LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

September 1997 price £1/50p

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- Communalism
- Devolution
- Liverpool dockers

THE TRUTH IS IN HERE!



EVIL PLOT TO TAKE OVER THE N.E.C.

Labour Left Briefing

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Labour in name only

Trade unionists gathered at this year's TUC Conference need to do some hard thinking. The temptation will be to greet the new Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues as conquering heroes. But a realistic assessment of the Government's performance so far will confirm that New Labour in office has given cause for deep concern and long-term anxiety.

Not only has there been no action at all on key long-standing commitments to the trade union movement, including rights at work from day one of employment, there is now an attempt to undermine the newly reinstated union rights at GCHQ with a "no disruption" clause that, it is rumoured, could later be imposed on other public sector workers. Cuts and privatisation continue apace in local government, the health service, and education. One of Tony Blair's closest friends in business, Bob Ayling, has waged a nasty anti-union campaign at BA. Not a finger has been lifted to aid the locked out Liverpool dockers (despite the Government's shareholding in Mersey Docks and Harbour Co.). And the minimum wage looks likely to be set at a level so derisory as to be counter-productive.

Most telling of all, this is the first ever Labour Government which has not immediately raised the levels of welfare benefits on reaching office.

It was insulting enough that Labour's plans for poverty were reduced to an after-thought, unveiled during the summer holidays; worse yet, the Social Exclusion Unit is charged not with spending but with saving money, by streamlining aid to the poor and eliminating alleged duplication. Responding to Roy Hattersley's criticisms, Mandelson (clearly here speaking for Blair) has condemned the idea of "throwing money at poverty". Thus we have the return of one of Thatcher's most outrageous exercises in Orwellian Newspeak. Let's be clear: without increased state spending — on benefits, public services, job creation measures — poverty in this country will continue to claim ever larger numbers of the working class, and plunge them ever deeper into misery and impotence. Having disowned increased spending, the Social Exclusion Unit will be left with only two functions: one, to provide a fig leaf for the Government, and two, to discipline the poor into an acceptance of their place in New Labour's shop-worn excuse for a brave, new world.

The Social Exclusion Unit defines the problem of poverty as a function of the "underclass", an alienated minority trapped in a cycle of despair and criminality. This sleight of hand shifts the burden of responsibility for poverty away from economic policy and on to the "culture" or even the "moral fibre" of those who suffer it. Trade unionists have a direct interest in rejecting this falsehood. They know that the continuing existence of mass unemployment, and of a large pool of unskilled, casualised labour, dilutes the bargaining power of all workers, and lowers wages and conditions across the board.

Under New Labour's twin disciplines of "welfare reform" and "labour market flexibility", workers of all types and in all sectors will suffer increased insecurity and exploitation. Education and training are held up as the only protection against the brute forces of global competitiveness, yet this Government has become the first to introduce university fees. The Tories would not have dared take such a flagrantly reactionary step. Contrary to Government propaganda, fees — which will rise well beyond the £1,000 mark soon enough — are clearly a disproportionate deterrent to the poor. Providing the broadest and best education for the populace as a whole is the duty of society as a whole, not just of those individuals who may directly benefit from it at some point in the future. "Pay-as-you-learn" is a dangerous precedent: once established in higher education, it will be a more acceptable way of solving the underfunding crisis in further education. If the principles guiding the introduction of university fees are applied elsewhere in the public sector, we will see the end of all universal provision and of all funding from general taxation.

The big lie behind the university fees gambit is that somehow the country can no longer afford to fund higher education. In fact, conversion of some 10% of current military spending would cover the long term shortfall in university funding, as would the rescinding of Gordon Brown's 2% cut in corporation tax, not to mention a modest increase in the top rate of personal income tax.

Under New Labour's current policies, the poor will get poorer, and more numerous, while the rich will get richer, and more powerful. Workers and unions will lose even more clout in the workplace while employers run rampant. Eventually, as sure as night follows day, rising unemployment will follow high interest rates and cuts in public spending. It is up to the trade union movement to blow the whistle — sooner rather than later — on a Government which is Labour in name only.❑

Left slate for the Labour Party NEC elections

Division III (CLPs):
Diane Abbott, Jeremy Corbyn, Lynne Jones, Ken Livingstone, Alice Mahon, Alan Simpson, Dennis Skinner.

Division IV (Women): Christine Shawcroft.

National Constitutional Committee:
Shirley Gadsdon.

Votes must be in by Friday 26th September!

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Oh dear, oh dear — oh Dearing!

Steve Reicher, St Andrews AUT, reports on Labour's plans to stop equal access to education.

THE DEARING REPORT on Higher Education was bad: tuition fees of £1,000 per year for all students. Government reaction was worse. While they threw a sop by remitting tuition fees in full if parents earn under £16,000 and in part if parents earn below £32,000, they also announced the maintenance grant would be turned into a loan.

Dearing had rejected this option on the grounds that it would redistribute money from the poor to the rich. The worse off will now have to borrow money, so repayment terms for the better off become easier. The poorest students will lose around £7,000 in grant and only save £3,000 through not paying fees — so much for Blunkett's claim to be protecting the weakest.

The Dearing Report was set up as part of a tacit deal between Labour and Conservative to bury the crisis of higher education as a political issue in the election campaign. The Tories had expanded the numbers of students in higher education while decreasing the money in real terms — by a third over the last ten years with a further 10% reduction planned over the next three years. The results were obvious: decaying buildings, under-equipped labs, overcrowded classrooms, student hardship and stagnating staff salaries. Labour might attack these in opposition but were not prepared to pay for high quality mass higher education.

Since the Dearing Commission had to work within broad Treasury limits, it could choose between admitting standards would slip and making those in higher education pay: staff on low salaries and students by losing grants and by tuition fees. New Labour's response, driven by a desire to save even more money from the exercise, was consistent with Brown's budget measures of taking proportionally more from the poor. Labour planned to get away with it by clever PR: MPs were told to concentrate on the fact that parents' contributions will not rise (true, but the burden of repayment shifts from parent to student) and the fact that students from lower income families will not pay fees (not mentioning that their grant will be withdrawn).

The significance of Labour policy was illustrated by two reports published the same week as Dearing's. First, it was shown that your chances of getting to university are 80% if you come from a professional middle class background but only 10% if you come from a manual working class background. Like all previous expansions of higher education, all that happens is that larger sections of the middle class get in. Second, it was revealed (no great shock, this) that the gap between rich and poor is larger than ever and, in large part, comes from the lack of qualifications and thus access to skilled jobs by those from poorer backgrounds.

The poor remain poor because they are excluded from the education that might improve their position. Labour's response — to make higher education massively more expensive for students — can only entrench and increase social inequality, despite Mandelson's cosmetic efforts.

There are two further reasons to oppose Labour's plan. First, it not only reinforces Tory economic policies but capitulates explicitly to Thatcherite ideology that students should pay because education is an individual resource. We get educated to become little entrepreneurs maximising our own incomes. This abandons the notion that education is a social good, undertaken to improve the general state of society and enabling people to provide a greater social contribution. Once we see education in individual terms, how long is it before there are tuition fees at sixth form — after all not everybody stays on and those that do may well end up with better incomes?

The second reason is that, for all their significance, tuition fees and loans won't raise that much money. The Dearing proposals were estimated to "save" £1.1 billion per year, the Labour plans £1.7 billion. They will require a massive bureaucracy and all the problems of chasing students, administering a means test and so on. This money could easily be raised by other means by a Labour Government with the political will to tackle inequality rather than talk about it. Graduate employment increases the national income by an estimated 8%.

The day before Dearing, NUS and AUT were arguing that business benefits from university training and that they should therefore pay a "graduate tax". But they weren't opposing tuition fees. It was left to marginal figures like Ted Short to declare that they were ashamed of Labour and were thinking of tearing up their Party card.

The issue really is that big. Labour is proposing the end of the principle of free education. It is putting a locked door between the poor and the universities. Every constituency in the country should make sure that its MP is deafened by the howls of outrage demands opposition to Blunkett's policy.

Why Trainer needs retraining

Jon Green, South Bank University, reports: Even Dearing will be a little despondent. After 14 months' work, his report will be remembered for ending free education, rather than heralding a new expansion of the HE sector. The National Union of Students (NUS) opposed college principals' suggestion of local fees and the national fees Dearing would bring: but the New Solutions Group around new President Duncan Trainer felt outright opposition was not the best tactic. He led the successful campaign for NUS to propose a graduate tax as a better option to save money. Now NUS has agreed to a pragmatic approach, it is badly placed to do a U-turn and argue for the retention of the maintenance grant. Whether Trainer really thought Blair would take his sacrifice of the graduate tax — or whether he proposed it in order that his posturing outrage at the maintenance grant abolition would make him look good to students — is a matter of conjecture.

Under Labour's plans, graduate debt is estimated to rise to £12,000. However, the number of graduate jobs has not increased in line with the number of graduates over recent years. Graduates are facing unemployment or taking jobs which don't require degrees — forcing down wages and increasing unemployment amongst non-graduates. The debate has focussed on the 18 year old school leavers who form just under half the student population. Mature students will be especially deterred by the cost of going to university, with less time to repay their debts, and the aim to increase the proportion of the population with graduate qualifications will be jeopardised. Student unions will have to put pressure on the NUS leadership to oppose tuition fees and support the grant. This issue should unite all students and provide an opportunity to fight for the principle of free education once again.

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Dirty spin doctors

Peter Frankental exposes the polluters' PR company with its tentacles at the heart of government.

BRITISH PETROLEUM'S court action against Greenpeace and their subsequent decision to withdraw their damages' claim raise the stakes yet again in the war of the transnationals against the environmentalists. While legal proceedings are loaded heavily against activists, as the McLibel Two and anti-roads protestors have found, the public relations' battle is a more even contest. While direct action can be effective in gaining media coverage and public support for causes, the resources of transnationals can equally buy a lot of valuable advertising. A recent *Guardian* article (13th August 1997) exposed the news management techniques of the world's largest PR and crisis management consultancy, Burson-Marsteller.

When thousands were killed and maimed by Union Carbide's leaking chemicals at Bhopal, Burson-Marsteller were quickly on the scene to ensure that Union Carbide's version of events was picked up by the world's media. When the Exxon Valdez leaked oil in Alaska, Burson-Marsteller were brought in to smooth over the troubled waters. When Argentina's junta were throwing dissidents out of helicopters, Burson-Marsteller were acting on their behalf to promote trade. When Three Mile Island spilled out its nuclear toxins, who better to reassure the US public than Burson-Marsteller. One of their current campaigns is convincing the public of the safety of genetically altered food.

Their other clients include McDonalds, Canada's timber industry, and the governments of Saudi Arabia and Indonesia. In the US and Canada, Burson-Marsteller has mobilised in support of the National Smokers' Alliance, against a proposed energy tax, in support of the fur trade and in favour of a growth hormone that boosts milk production. The more ecologically damaging a process or event, the more likely it is that Burson-Marsteller will be called upon to manipulate public opinion in its favour.

