheless being propelled in a neo-liberal direction by the forces of globalisation, which are pitting workers all over the world against each other in the relentless drive by transnational corporations to invest wherever the return on their capital is greatest. This is why Blair lectured the recent TUC Conference on the need for a flexible workforce (that is, an unprotected workforce with a minimum of rights). Welfare to Work should be seen as merely another dose of neo-liberal medicine, designed to maintain the competitiveness of the UK economy.

It is encouraging that the newly elected French Government under Lionel Jospin has tried to buck the neo-liberal trend by initiating a job creation programme of 350,000 community service jobs for young people at a minimum wage of over £700 per month. This goes to show that governments do have political choices and can fly in the face of neo-liberal orthodoxy if they are sufficiently committed to serving the interests of those who are economically marginalised.

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Spinning out of control

Don Rocinante reviews Campaign 1997 by Nicholas Jones, published by Indigo Books, £8.99 paperback.

THIS book rests on an interesting contradiction. As the story of the 1997 election campaign, the role of the media and the part played by photo opportunities and spin doctors is central to the narrative. Yet the sheer scale of Labour's victory on 1st May, the culmination of a huge opinion poll lead built up in advance, reduces the importance of anything done by media people and campaign teams in the five weeks before polling day.

For socialists, the book has three great merits. First, Jones tells the inside story of how New Labour leaders deliberately set out to upstage last year's TUC Congress to emphasise the distance between Blair and the unions. This was followed up by top level complaints to the BBC, when correspondents — Jones included — filed reports on trade union demonstrations or protests that called on Blair for support. This caused considerable friction between Jones and Labour's campaign supremo Peter Mandelson. On one occasion, Mandelson told Jones that most correspondents ended up "hating the trade unions" and wanted to know why he was different: "You still have time for the unions," he told Jones. "That causes me trouble."

Second, Jones tells the complex inside story of how Labour's proposal to increase the top rate of income tax was dropped, how there were real divisions between Blair and Brown over this and how this was a factor in the simmering feud between Brown's office and Mandelson. Jones' documenting of "off the record" remarks by differing Labour spin doctors creates a believable picture of the casual treachery and back-stabbing in Labour's senior ranks.

This is the third important observation in Jones' book: the utter charmlessness of the leading Millbank figures, amounting to real character flaws. Jones highlights many incidents in which journalists were routinely yelled at by Blair's press officer Alistair Campbell for their reporting. Jones himself was often on the receiving end, with other Labour spin doctors, such as Dave Hill and Charlie Whelan, joining in, "jabbing their fingers, denouncing me as a prat and a wanker, as Campbell continued his tirade."

Even after the election, Labour's media team kept winning candidates "on message", by putting the same soundbites into their victory speeches. The "spontaneous" greeting of Blair at 10 Downing Street the next day was also carefully choreographed from Millbank right down to the Union Jacks.

Today each of these figures occupies a key position in government, with Mandelson perhaps the most powerful politician after Blair — on several Cabinet committees and controlling the Government's output to the media. Watch out democracy!

THE END OF
PARLIAMENTARY
SOCIALISM

From New Left to New Labour

by
Leo Panitch and Colin Leys

A vivid historical analysis of the Labour Party's passage from 'from Benn to Blair', one of the most dramatic - and traumatic - transformations ever undergone by a major modern political party. This powerful analysis finds striking parallels between the circumstances that produced the Labour new left of the 1970s and those taking shape under New Labour today. Essential reading for anyone interested in the Labour Party today.

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FRINGE MEETING

THE END OF PARLIAMENTARY SOCIALISM

Leo Panitch and Colin Leys will be joined by Tony Benn MP and Hilary Wainwright to discuss **The End of Parliamentary Socialism** at the Labour Party Conference.

Time: 1pm

Date: Wednesday 1st October

Place: Room G7, Ground floor, Brighton University, 10-11 Pavillion Parade, Brighton

For more information contact **Laura Pearson** on **0171 437 3546**

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At the risk of the discussion becoming a ping-pong match, I'd like to respond to Tony Dale's letter in the September *LLB*.

I write not as a supporter of the SLP, the Socialist Party or even the Scottish Socialist Alliance, but as someone who has supported the creation of a socialist electoral (but not exclusively) alternative to the Labour Party since 1985. All of the three organisations above have shortcomings which, I believe, make them fall well short of offering a viable alternative.