A network of 36 offices ensures that their tentacles are spread around all the key centres of power worldwide, with sophisticated political contacts. Derek Draper, for example, is a former chief aide to Peter Mandelson, and a director of *Progress* magazine, a bland publication notable for carrying advertisements for the armaments' industries. According to *The Independent*, he is also an employee of the political consultancy, Prima Europe, which jointly produces publications with Burson-Marsteller. It's hardly surprising therefore, that a recent edition of *Progress* contained a supplement promoting the manufacturers of weapons of mass destruction. What is more worrying is that this edition purported to come from the Labour Party and was circulated selectively to Labour Party members. Now that companies like Burson-Marsteller can no longer pay MPs to do their dirty work, they can quite easily slide in through the back door of ministerial offices and policy units. It is clearly time to broaden the debate on parliamentary ethics to cover the conduct of the executive and the insidious influence of the arms industry.

Who buys the Reeboks?

Sue Cohen (Single Parent Action Network) and Peter Beresford (Open Services Project and Citizen's Commission on the Future of the Welfare State) argue that poverty has to be tackled with the participation of the poor.

"POLICIES WILL always reflect the interests of those who are dominant. If we are going to have effective democracy it has to include everyone." These words come from one of the contributors to the publication launched by the UK Coalition Against Poverty in August. Refreshingly, whereas most studies on poverty are led by academics, politicians and "professionals" in the voluntary sector, this has been drawn together by those with direct experience of poverty. People in poverty rarely find a voice. It is unhealthy for the democratic process to exclude the 14 million people who live in poverty. It is also unhealthy for new policy-making; lack of effective consultation means New Deal policies will have inbuilt contradictions, causing further havoc in people's day-to-day lives.

Participants describe the effects of being poor in an affluent society. "You're like an onion and gradually every skin is peeled off of you and there's nothing left. All your self-esteem and how you feel about yourself is gone — you're left feeling like nothing and then your family feels like that."

"You know who buys the Nikes, the Reeboks? It isn't the wealthy, it's the people who don't have anything because they think they can buy self-esteem and dignity through designer clothes. I know a woman with a shop who targets those people because she knows they'll buy."

It describes ways of uniting around difference and exposes the myths — for example, that if you are in poverty you can't be working hard. The UK Coalition is a unique alliance between representatives of grassroots organisations who have personal experience of poverty with paid employees working on anti-poverty strategies. The organisation has embarked on ground-breaking work to formulate a National Poverty Eradication Plan for the UK, involving more than welfare to work policies.

"One Nation" politics have in the past meant that those in poverty generally get told what is best for them. The UK Coalition acknowledges that those with experience of the problems are best placed to inform measures designed to eradicate poverty.

●The report is available from CAP for £3. To order a copy or find out more, contact UK Coalition Against Poverty, 17, Grove Lane, London SE5 8RD. Tel: 0171-703 5400. Fax: 0171-703 5745.

YES — IE! for a

Ceri Evans, YES Campaign Co-ordinator and Cardiff West CLP, argues that all British socialists should have no hesitation in calling for a "Yes" vote.

ONE OF THE most immediate consequences of the election of a Labour Government has been the decision to call referenda on a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly. Scotland will vote on the 11th of September and Wales will follow on the 18th.

The proposed Welsh Assembly will be a 60 seat body with limited powers, elected by an additional member system (40 seats elected by first-past-the-post and 20 seats allocated using local lists).

The arguments in favour of a Welsh Assembly are very clear. During their 18 years of rule the Tories constructed a highly undemocratic quango-state in Wales. The Welsh Office has a budget of £7 billion, £2.3 billion of which is spent by the quangos. Under the Tories, the post of Secretary of State for Wales was increasingly used as a testing ground for young hopefuls, such as John Redwood and William Hague. Far from being representatives of Wales in London, they were very much the representatives of London in Wales. Labour's current proposals for Wales, though limited, would at least give control over most Welsh Office functions to an elected body. Socialists should support any measures which extend the control of ordinary people over their politicians and the state. Perhaps more importantly, the Assembly has the potential to become a focus for the demands and struggles of Welsh workers. It will be elected by us and speak in our name, we must demand that it speaks and acts to defend our interests.

Of course, many people in the Labour Party support the Assembly proposals for very different reasons to these. The traditional right-wing leadership of the Wales Labour Party, based on local government and the trade union bureaucracy, has grudgingly conceded support for an Assembly. They hope to turn it into little more than a glorified county council, stuffed with the kind of yes-men who populate most valleys' Labour councils. Blair's project is a little more sophisticated, and seeks to create regional assemblies in an effort to "spread the blame" for difficult decisions which lie ahead. Neither of these scenarios should cause the left to reject a Welsh Assembly. On the contrary, our task is to subvert both these projects, in an effort to create a genuinely representative, popular and campaigning Assembly, unafraid of criticising the right-wing policies of the current Labour Government. The demand that women are equally represented in the Assembly is crucial in this respect.

A conference was held in Cardiff on July 19th, entitled "Socialists and a Welsh Assembly". The purpose of this event was to begin to develop a socialist agenda for a Welsh Assembly and to debate the issue of whether socialists should call for a "YES" vote in September. The conference was attended by activists from the Labour Party, Plaid Cymru, the Communist Party, trade unions, pensioners' and unemployed workers' organisations and the far-left. Broad agreement existed on our approach to the Assembly. A statement was adopted, dubbed the "Cardiff Declaration". The conference organising committee is continuing to meet in order to produce campaigning material under the slogan: "Socialists say YES!".

The NO campaign, after several shambolic false starts, has now found a sponsor in the form of Sir Julian Hodge, a multi-millionaire living in tax-exile in Jersey. He is joined by a few members of Rhondda Labour Party, along with the nauseatingly sycophantic Lord Tonypandy, who supported the Referendum Party in the last election, and an assortment of other reactionaries. These

The Cardiff declaration: Socialists Say YES!

This Conference declares its support for the right of the people of Wales to self-determination and calls for the establishment of a Welsh Assembly with the right to decide for itself which powers to retain in Wales and to determine its relationship with the rest of Britain and Europe.

Such an Assembly will need to have the law-making and financial powers necessary to begin to overcome the damage inflicted upon Wales by 18 years of Tory rule from Westminster. It should pursue policies for full employment, the expansion of public services and for greater democracy. As a first step it should cancel proposed hospital closures, abolish the quangos in their present unaccountable form, and take back into public ownership Hyder and other privatised utilities.

A Representative Assembly

Its electoral system should ensure that it is representative of the whole of Wales, through a system of proportional representation for the election of all seats in the Assembly, and is composed of equal numbers of women and men. Members of the Welsh Assembly should not be able to hold simultaneously any office as MP, MEP or councillor, even though councillors are not waged.

Labour's proposed Assembly falls short of these objectives but at least offers the people of Wales some measure of democratic control over the decisions which affect their lives. Furthermore, it will be an important line of defence against any future right-wing government at Westminster. It is therefore essential to win a substantial YES vote in the referendum on September 18th. We call upon all socialists in Wales to campaign actively to maximise that vote. We completely reject the stand-point of those in Wales who advocate a NO vote on supposedly socialist and internationalist grounds. It is a hollow internationalism that cannot recognise the specific needs and aspirations of the people of Wales, a strange socialism that is so fond of the centralist and outdated British state.

Campaign for a YES Vote

This Conference resolves to publicise this declaration under the slogan: Socialists Say YES! to work with all existing YES campaigns and to argue the socialist case for a YES vote throughout the labour movement and the left in Wales. We will also take every opportunity to fight for a strengthening of the proposals, in line with the objectives set out above. We call upon the Labour Party to conduct a vigorous mass campaign in support of the Assembly proposals. Victory will only be assured if Welsh working people are convinced that an Assembly will give them a real democratic voice.

- Flyers and posters putting the socialist case for a Welsh Assembly are available from Socialists say YES! Cardiff Centre for Trade Union Studies, 131 Crwys Rd, Cardiff CF2 4NH. Tel: 01222-390273.

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Welsh Assembly

people share a common hatred for any expression of Welshness which goes beyond the stereotypical male voice choirs, leeks and rugby! Their campaign consists of little more than scare-mongering — about who will control the Assembly: "North Wales under the thumb of South Wales" — and how much it will cost: "Welsh taxes soaring by £1,200 a head."

Anti-Assembly Labour MPs have been careful not to associate themselves with this rag-tag bunch. Nevertheless, left wing MP Llew Smith needs to explain how he can support a NO vote, a position which only the Tories support in Wales! Socialism is inconceivable without widespread national and local autonomy and yet Llew seems to prefer the existing British state, which is both centralist and archaic, to the limited democratic gain which a Welsh Assembly would represent.

It is also vital that socialists in England raise the issues within the English labour and trade union movement. This is not a struggle for the Welsh or the Scottish alone — a victory in September will be a gain for the working class throughout the British state.

Yes! Yes! — the Scottish referendum

Our Scottish correspondent reports.

THERE SEEM TO be two referendum campaigns in Scotland. I'm not referring to Think Twice versus Scotland Forward, but to the campaign on the ground and the campaign in the media. The Think Twice campaign, which is led by Tories who rarely do, has little or no presence on the streets and doorsteps, while Scotland Forward and its supporting organisations (almost everyone except the Tories) are busy holding public meetings and giving away loadsaleaflets.

Local papers reflect this activity, but the Scottish national media tells a different tale. At one end of the spectrum, the *Daily Record* is backing the Yes! Yes! campaign with T-shirts and the like. At the other, the right-wing press will seize on anything which seems to undermine the double yes campaign (while attempting to give the impression of balance). *The Scotsman* — previously a liberal-cum-nationalist paper — has, under the guiding hand of Andrew Neill, adopted this fairer to some than others approach.

After the high profile campaign launches, most MPs are taking a holiday break, so things have gone a little quiet. Looking at the campaign now, you would be forgiven for thinking that the main enemy for the double Yes vote is apathy, but we can expect the battle to heat up again by the end of August. It may be that the No campaigners, aware of their weakness on the ground, are also saving their thunder for the final two weeks. It is predictable what that thunder (whimper?) will be. Tax powers are correctly perceived as the weak link. While support for a parliament has been over 75%, support for tax powers has hovered in the fifties. Labour has tried to bury the issue several times, as though it is something shameful. A second question, a promise not to use it for the first term, even a second referendum. Clearly some influential members of the Party think it wouldn't be so bad if we didn't get the revenue powers.

So, assuming we do get there, what difference will it make? Well, there are the well worn but valid arguments about what devolution has done for our continental neighbours. If we follow the Spanish path, it could lead to more demand for regional assemblies elsewhere, and more power for the one we are about to set up.



Henry McLeish MP and Nigel Smith, chairman of Scotland Forward

It will also have profound effects on the Scottish political scene. Not just through increased availability of slots for political faces to fill (which might include a few new faces), or a parliament filled with non party political media stars (seriously suggested but highly unlikely). The most profound effects are likely to be felt through the electoral system. The additional members system will run within existing Euro boundaries. Up to ten first past the post seats, plus seven additional members, will mean that the threshold for election comes down to just about 5%. At this level, we can expect parties other than the big four to emerge with a voice in the new parliament, and with the 1999 Euro elections also to be run under PR, it is not inconceivable that other parties could get success there too.

The left, particularly within the Labour Party, is going to have some hard decisions to make. For those outside, other than the Greens after another environmental crisis, electoral success will probably rest on building a broad coalition between groups who are more used to arguing than working together. The Scottish Socialist Alliance has set itself the task of doing that (and as a result turned their back on the monoculture of the SLP). The influence of the SSA is still patchy and thin though. Apart from the strong local following for Tommy Sheridan, they did not do particularly well in the General Election. The left within the Labour Party is hoping that the Scottish Parliament could herald a return to the principle of the broad kirk, which historically has worked well within Scotland. The signs are not auspicious however, with rumours of approved lists of candidates circulating in advance of any official panel being opened. The lists are not reported to contain the names of any leftwingers. More significantly perhaps, the panel when it does arrive will be subject to stringent vetting. It remains to be seen whether this will be based on experience and ability or on political acceptability.❑

PiP: the management of criticism

Former Labour Party General Secretary Jim Mortimer argues that the union voice in the Labour Party brings a whiff of real life that the Millbank Tendency is worried about.

NO ONE SHOULD be in doubt as to the main intention of the sponsors of the proposed constitutional changes for policy-making in the Labour Party set out in the document *Partnership Into Power* (PiP, formerly Labour Into Power) circulated in revised form last month. It is that criticism of Government policy from within the labour movement should be muffled as far as possible by the setting-up of internal committees. These will be less likely to attract public attention than debates at Labour Party Conference. The proposals have much more to do with the management of criticism than with concern about deficiencies in the existing system. New Labour wants to ensure that protests about policy — inevitable as the Government's commitments unfold (Tory spending limits, no increase in income tax rates on the wealthy, very little, if any, redistribution of wealth and income and the retention of the main framework of anti-union legislation) — are kept within limits so as not to threaten these commitments.

The unions stand to lose much if the sponsors of these new proposals get their way. The great advantage of trade union influence in the Labour Party is that the unions bring to bear the bread-and-butter issues of the day — the experience and feelings of millions of working people. This is expressed in debates which focus on the main issues.

In an article in *The Times* written shortly before the recent General Election Tony Blair gave a clear signal of his attitude to the main body of anti-union legislation introduced during the years of Margaret Thatcher and John Major. He made it clear that it will remain and he acknowledged that Britain would continue to have laws which are among the most restrictive in western Europe. He made this acknowledgement not as a matter of shame about the state of Britain but as an assurance to the readers of *The Times* that New Labour if elected would make little real change to the restrictions on organised labour. It seems that he will be true to his word.

Today in Britain, not one of the fundamental rights of organised labour is properly observed. Employers can resist trade union organisation, recognition and collective bargaining without legal penalty. They can withdraw trade union recognition by their own decision and when they think they have sufficient strength to enforce their will. The right of workers to withdraw their labour is subject to a succession of legal hurdles, all designed to protect employers. The right of groups of workers to help each other through solidarity action in industrial disputes, as a combination of persuasion and demonstration of support, has been severely curtailed. Unions no longer have the right to determine their own system of elections for their principal officers and representatives. Union affairs are subject to legal interference on a scale far greater than for other voluntary organisations, including political parties.

The intention of the Labour Government in relation to trade union rights is to do just enough to enable them to show, justifiably, that they are better than the Tories. They have restored the right of trade union organisation at GCHQ. They have taken the initial step — by the appointment of an independent commission — for the introduction of a national minimum wage. The requirement for periodic ballots for the voluntary payment of union subscriptions through the employer's payroll will be abolished. Labour will accept the Social Chapter. Other modest measures are probable, but the basis of the restrictive legal regime introduced by successive Conservative governments will remain.

It is not only in relation to legal rights that the trade union movement will find it necessary to exert pressure on the Government. It is also on a whole range of economic issues.

Who in the trade union movement would have believed that one of the first acts of a newly-elected Labour Government would be to hand over the control of interest rates to the bankers? Since the election, interest rates have been increased on four occasions. Millions of families are paying extra through their mortgages and the interests of manufacturing industry and its employees have been damaged.

Who would have believed that it would be a Labour Government that introduced fees for university tuition and abolished maintenance grants? Whoever thought it likely that in its first Budget a Labour Government would introduce tax change to take billions annually from pension funds?

In the years of Conservative rule Britain became an even more unequal society. A recent report of the Institute for Fiscal Studies demonstrated that poverty has increased dramatically. The rich became richer. Why is New Labour so reluctant to do anything effectively about the obscene inequality of British society? The excuses of the Mandelsons and the Blunketts are unpleasant to witness.

It is against these policy issues that New Labour's proposals for the constitution have to be considered. Labour's conference must remain the focal point for key debates.

Manchester Area Campaign Group Rally

7.30pm Thursday 11th September

SPEAKERS:
Dennis Skinner, Liverpool dockers

Main Hall, Friends Meeting House
Mount Street, Manchester

LLB page 8

Take the power!

Pete Willsman from the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy outlines the choices that will face delegates at this years' Labour Party Conference on Partnership In Power (PiP).

HARD BOILED *LLB* readers do not need reminding that one of the main motivations behind PiP is to rob Party members of any real influence on policy. If it goes through we know just what sort of policies we'll be saddled with. Making students pay for their higher education is just a taster, but even this was enough to provoke Ted Short, the former education minister, into saying that he may leave the Party. To think that we always regarded him as hard right!

We face an historic turning point: the end of the Party as a vehicle for radical social change. Only a united and wholehearted fight back over the next year or two by every socialist who believes in the Party offers any hope of defeating the "modernisers". This means putting aside pet projects and sectarian squabbles and knuckling down.

As far as PiP is concerned, a good start has been made with the hundred Conference resolutions. Many Party activists have got the message — despite the honeymoon period. This has worried the Millbankers. They spent the summer organising briefings where CLP activists were given the hard sell. At these meetings the big wigs have been forced to admit that the National Policy Forum has been a complete flop. But they still vehemently argued for more of the same: namely a revamped forum. They promised to feed into the NEC all comments made at these soft soaping meetings. This was a complete sham. The final report, agreed by the NEC in July, completely ignored submissions from CLPs and unions. It was essentially identical to the original document issued in January. Even the craven and gullible hacks on the *Guardian* are beginning to realise that the silk glove of fine sounding words disguises a stalinist fist. The *Grauniad* found the arrogant ruthlessness in Uxbridge unsettling, especially Blair's comment — "What matters is that we have somebody who is thoroughly New Labour and is a supporter of mine." An unnamed spokesman tried to smear David Williams, the rejected Labour candidate, by raising the militant bogey. These shadowy people have no integrity whatsoever. Most of them have only recently emerged from the cesspit that is student politics.

It is now clear that the NEC will try to force a raft of rule changes through this year's Conference that would give effect to all of the main proposals in PiP. If carried these rule changes would:

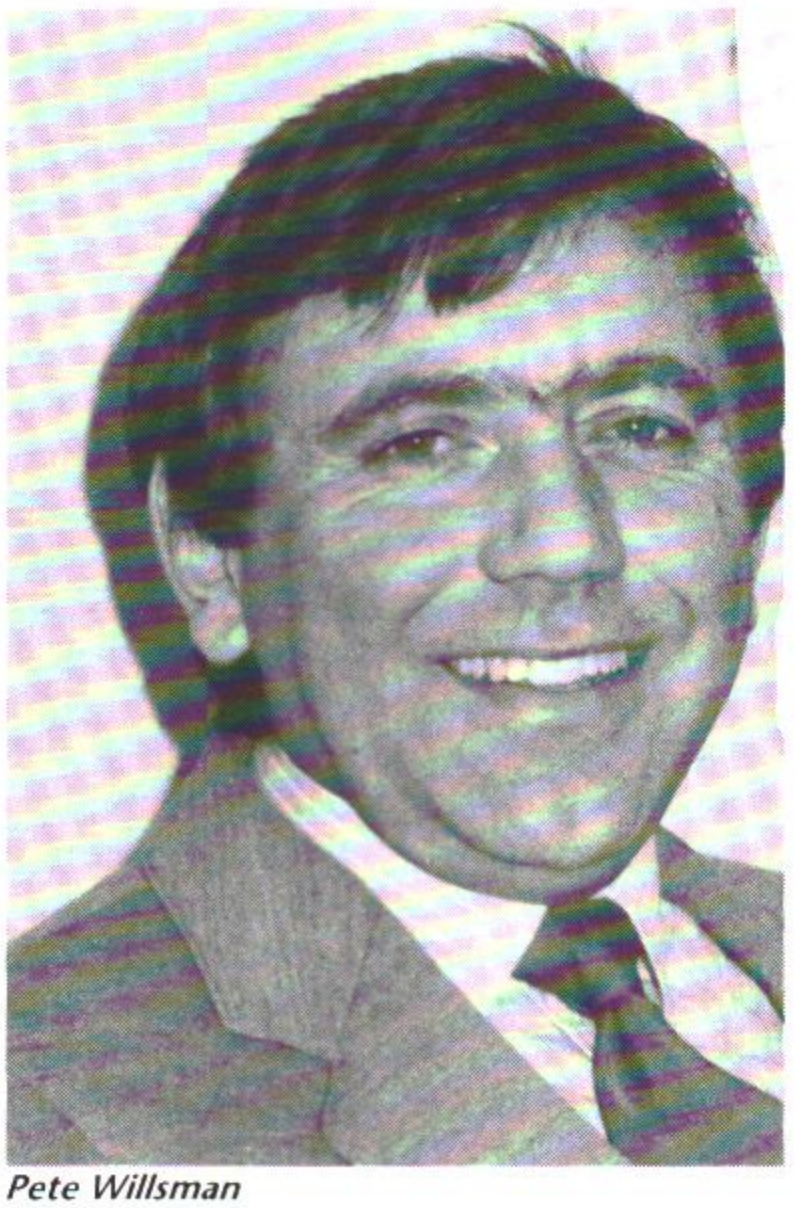
- abolish the existing right of CLPs and unions to submit resolutions and amendments to Conference.
- abolish the Women's Section of the NEC.
- ban MPs from standing for the CLP Section of the NEC.
- reduce the CLP Section from seven to six seats.
- downgrade the role of the NEC.
- encourage CLPs to "pilot new methods of organisation".