I left the Labour Party in 1985, not because of what was happening then but because I realized that socialists always had been, and always will be, wasting their time in the Party. Thus the timing of the socialist challenge to Labour is not important for me.

I feel that Tony is being extremely complacent in stating "I believe that there is far greater support for socialist values than the election suggests." Where's the evidence? The fact that *The Sun* is still overwhelmingly Britain's biggest selling daily newspaper and the millions of people actively involved in grieving for the Princess of Wales suggests that the opposite is the case. The Labour left has been labouring under this illusion since 1900.

Seventy-three thousand votes for Dennis Skinner are not the point. The success of a socialist project outside the Labour Party does not depend upon persuading these 73,000 to leave the Party but instead getting a sizeable proportion of the rest of the approximately 57 million people in the country to first understand socialism and then actively support it.

Paul Allender,
Canterbury

I refer to the item in Periscope of the September issue. First let me assure you that I have consistently raised with Turkish authorities the matter of human rights abuses in Turkey, indeed I have probably written more letters to them than any other member of the European Parliament.

So far as the Turkish Republic of North Cyprus is concerned, it is part of the wider island of Cyprus. If Cyprus is to be successful in its application for membership of the European Union, I am sure you would agree that the full consent of both communities has to be given. There cannot be a case of forcing the Turkish Cypriots into the European Union without their rights being properly safeguarded. There are, in fact, two left parties in Cyprus, a Social Democratic Party, led by Mustafa Akinci, somewhat to the left of the Labour Party and a former Communist Party, led by Mehmet Ali Talat, this being the larger of the two left-wing parties. My view is that it is important to maintain links and relations with these parties, and it is in that spirit that I visited North Cyprus and maintained my contacts with the two parties and a wide range of people connected with that part of the island. Any forms of address accorded to politicians on the island are in accordance with the forms used by the leaders and members of these two parties.

If you are interested I would be prepared to write an article about North Cyprus and its problems for your esteemed publication.

Richard Balfe, MEP



LLB apology

An apology is due for our attacks on the LCC, Fabians, Mandelson and the Twiglets for producing unacceptable right-wing proposals. They're Bolsheviks compared with **Labour 2000**'s mag which argues against abolition of CCT, against the windfall tax and for "an end to the anarchy of public sector strikes". They say "surely the case for new legislation on damaging industrial action remains irresistible". Surely the case for public execution in such cases remains irresistible.

Progress Watch

Many Labour Party members have wondered how the ultra-modernisers of *Progress* magazine have managed to get hold of so many members' names and addresses. The source could be your MP. **Kate Dixon** and **Derek Draper** from *Progress* have written to many MPs stating "we are keen to provide the magazine to as many activists as possible. In order for us to do this we are reliant on the receipt of current GC lists. Please can you send us yours". Cheeky yes; breach of Data Protection Act probably.

Law and order

MPs who argue that Labour should always respect the law — as they did over poll tax and anti-nuclear campaigns — really should do the same themselves. Who is the latest one to be caught with no car tax? Step forward, the Member for Hartlepool.

Spun out of control

If the Millbank spindoctors are so bloody good, how come the announcement of **Tommy Graham MP**'s suspension was made on the day of the launch of the Scottish yes yes campaign thus overshadowing it on nearly every news bulletin?

Red Menace

Hidden away in the coverage of the ex-MI5 agents' exposé of incompetence in combatting the IRA and files on Jack Straw was the revelation that Peter Mandelson's file included a photocopy of his Communist Party membership card. If Democratic Left HQ can dig out the original, we can add it to our prize raffle.

Mystic Meg has nothing on *LLB*

You read it here first — in our election issue we reported exclusively that Roy Hughes (former MP for Newport East) would be rewarded with a peerage for standing down to allow Tory **Alan Howarth** in. Over the summer, he got his reward and joined the vermin in ermine.

Virtual peace process

Lateral-thinking guru Edward de Bono has set up an Internet website aimed at solving the problems of northern Ireland (http://www.edwdebono.com). Visitors are invited to log on and outline their solutions. Those who show creative thinking will be invited onto the next level of meaningful debate — the "middle ring". We understand **Mo Mowlem**'s office, despite numerous attempts, has yet to achieve this level.

AOB

"The dumplings at the SFA (Scottish Football Association) are supposed to represent the fans...They have brought shame on the nation. Mr. Farry (SFA chief executive) should resign immediately" — Campaign Group MP **Jimmy Hood** on reluctance to postpone Scotland's match against Belarus following Di's death.