The strategy for confronting this at Brighton needs to be thought through very carefully. The first line of defence should be full support for the delay motion sponsored by Keep the Party Labour, Labour Reform and CLPD. This motion has overwhelming support in the CLPs but there is still a lot of work to be done in the unions. The Millbankers see PiP as a means of further centralising authority and control in the parliamentary leadership and reducing the influence of the unions. Unfortunately some senior union officials seem to be hypnotised like rabbits in a car's headlights.

We face an historic turning point: the end of the Party as a vehicle for radical social change.

A further motion likely to be before Conference should also be fully supported if the delay motions fall. This calls for an annual rolling programme — directly amendable by CLPs and unions. This would be an advance on the existing practice where Conference policy can easily be ignored. It would also be in line with practice in European socialist parties (e.g. Sweden) and with the proposals from Larry Whitty carried in 1990.

Another important motion before Conference is likely to be one upholding the Party's federal structure. It is this framework which



Pete Willsman

enables the Party to retain its links with organised labour and grass-roots members and supporters. PiP seeks to undermine and ultimately end this vital link. It is argued that the Cabinet, MPs, MEPs and local councillors warrant special representation on the NEC.

PiP is transparent. Labour's parliamentary elite seeks to dominate not just policy-making but also the composition of bodies elected by Labour organisations and the wider membership. Once the trade union influence on the NEC is diluted, the way will be cleared for the NEC to introduce a ballot of all members to remove the unions from the Party altogether. As with Clause IV this will be posed as a vote of confidence in the leadership. This is precisely what Stephen Byers proposed in that restaurant at the TUC in 1996. The unions are being told that PiP is aimed at constituency activists and that the unions need have no fears. Nothing could be further from the truth.❑

More questions than answers

Ann Black from Labour Reform's Steering Committee offers her point of view on *Partnership in Power.*

SO FINALLY we have the Conference papers on *Partnership in Power*. How will it play out in October? Some proposals have been widely trailed. The Women's Section of the NEC will be replaced by quotas. MPs will no longer be able to stand in the Constituency Section. A two-tier NEC, with less frequent full meetings and much work delegated to "lead" members and Party officers, appears confirmed. Conference will focus on papers from the National Policy Forum and the NEC. Motions may still be submitted on matters not substantively addressed in these reports, or which have arisen since their publication. But who knows how this will be interpreted? If the Forum had reported on education this year, could we have discussed the end of free student tuition? The rule giving total discretion to the Conference Arrangements Committee leaves us little wiser.

Membership of the National Policy Forum Mark II looks reasonable. But although it will be too late for the 1997 Conference to elect CLP representatives, the new Forum is expected to start work early in 1998. Will the current unaccountable members set the parameters of the rolling policy programme? More seriously, the Forum will only meet twice a year, to approve standing commissions for policy areas and to consider and amend their reports.

Real power will rest with the Policy Commissions. They will respond to resolutions and comments throughout the year, solicit views and draft reports. The Commissions will include "significant representation" from the Forum itself — as would the Joint Policy Committee — but no numbers are specified in either the rule changes or the explanatory paper. Who will fill in the blanks?

So documents may be presented to the Forum, and to Conference in the name of the Forum, without members having enough information to evaluate how faithfully they represent Party concerns. This anxiety is reinforced by the summary of evidence to LiP itself. Of 842 submissions, 44% were from CLPs, 43% from branches, and only 3% from trade unions. All subsequent figures are reported as percentages of 842. This gives a comment from a trade union with 100,000 members the same weight as a CLP with 1,000, a branch with 100, or a single individual. The only sure conclusion is that the Party is split on every aspect, with few changes supported by even half the submissions. The case for deferring PiP and seeking modernisation with consent is stronger than ever. Nevertheless, the message is "vote this through and we'll sort out the details afterwards."

Unfortunately implementation of the 1996 Conference decision on Local Policy Forums (LPFs) does not inspire trust. Composite 53 called for forums at CLP level. But in at least one region recent "pilot LPFs" bypassed CLPs completely, with the venue, timing and invitations determined by the regional office, the agenda dictated from London, and no feedback to participants. Enough delegates may buy the lie that PiP, immediately and in full, is the only alternative to chaos. Whether composites are remitted or put to the vote will depend solely on the movers, and on chance interactions in compositing meetings. Delegates may have to vote on rule changes before debating the structures which they will legitimise. The trade unions' position is not yet clear. If they could get a deal which would hold, they might be swayed. But on whom can they rely?

In 1995 Tony Blair promised to end zero-hours contracts. That commitment has gone. Guarantees of recognition recede. The unions should consider where their friends are. Constituency resolutions reaffirm the union link at all levels. Activists would not understand if they were undermined by the block vote in the service of a party machine which, increasingly, regards the unions with contempt. The unions may be tempted to switch their money and people into campaigning directly on pay and industrial issues. But they should look first at which factions would welcome a divorce. The left, and this includes many who would formerly have disclaimed the label, should take to heart the words of Clause IV: "By the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone". That will remain true whatever happens in Brighton.

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

Berwick & District Trades Council

invites all socialists to a day school and evening social on 1st November.

Details from:
Moira Kay
01289-386 519
or
Dave Stewart
01289-305 749.

More LIP from Mandelson

Dave Statham, Brent East CLP, reports on the most boring Labour Party meeting he has ever attended.

On 24th July around 200 people packed in the Grand Committee Room of the House of Commons for a meeting called to hear Peter Mandelson attempt to persuade Party members that Labour into Power was not the disaster we know it to be. The result was a meeting of mind-numbing tedium with a patronising display of Mandelson's self-satisfaction. The overall tone was summed up by David Cairns, chair of Mitcham and Morden CLP, who convened the meeting. "You can always organise your own meeting," was his response to someone in the audience who questioned the platform's lack of balance. Not, however, without the names and addresses of conference delegates that Walworth Road kindly supplied to the organisers. No doubt *LLB* would be given similar assistance!

New Labour undiluted?

Maria Exall, Central London CWU, reports on the Labour Womens' Training Conference in Bournemouth 12th/13th July.

CONFERENCE BEGAN with a speech from Tony Blair, the theme being the need to continue the pledge: "We fought the election as New Labour, we will govern as New Labour." Party Conference this year would see "New Labour undiluted," in the proposals on Partnership in Power (PiP).

The speech set the tone for the weekend. Every platform speaker praised PiP. Mo Mowlam, along with four new women MPs managed a mention of it and Clare Short berated the "conservative left'" for opposing the modernisers' steamroller. However not everyone was convinced. At a well attended fringe meeting, "Partnership in Power — an attack on democracy", many delegates reported on the widespread lack of support in the Labour Party for PiP.

Loraine Monk, London Region rep on the National Policy Forum, outlined the dangers for basic democracy and the womens' organisation in the Party from PiP.

Pam Tatlow stated how women in the Party would have no effective organisation. The removal of the Womens' Section of the NEC, new methods of elections to national policy forum and a rolling programme of policy, rubber stamped by Annual Conference, add up to less democracy for women in the Party.

The most interesting part of the Training Conference were workshops with Labour women having their say about Labour's policy programme. All the speakers in the "Welfare To Work" discussion were critical of the scheme as it could go the way of previous Tory schemes — creating a pool of cheap labour, offering no real opportunities for young people and being based on compulsion.

Labour's lack of commitment to change dominated the discussion in the Economy Workshop: why is Labour not reversing the Tory spending cuts in health and education? Why are we holding on to Tory spending limits? Why is Labour carrying out Tory cuts to single parent benefit?

Labour women spoke of the need for greater welfare spending to repair some of the Tory damage of the last 18 years. Many Labour women at the conference expressed frustration at not enough being done, as well as the narrow agenda. At a fringe meeting called by the Labour Women's Action Committee, Audrey Wise MP spoke of the need to reassert socialist values. Many Labour women are not happy about the direction of the New Labour Government. They want to change working class womens' lives, through a minimum wage, repeal of the anti-trade union laws and the rebuilding of the welfare state.

Several years ago, Labour Womens' Conference was made a biennial event, alternating with a "training conference", in order to prevent left wing outbreaks. The 1997 event should have been a policy making conference. Many of us were unhappy about not being allowed to vote at a time when crucial debates were taking place!



Maria Exall

Many of the women were new members who'd come as individuals rather than delegates. It is good that women want to get involved in political discussions. However an event with women delegates would ensure greater democracy within a collective organisation to contribute to political policy making.

New Labour purges Select Committees

Diane Abbott has been removed from the Treasury Select Committee, of which she had proved herself an able and independent-minded member during the last Parliament. Abbott has spoken out against the decision to hand over interest rates to the Bank of England (her replacements on the Committee all supported the move). Since the Select Committee is now charged with Parliamentary oversight of the Bank of England's new monetary policy committee, Abbott's removal is particularly ominous.

Likewise the removal of Jeremy Corbyn from the Social Security Select Committee, of which he has been an assiduous member for many years. Corbyn is a well-known critic of Frank Field's notions on welfare and pension reform, and the only member of the Committee who refused to take part in a taxpayer-funded junket to inspect Chile's privatised pension schemes in 1995. Every year for more than a decade he has presented his detailed Bill for the Abolition of Poverty in Retirement to the House, and he has maintained close links with the pensioners' movement up and down the country.

Corbyn's exclusion from the Select Committee is a blow to pensioners and benefit claimants, and a worrying indication that, under New Labour, merit, hard work and conscience count for much less than loyalty to the leadership and a capacity to keep your mouth shut in the face of injustice.

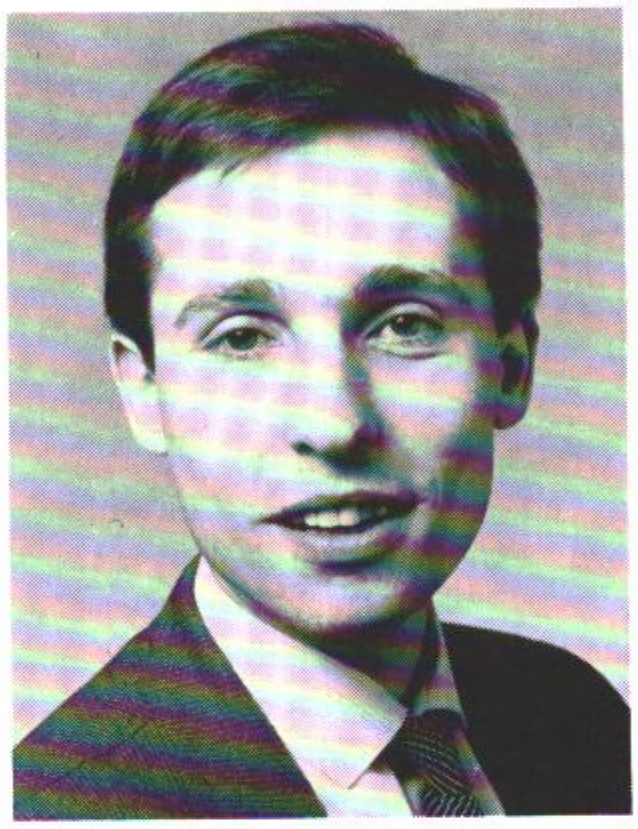
And what kind of system allows the executive to hand pick the legislators who are supposed to scrutinise its performance?

Fire Brigades Union London

FBU

Defend trade union rights!

Shooting ourselves in the foot



Andrew Slaughter in his Briefing *days.*

Councillor Peter Ryerson, Chair of Education, London Borough of Hillingdon, and Uxbridge CLP, analyses the Uxbridge byelection.

THE UXBRIDGE byelection was lost when the national Party decided to impose a shortlist of two. Why only two? Seven candidates were nominated. One (Michael Shrimpton) was unsuitable — he defected to the Tories during the campaign — but what about the others? There was an excellent woman candidate — why was she excluded? Why was the local candidate who had 50% of the nominations dropped? I can only speculate that old scores were being settled.

We were told that we needed a candidate who "could handle the media". "Byelections are different"; there are "national pressures". So why were there no press conferences? Ironically the person who had the greatest media pressure to withstand was David Williams who showed that he can handle the media well. Every press reference to the Labour candidate emphasised that he was imposed. On the other hand, Dave Williams was nearly always referred to as "the nice Mr Williams"!

The Labour campaign was very impressive, and if the number of campaign "bus stops" and large Labour placards was any indication, we should have walked it. There were "bus stops", etc., in places that had never had them in the twenty-four years I've lived in the area. The real tragedy was not only losing but that many Party members "dropped out" because of the way the candidate was imposed, and that so many youngsters who were enthused during the General Election took no part.

The Uxbridge byelection closes a chapter in Labour's history (Labour's byelection lesson, August 1st). It will not do to claim with hindsight that the seat was unwinnable. If Labour's high command had believed this, Tony Blair would not have intervened personally in the campaign. Labour's post-mortem must focus on the abysmal treatment of its General Election candidate. Despite a very near miss in May, he was not deemed suitable and was summarily discarded in favour of a more typically New Labour figure. This arrogant treatment tarnished Labour's image as a sensitive organisation.

New Labour has developed a contemptuous attitude towards local organisation and local figures. This attitude reflects a deep distrust of the grassroots, most especially its active members, which is corroding its internal democracy. You have rightly expressed concern that open debate within the Party is being discouraged and that argument is equated with disloyalty. In the wake of Uxbridge, it is time this trait was decisively removed and the Party began a serious examination of its future direction.

Trevor Fisher, Honorary Secretary, Labour Reform

An end to unrepresentative cliques!

Duncan Hall, Warwick University Labour Club, reports on the Young Labour Conference.

This was a conference with no resolutions or policy votes. It was, seemingly, the vehicle for the election (or selection) of youth rep on the NEC and the National Policy Forum. Activities were primarily social or skill-building — as we could not be trusted to make policies without certain skills.

Bournemouth's mayor welcomed us at a wine reception (lounge suits mandatory for guests) and the company was dominated by the Young Labour junta floating around together in mutual appreciation. Young Labour is run by a self-perpetuating clique which appoints new leaders from its own ranks or the ranks of its sycophants.

The first session heard speeches from Stephen Twigg and Gordon Brown. Brown was not challenged on any element of his budget or New Labour policy in the short and innocuous question time. Any discussion or dissent was soaked up in policy workshops.

In elections for the NEC Youth rep four candidates stood. The key contest was between Sarah Ward, who attracted over 60% of the vote, and Raj Jethwa (backed by the GMB and Young Labour Left). The elections to the Party's Policy Forum saw similar results. Unfortunately the left has never organised sufficiently to be more than an irritation. We leave each Youth or Student Conference full of feigned optimism yet we are permanently stuck on about a third of the vote.

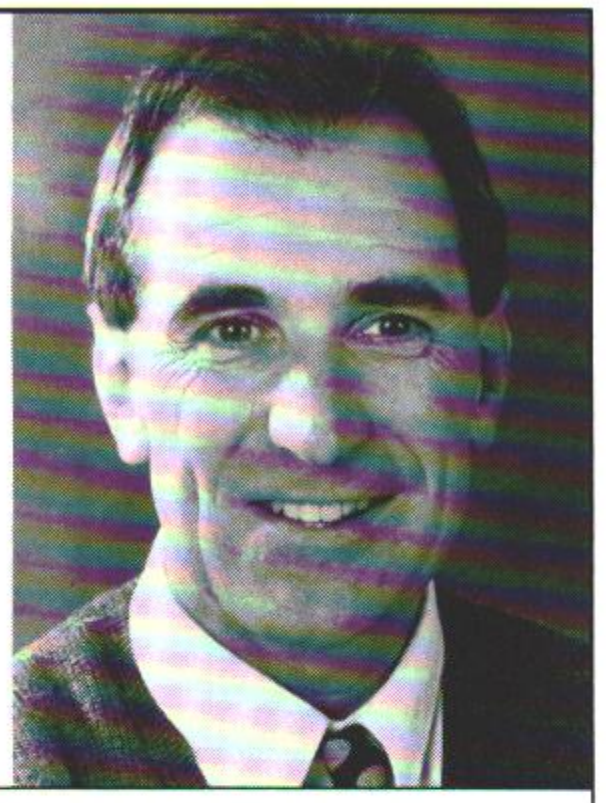
At a left fringe meeting addressed by Ken Livingstone, we ran over the old issues around organisation and performance, and asked if the left can ever unite around one candidate. But we reached no useful conclusions. A good start for the left in Young Labour would be to spearhead the campaign to clean it up. Whether this presents itself as an organised Campaign for Young Labour Democracy, or just through the words and deeds of left-wing candidates will be up to us.

As Tony Blair delivered his divisive and infuriating speech about what was Labour Into Power, the irony cannot have by-passed everyone when he declared that he didn't want to return to a time when unrepresentative cliques were all powerful.

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the Alan Simpson column

The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.



But where's the work?

THE GOVERNMENT'S Welfare to Work proposals throw up several contradictions in Labour's policy objectives. The priorities appear to include: removing obstacles to moving people from the benefit system to work, encouraging flexibility within the labour market, fundamentally changing the benefit system, encouraging individual contributions to their welfare packages and targeting benefits more effectively towards the worst off. In fact these objectives are fundamentally incompatible.

The biggest barrier between welfare and work is the means-tested benefit system, which has become labyrinthine and demoralising. The interface between the benefits' system and the tax system is punitive. In today's Britain no-one is taxed more heavily than the working poor. Lowering the tax rate is senseless unless we remove means-testing. A large rise in the tax-exempt floor would be a coherent starting point in removing welfare-to-work disincentives.

Moving frequently between benefits and work continues the nightmare. Each change requires a recalculation of entitlement and a wait for payment (often leading to rent arrears in the case of Housing Benefit). There's also a case for housing subsidies being linked to property rather than people. A "low rents" strategy has obvious counter-inflation attractions and mitigates against house price rises in the private sector. We can also impose minimum housing standards here.

But the biggest question is, simply, "where's the work?" We have a lot to say about training and skills, but little about actual jobs. Indeed, we are running with a cap on social expenditure tighter than the Tories would have stuck to. The Tories used forced training schemes to massage unemployment figures and take people off long-term benefit rates, returning them to lower ones when the Mickey Mouse scheme ended. Labour will not be allowed to get away with this.

A shift from Housing Benefit back to housing subsidies could be tied to a serious programme raising housing and energy efficiency standards, with huge job implications. A skill training programme linked to this could have immediate short-term relevance. We would need an interventionist strategy beginning and ending with the question of real jobs.

The Government talks about "flexibility" in the labour market, but being multi-skilled and adaptive to change is very different from having semi-itinerant status. Disposable labour is generally untrained, as firms will simply not train those who have no future there.

Job insecurity locks the state into three very long-term costs: long-term "premium" payments for social insurance, an impossible remit for training the permanently-disposable, and growing numbers who are uninsurable and for whom the state will pick up the bulk of benefit/pension costs. Traditionally viewed as a working-class/unskilled issue, labour market changes may make this more complex. Most data-processing and computer-programming for the 1991 census was done in India, at the rate of one dollar an hour. If deregulated competitiveness policies take accountancy and IT work downmarket (in wage and job security terms), it leaves the training programme with problems. Will raising skills in itself generate employment? Last year Boeing announced that over 20,000 of the US's most highly-skilled workers would be made redundant because of an agreement to build the 777 in China. Therefore, does it make sense to have skill training programmes which are not reinforced by fiscal measures promoting "site here to sell here" measures?

Privatisation led to huge profits and dividends but the social costs of unemployment and poor health have never been calculated, nor has the shift from company spending on training from front-line workers to senior management.

Our current lack of a training levy on employers encourages them to poach rather than train.

I have had a lot of involvement in social and community programme training. What became clear was that for those without formal qualifications this was not just a way back into normal routines of work — it was a career pathway. In the 1970s, recognition and worth in the wider jobs' market followed. Today's equivalent would have to recognise the higher percentage of single parents, and the impossibility of separating access to childcare from access to long-term job prospects.

For most young people, the word "training" is a sad joke. It is not redeemable unless a real job exists at the end. Many jobs being created are benefit-dependent, low-paid, part-time and irregular. We need to remove disincentives to full-time secure employment, restoring "platform" benefits in place of means-tested ones. Moving from welfare to work must not make you poorer. The poor should not have to pay higher marginal tax rates than the rich. We should strengthen separate provision for the financial needs of children. Labour should take advantage of the "feel good" factor, one which feels good about ethics rather than low taxation. If we tap into this, we can avoid the language of compulsion or forced labour.

Thousands of people, young and old, long to be eco-warriors, stopping the elderly dying of hypothermia, installing more sustainable methods of water management, cutting the health care bill by working on proactive health care and pollution reduction. There is so much more to this than tunnels under Manchester airport.



We must not

On 27th September it will be two years since 500 Liverpool dockers were sacked. Mike Carden from the Liverpool Docks Shop Stewards Committee and a member of TGWU's General Executive Council spoke to Tony Dale (Manchester UNISON) about the dispute, how the dockers feel they have been treated by the labour movement, and their hopes for the future.

THE DISPUTE REALLY began for us in 1989. 1989 to 1995 was a period in which the employer increasingly became more belligerent, more demanding, more arrogant. There was an increase in disciplinaries. Petty disciplines became more and more serious. They drafted in a manager from Metal Box, who had no connection with the industry, whose job was to be pig ignorant. This fellow has been there for six minutes and is telling dockers with 30 or 40 years in the industry they are not loyal to the company. In about 1993-94 we had the imposition of new contracts. We had been right through the mill.