"A flexible Labour market? When I hear the Labour Government using Tory phrases I shudder." — **John Edmonds**, GMB.

"Where employees take secondary action during a lawful dispute, workers must have the right to take solidarity action without fear of intimidation, legal action against the union, or sequestration" — **Tony Dubbins**, GPMU General Secretary.

Labour's unethical arms dealing



PHOTO: PATRICK DELANY

CAAT demo.

Will McMahon, Campaign Against the Arms Trade, slams the Labour Government's refusal to ban arms sales to members of the "genocidal hall of infamy".

ONCE AGAIN a Labour Government has become the friend of the arms trader. In 1966 Labour set up the Defence Export Services Organisation and in the 1970s Labour failed to rise to the challenge of the arms conversion movement. Now the Labour Government — that has roared so much about ethical foreign policy — has brought forth a mouse in terms of practical political change. Banning the export and production of land mines is fine but it is not a great political challenge. Banning the export of torture equipment had already been agreed — not even the Tories wanted to be seen to be in favour of free trade in electric shock batons. But there it stops.

Labour will not break from the Tory policy of using the arms trade as a diplomatic and strategic tool in a ludicrous attempt to maintain Britain's role as a global power. At the same time labour movement leaders use the cover of defending jobs to support the arms industry.

A press release issued by the AEEU at the TUC Conference argued unbelievably that arms supplies should continue to Indonesia because to stop them would mean that the UK would lose civil contracts, and defence workers would lose jobs. They also claimed that the economic situation for the poor in Indonesia — and by implication the human rights situation — was improving. The last argument is a sick joke.

LLB has reported over the years the ongoing genocide in East Timor, which has included the slaughter of newborn babies as part of an organised policy of mass murder. The Indonesian military stands alongside Pol Pot and the Nazis in the genocidal hall of infamy.

Indonesia itself had an election in May which was "Eastern Bloc" in character — multi-party but everybody knew which party was going to get 75% of the vote. Since then thousands more Indonesian troops have flooded into East Timor. Dozens of unarmed youth have been systematically tortured. Perhaps the AEEU press office might like to publicise some of these facts.

The suggestion that to stop arms sales to Indonesia might lead to the UK losing civil orders is based on ignorance beyond belief. What is true is that arms sales are used to curry favour and help repressive regimes crush democratic movements — thus allowing multi-nationals to exploit vulnerable workers. There is no evidence that ending arms sales leads to the cancellation of civil orders. If it did then the UK's civil export trade would be the hostage of the arms dealers — a good argument for getting out of the trade altogether.

The nub of the matter is that the AEEU organises workers in military export industry and would rather keep them in work by supplying arms to regimes that torture and gun down fellow trade unionists across the globe than campaign for a political alternative.

No economist would seriously argue that the ending of the UK's role as an arms trader would have anything but a minuscule effect on the overall UK economy or on manufacturing employment specifically. Even pessimistic predictions point to a neutral effect. Others suggest that switching the current £1 billion subsidy to civil exports would actually produce many more jobs than the 80,000 that arms exports provide.

There is no need for arms export workers to lose their jobs. The taxpayer currently pays a £12,500 subsidy to keep each of these workers in employment. Why not pay them to retrain and do something more useful instead? It is not as though the international demand for civil engineering, computing and other transferable skills is not there. By 2010 the global environmental technology market will be ten times the size of the arms market. It is not difficult to conceive of an alternative economic strategy.

LLB AGM

Open to all supporters

The left and the Labour Government - what now after Conference?

11am-5pm, Saturday 8th November
Caxton House, St. John's Way, London.
(Archway Tube)

Speakers include Tony Benn, Jeremy Corbyn, Liz Davies, Mark Seddon, Geoff Martin and Christine Shawcroft.

Indonesian union congress repressed

INDONESIAN POLICE have forced the independent trade union (SBSI) to cut short its second Congress in South Jakarta. At least nine Indonesian trade union activists were arrested while foreign delegates and two Dutch journalists attending the event were detained.

The Congress opened as scheduled on September 19th. By the afternoon session, the police blocked access to the streets where the SBSI is based and ordered the 200 delegates to finish their work.

In Brussels, the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) sent a strong message to Indonesia's authorities demanding the release of all detained foreign and Indonesian trade unionists and journalists. The first SBSI Congress in 1993 was also stopped by the police, an action that was strongly condemned at the time by the UN's International Labour Organisation.

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