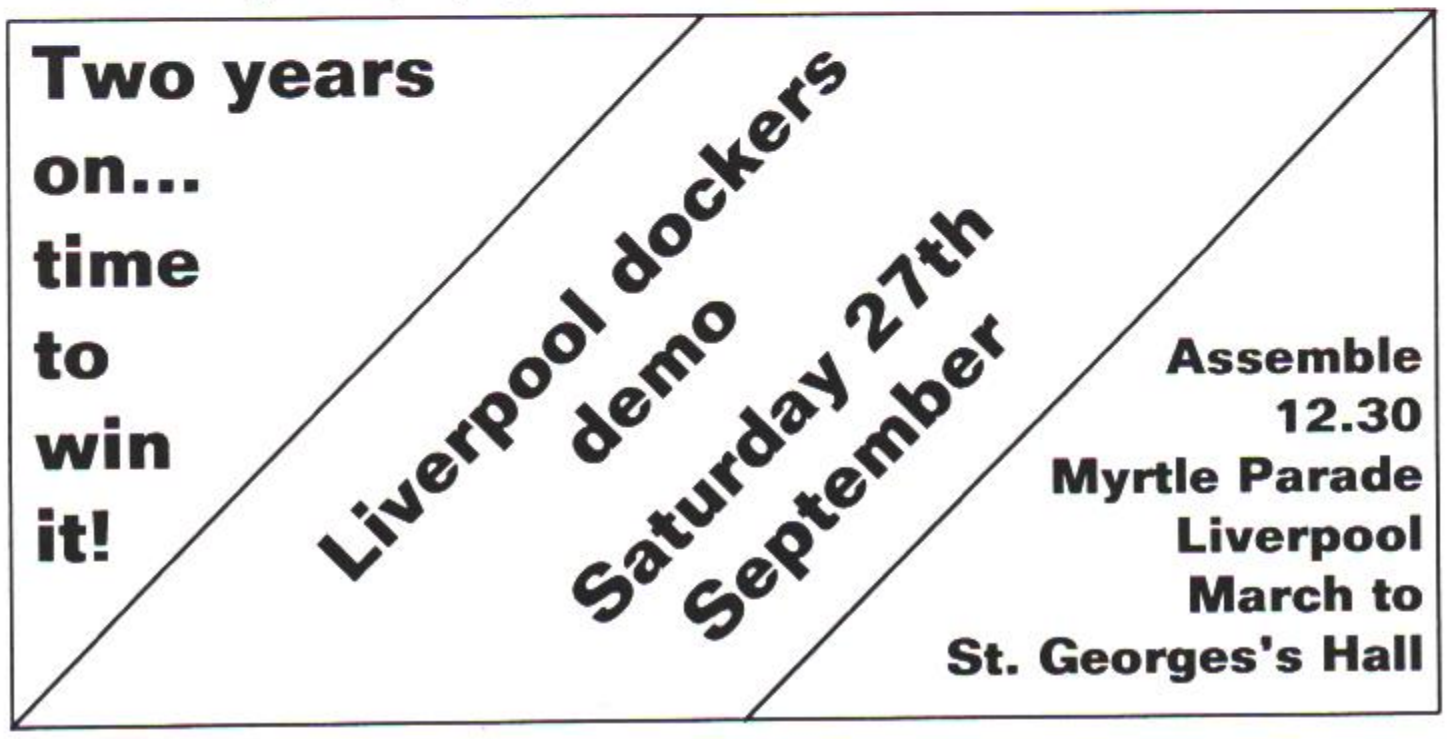
The actual event that led to the dismissals could have been anything. Everyone was of a mind that something big was going to come off. We had an attitude that if something did happen, if something did break, we weren't going to go out of the gate. We would have to stay inside and fight from the inside. Then the Torside lads were threatened with 20 redundancies — a reduction of the workforce from 80 to 60. They had an official ballot. The union through its officer told them to accept it because the company was threatening to go into liquidation. This was a company set up by the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company and the TGWU. In the ballot there was 90% for taking industrial action and the company backed down. Within less than two weeks we had this issue of overtime and they sacked five people on the spot and it just snowballed from there. Our opinion is that it was a conspiracy from start to finish. We would have liked to have avoided it but unfortunately we did not have any option but to stand up to the employer.

The financial generosity of people has been extraordinary. But the big thing we need is solidarity action. We need workers in other ports in this country to take action. But then you examine the nature of these ports and most of them have been destroyed since 1989 and generally speaking have no union organisation. That is a big problem and that is why very early on the only way we could go was international. We had very strong links internationally over many many years. Everything we have done has been against the backdrop of "it's unofficial and it's illegal." We've challenged that endlessly and we continue to challenge that. We are not on strike, we have been dismissed. There is no reason why the TGWU, the TUC or the International Transport Workers Federation (ITF) should feel restricted in any way in supporting us.

When we sought support from the ITF and TGWU we knew from the very beginning that they were saying "no we can't do this because we will be threatened with sequestration." Everything we have done has been done on an unofficial rank and file basis. We have developed the second International Dockers Conference that took place in Montreal involving God knows how many ports. We are talking about serious players in the dockers' international trade union, South African dockers from the Transport and General Workers Union of South Africa, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union on the West Coast of America, the International Longshoremen's Association on the East Coast and the West Coast of Canada as well. The people we have met have been magnificent. We are busy now organising a second international day of action. We are just working on a date. It'll be fairly soon but again its a question of co-ordination.

For so long in dealing with the TGWU we tried to be courteous and specific. We've had finances from the union which have been sporadic. In terms of what we would be entitled to if we were on official strike, it is less than a third of what we would normally be expected to get. On the executive Bill Morris came up with a statement to cover all the resolutions at TGWU conference covering the docks and other related motions covering anti-union legislation. All we wanted was a simple statement relating to the ITF and relating to the Labour Party with the Government having a 13.8% shareholding in the company. The machinery of the union was adamant. All the stewards met Morris a couple of days before conference began in Brighton. We appealed to him to withdraw the statement and work together on a fresh one. We weren't arguing that the motions should be withdrawn, our attitude is that we have no right to tell a branch in London or anywhere else that they should be withdrawing motions but we said we could work with people on the motions, discuss with them and see if they would accept advice from us. But Morris was adamant that his statement had to get through. It wasn't an industrial statement, it was more like a filmgoers' guide. It was a critique of Ken Loach's film, of the Pilger article and of the *Guardian*. To me it was sad it should come to that. It got absolutely malleted by conference.

One of the things we've attempted to do in this dispute, and we've been criticised for it,



walk alone



PHOTO: CATHERINE ARTHUR

Dockers march on London, December 1996

is that we've tried to be non-sectarian. We've got supporters from a wide spectrum of political groups. I'm proud to say we have a few anarchists helping us and doing really important work for us. In terms of both the TGWU and the labour movement, we've attempted not to be "political" in terms of having a "line" that we are all following. There is no "line" and I think if we had a "line" we would have been destroyed a long time ago. Also, it has been important to recognise that there are some good Labour MPs. We've had some excellent Labour MPs here, the likes of Bob Parry, Joe Benton, Eddie O'Hara and Eddie Loyden, good people who have supported us tremendously. Unfortunately they've retired now. Other people who might not be so good have taken over and have yet to prove themselves. We can't say they have exactly been banging the door down. We want the Labour Government to do what the Tory Government did for us a year ago when they had an inquiry into the Mersey Docks and Harbour Company, into the dispute. It was never finished. We never achieved too much from it but it was vitally important we had that debate in Parliament.

It is a political issue, the Government is a major shareholder. We believe there is a question of public accountability. It really is a scandal what has gone on in the dock industry, no different from every other industry which was privatised. We are talking about personal profit that individuals have made as a result of privatisation. We have had the likes of Ken Loach, John Pilger, Paul Foot and a number of other good comrades saying "look, here is something that needs examining, this is a wrong that needs to be corrected" yet nothing has really happened. Ian McCartney has written us a letter saying he is not going to get involved in an industrial dispute. It makes you wonder what are they going to get involved in. If Blair says anything, he talks about justice, about social justice. There are many injustices in society but I can't think of many greater injustices than what has happened to us. If somebody is going to start being puerile and saying "well the dockers shouldn't have done this and they shouldn't have done that" well perhaps the employers shouldn't have sacked us. From any way it is examined people should say "well that is wrong."

I'm 44 years of age, Jimmy Davies is approaching his mid 50s, there are men 64 years of age on the picket line. Perhaps whichever way it ends we could walk away and say "that is it, what a bastard society we live in." If we walk away I don't think I'm going to get another job anywhere else.

There will be other people who will have the same experience as us, like the Magnet workers, like the Hillingdon workers. Someone has got to say "hold on a second, workers should have rights." These rights should be in law and clear for everyone to understand so that employers do not have what borders on fascism.

The right to have an industrial dispute without being sacked would be a positive step. Everything else would flow from that. Economic fear keeps workers down. The way we are going now we seem to be going the other way.

A lot of dockers come from strong historic traditions of supporting Labour. I think a lot of the dockers voted Labour in May out of that sense of tradition. I don't hear too many people talking about the first 100 days of Blair's Government. It is as if it is business as usual. There is a danger that Labour is not seen to represent anyone. There is a common theme from people saying "who do these politicians represent?"

Reclaim The Streets as a group have a right to have a say but who is representing them? According to Bill Morris he doesn't want to represent them because "we are nothing to do with anarchists." But when we were 16 and leaving school with no qualifications there were thousands of jobs, it wasn't a problem getting a job. Obviously in this day and age it is a totally different world, someone has got to represent them and it is big problem for democracy if people are outside any representation.

What we want now is a Government enquiry into the dispute and the boycott of the Port of Liverpool.❑

New campaign on workers' rights

Pat Byrne, London BECTU

THE EMPLOYMENT Law Sub-Committee of the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers is launching a new campaign on workers rights at this year's TUC Congress. The initiative is entitled "Rights at work: a manifesto for change" and aims to shake the movement out of its current state of resignation on the issue.

New Labour's acceptance of the old Tory anti-union laws mean that they will soon begin to be seen as Labour anti-union laws. Labour ministers' claim of wanting to take a balanced and neutral approach to industrial relations cannot work in a situation where the balance of power has been shifted so decisively in favour of the employers. How can you be neutral when you maintain laws that conflict with most of the basic regulations laid down by the UN's International Labour Organisation or practice throughout the European Union?

If the Labour Government is seen to sit by with hands folded or even to support the multinationals when they use these laws to victimise and bully British workers into accepting ever lower wages and worse conditions, there will be a wave of disillusionment among the electorate which threatens any chance of a second Labour term.

The new government faces a backlog of pent-up frustration. Conflicts are coming in which millions will demand that they act differently from the last. Such a situation will develop dynamically, opening up opportunities for proponents of workers' rights to demonstrate the need for new legislation.

In the view of the Haldane Society of Socialist Lawyers it is important to prepare now for this situation. In particular we need to get across the need for major legal reform in an accessible and popular way. This is why our new Rights at Work campaign tries to shift the emphasis away from union rights to workers' rights. Of course, individual rights must be part of collective union rights, but we want to bring home to workers that this issue is also about their problems and their future, not just that of a few trade union leaders and their headquarters' staff.

A Manifesto For Change

We call for the law to conform to the following principles:

- Workers should have the right to trade union representation on all matters affecting employment
- Workers and trade unions should have the right to take industrial action, including solidarity action
- Workers should not be sacked or victimised for taking industrial action
- Trade unions should have the right to organise and recruit at the workplace
- Trade unions should have the right to manage their own affairs and to enforce democratic decisions
- Workers should enjoy all employment rights from the first day of employment
- All labour laws should respect ILO conventions and other relevant standards

It was low wages, worsening conditions and job insecurity that helped produce the scale of Labour's victory. If New Labour wants to secure a second term it needs to begin to tackle these problems and this can only be done hand in hand with the trade union movement.

This new campaign for workers' rights needs to be as broad-based as possible to succeed. If your union branch or organisation would like to sponsor the campaign or you need information please write to: Bernard Ryan, c/o Kent Law School, University of Kent, Canterbury CT2 7NS

Despite election — school cuts continue

A Lewisham NUT member reports

IN THE WAKE of Labour's landslide victory and Blair's much vaunted commitment to improving education, staff at two Lewisham schools spent much of the summer term opposing job cuts.

At Marvels Lane School, members of the NUT and NASUWT have taken strike action over a quarter of the full-time class teacher posts being cut, with two teachers facing compulsory redundancy from September. This term there will be approximately the same number of pupils on roll but with three fewer teachers. Class sizes will rise with an immediate effect on standards.

At Watergate Schoo' which has pupils with a wide range of severe learning difficulties, cutbacks of over £20,000 have been proposed. As many as five teaching assistant and nursery nurse posts could be lost. Such a reduction will seriously threaten not only the quality of education for a very vulnerable group but also the safety of both pupils and staff. Being under Special Measures following OFSTED has made the task of opposing these proposals more difficult for staff and governors.

Following the announcement of these cuts, and despite it being near the end of term, staff at both schools successfully lobbied the education committee in July, a meeting called to discuss raising standards in Lewisham's schools! A close working relationship between the NUT and UNISON has helped in trying to resolve these disputes and continue discussions with the LEA and the schools.

These attacks need to be seen in the context of the QAD Audits and Capability Guidelines that the Council are trying to impose. This OFSTED-style Audit of teaching was rejected as demoralising by 71% of teachers in the Joint Union Survey. 86% said that individual 1 to 7 gradings should be stopped. One implication of the Capability Code is that staff could be sacked just for being unwell. A number of schools in the borough are currently in dispute over implementation of the code.

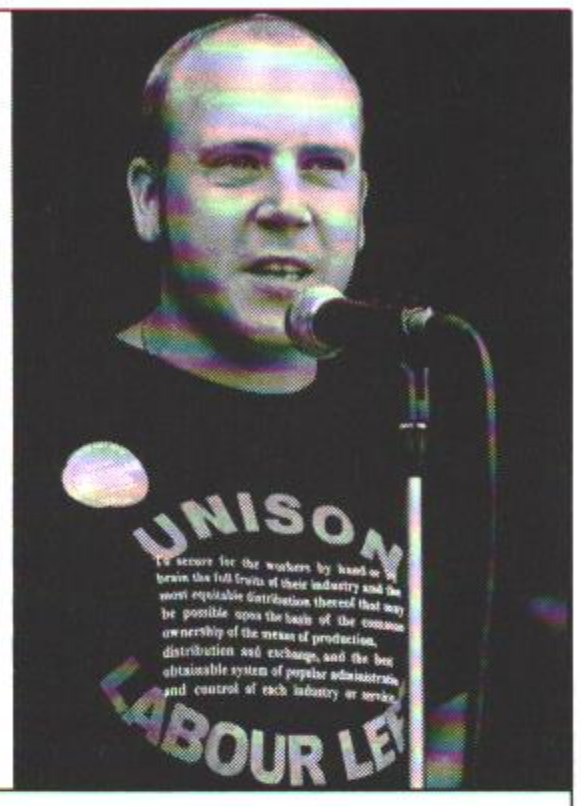
The increasing workload and worsening morale in Lewisham sits awkwardly with Blair's commitment to education. Perhaps, Tony, you would like to come and "meet the people" in Lewisham schools and explain what's going on?

Stop use of BT agency staff

The 1997 Operator and Ancillary conference of the CWU agreed to launch a high profile campaign against BT's use of agency staff. Two years after the release of direct labour, 7,000 agency staff are working for BT. Some switchrooms have up to 80% agency staff doing the same jobs as BT operators — but on less pay and weaker terms and conditions.

the Geoff Martin column

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



I HAD TO LAUGH when Blair invited the usual bunch of Class A drug users, car thieves and cat burglars round to Number 10 for a couple of Special Brews. I understand that teams of Millbankers were on hand to cut the "Party Line" for anyone prepared to snort it.

Don't get me wrong, I've got nothing against the rock and roll lifestyle — just can't afford it mate. What's bizarre is where all this fits in with the hard line on young offenders. I can just imagine Jack Straw lurking in a corner itching to affect a citizens arrest on Noel Gallagher.

With that ludicrous tosser David Mellor appointed by a Labour Government to head the Football Task Force anything is possible. Liam Gallagher's appointment as the Drugs' Tsar is surely imminent — far out man!

Some people have commented on the fact that no trade union leaders made it onto the guest list for the Downing Street soiree. Not true. Christine Hancock from the scab Royal College of Nursing was there, which is no real surprise when you take into account the fact that the RCN is to effective NHS trade unionism what Ann Widdecombe is to free love.

All of this highly significant in terms of the Mod's plans for the union/Labour link. With Blair apparently prepared to crawl a hundred miles over broken glass to be photographed with any spivvy, union-busting "entrepreneur" he can find, the contrast with his reluctance to even enter the same room as a bona fide union leader is crystal clear.

So what are the Brothers and Sisters who fill the trade union seats on Labour's NEC doing about this orchestrated piss-taking? I'll tell you what they're doing, they're preparing the ground to vote themselves out of the Party structure.

The NEC vote on *Party into Power* proves this conclusively, with not a single union member prepared to join Dennis Skinner in voting against this poisonous package. Those trade unionists who tell you that *Party into Power* is not a staging post in the long march to dumping the link are the industrial equivalent of the Flat Earth Society.

It's a crazy upside-down world when the union at the forefront of opposing the Blairites' campaign to effectively dissolve the Labour Party from within is the AEU, but credit where it's due. The truth is that it shows us where the alliances need to be formed if we are to beat off the imminent attempt to ditch the link.

The opposition to the central thrust of Blairism runs deep in the ranks of the labour movement and it also spans across from left to right. Hattersley's persistent campaign for tax rises to fund public expenditure initiative deserves our support and will gain momentum as the cuts in front line services begin to bite this winter.

The solution does not lie in backing opportunist SWP-orchestrated lobbies of the Labour Party Conference. I for one am sick and tired of being lectured about the need to defend the Labour/union link by members of other political parties who've deliberately chosen to opt out of the struggle.

The cracks in New Labour's carefully applied make up are deepening by the day and the task for socialists and trade unionists in the Party is to stick together as the cleaners move in to fumigate the honeymoon suite.

Our campaign for an alternative vision of what this Government with its massive majority could actually deliver for our people will snowball over the next 12 months as long as we stick with it.

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

DEFEND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE LABOUR PARTY

Worried about authoritarianism in the Labour Party?

If you believe the leadership and Party officials should keep the rules and serve the Party, not break the rules and bully CLPs and members into submission, then...

Organise to Fight Back!

Sunday 14th September 1997
10:30am - 4:00pm

Conway Hall
Red Lion Square,
Holborn, London

Wrongly suspended? Candidate imposed? This meeting will organise to defend all our rights — at Conference and beyond.
Contact Celia Foote: 0113-262 4667, Mike Davies: 0113-262 4442

Called by the Campaign to Defend the Constitution of the Labour Party.

From secular failure

Mike Marqusee interviewed Achin Vanaik, political activist and author of *The Furies of Indian Communalism* about the limitations of identity politics, the role of nationalism and the way forward for socialists.

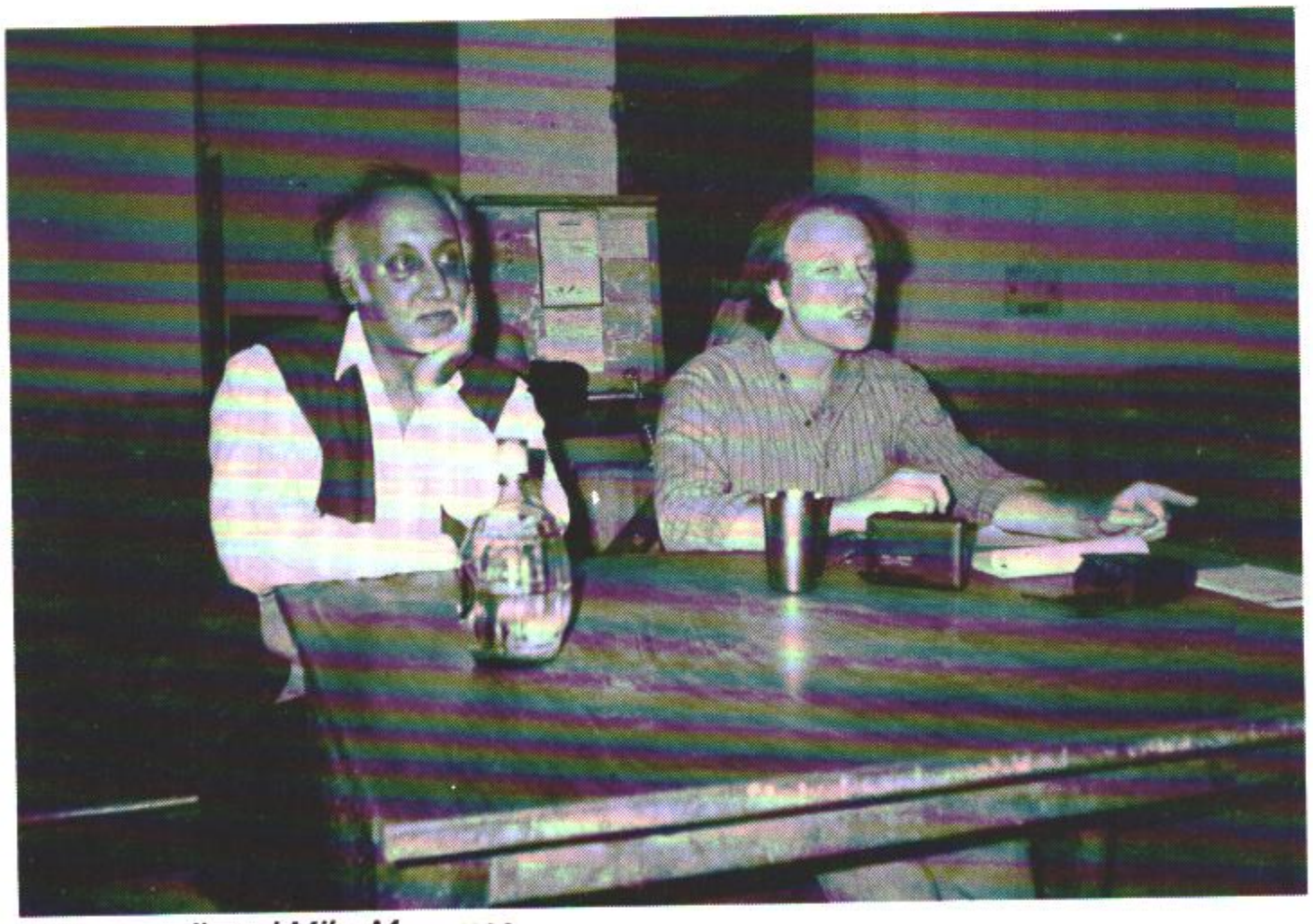
Q. In your new book, you explore the formation of political identities based on religion. As you note, this phenomenon is by no means restricted to South Asia. Where does the current global rise of identity politics — whether based on religion, race, nationality or culture — come from? How can they be opposed?

A. This phenomenon belongs to the fourth quarter of this century, the period of the long downturn. It is a response not to the failure of modernity as such, as post- and anti-modernists claim, but to specific patterns of modernity. It calls for critiques of advanced capitalism, actually existing socialism and "third world" capitalist developmentalism. Being the reaction to a many-sided failure — growing inadequacies in socio-economic development, problems in institutionalising and sustaining political democratisation, greater ideological disarray — it must be countered by a many-sided politics.

Regarding my book's specific focus on religious exclusivisms, it's worth bearing in mind that the religious map of the world will no longer change. The Islamic, Hindu, Buddhist and Christian parts of the world will remain so. Certainly there can be intra-religious shifts like the greater Protestantisation of Latin America and shifts in Europe and North America brought about by changing migration and demographic patterns. But the era when any particular religious system could make dramatic mass conversions or incursions is over for good.

What this worldwide "resurgence" of religion means is that people responding to perceived secular failures turn to whatever religious system already exists at hand to cope with growing material and psychological dilemmas. Not "religious dynamism" but "secular failure" is the defining characteristic of our times! Rectifying this secular failure constitutes our principal task. But not by stitching together positive forms of identity politics to counter its negative forms — identity politics is inescapably sectoral and a universal politics of common appeal is not the sum of sectoral appeals.

There is no escape from establishing a universal vision (in which sectoral needs are partially addressed) and building an organisational and political vehicle carrying that vision and popularly mobilising around it. Genuine socialist transformation in the long term is a necessity. However, given today's mass disillusionment with socialism, another kind of vision and politics capable of resurrecting that project is more immediately required. For all the limitations of nationalism (the obstacle to a true cosmopolitan internationalism) the nation is still the collective entity in which most people live and feel some strong sense of loyalty to. Even as it talks of globalisation, the right (witness Thatcherism) understands this very well. A national-popular politics of democratic empowerment overlaps with, but is not the same as, an explicitly socialist politics and cannot replace it. But by providing a politics of general and common appeal which makes a significant positive change it can be more than a halfway house to it, the more so if it takes the form of a movement. Demanding the extension of basic citizenship rights (rights related to the specific roles that most people occupy as workers, consumers, voters, taxpayers, patients, as the aged and as children) could be one way to generate such a broad democratic movement and politics. This would focus not just on the state and its policies but legitimise, empower and promote structures of self-organisation in civil society.



Achin Vanaik and Mike Marqusee

Q. Amid all the talk of globalisation, many on the left and right seem ready to write off the nation-state. Do you agree with this tendency? If not, what is the role of the nation-state in the global economy?

A. In the latest phase of the international political economy of capitalism there has been an important shift in power and authority from states to markets and their key organising institutions, which now operate transnationally if not quite globally. But writing off nation-states is absurd. They will continue to be very much around. Indeed, as long as no alternative political arrangement can more adequately incorporate citizenship rights or enable governing institutions to be held accountable to the public, it is the form of political authority which enjoys most legitimacy — and therefore remains a crucial site in the struggle among contending social forces.

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to socialist alternative

Leftists who write off the capacity of the nation-state to intervene effectively in the world economy are implicitly subscribing to a particular view of capitalism — global convergence to a neo-liberal order. In reality there have been, past and present, various forms of capitalist accumulation and regional development (West Europe, East Asia, North America) and national development (Sweden-Britain, Japan-Malaysia, USA-Canada).This is precisely because of the differential insertion of states into the world economy and variant state roles regarding ownership and regulation of capital and welfare functions, thus creating variant socialist possibilities.

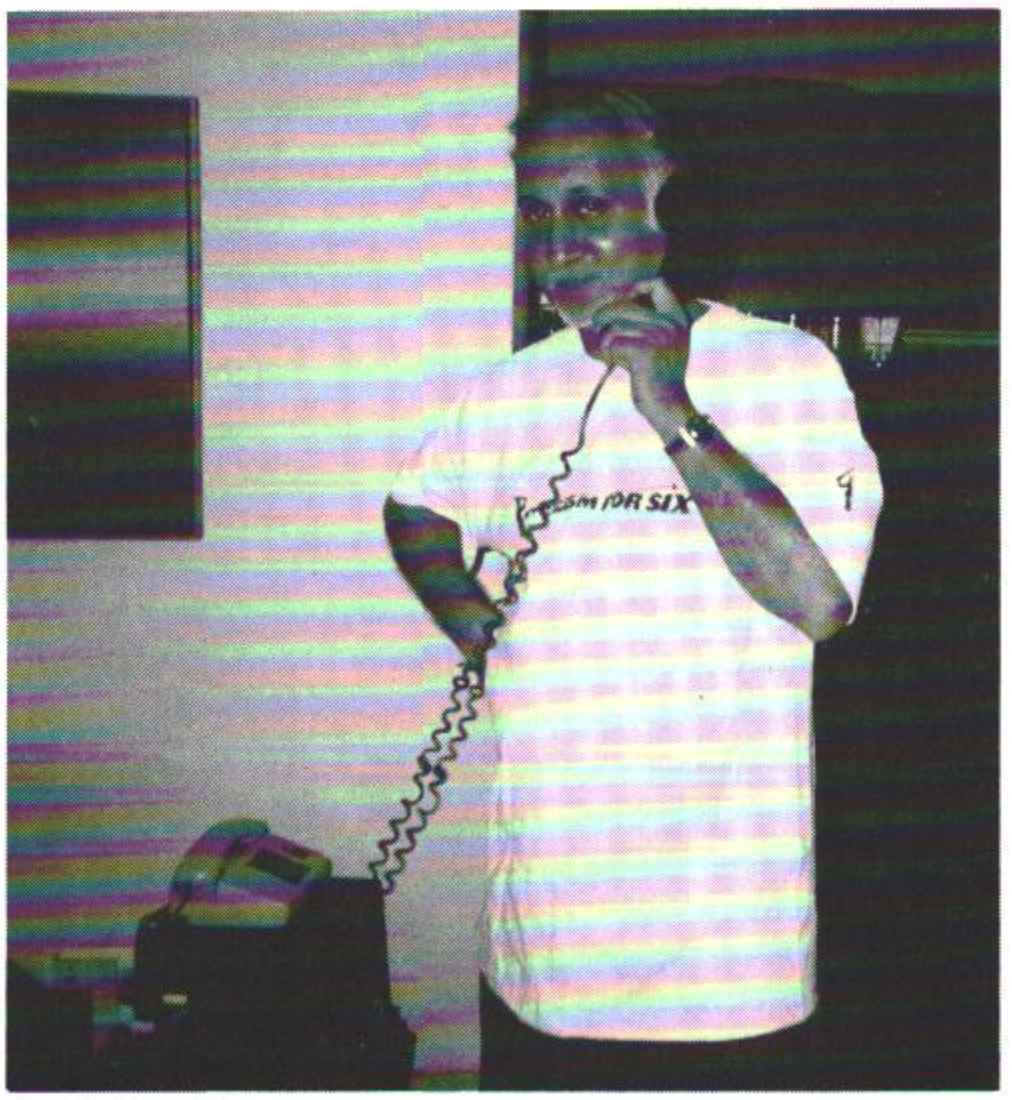
Certainly, globalisation has made it more difficult to carry out these regulatory and welfare functions but the responses to this pressure have varied. Neo-liberalism's claim that globalisation imposes a uniform and inescapable logic everywhere is simply a con. It is the political direction taken by a national society or wider framework like the EU that still determines the economic direction that entity takes, not the other way around. Who governs, how they come to govern, and what they do, makes a big difference.

Q. What then is the role of nationalism in the Third World?

A. In advanced countries, states are well developed and their expenditure and activity accounts for so significant a proportion of national income, their relevance is inescapable. In the Third World actual state capacities vary more. What India can do to resist unwanted globalising pressures is much more than what a weak African state can do. But everywhere, to dismiss the relevance of state power is effectively to forfeit a major part of the struggle against multinationals and structures like the IMF or World Bank that seek to institutionalise a specifically neo-liberal global order. However, the expansion of an "internal bourgeoisie" seeking association with foreign capital implies that a progressive nationalism has to be directed against them as much as against outsiders.

There is also another dimension. Third world anti-colonial nationalisms were essentially defined by what they opposed. Infusing a democratic cultural and political content remains very much on the agenda. When so many countries (not just India) face exclusivist religious nationalist pressures, to abandon the struggle for alternative, secular, democratic and progressive nationalisms in the name of a globalisation that has supposedly rendered nationalism irrelevant is a recipe for disaster.

Q. You have talked about the crisis of the socialist alternative. What do you see as the main questions socialists have to answer about their alternative and where do you think we should look for the answers?



Achin Vanaik

A. We cannot escape paying the price of a Stalinism that lived and died — the crisis of credibility in the idea of a socialist alternative. For most, opposing capitalism's effects no longer leads so easily to opposing capitalism itself or to committing to socialism. We must make the socialist project feasible and attainable again. The latter is more difficult and important. In reaching closer to the project we will necessarily resolve many of the problems about how it will work.

The working class remains central to any strategic mobilisation — no other force has comparable positioning or weight vis-a-vis the capitalist class. But objective changes in the structures of everyday life (not just subjective failings of working class organisations) render the claim that this class represents the universal interest less convincing than it once was. Certainly it is a claim that cannot be promoted in the old way. There is no escape from the more prolonged process of people coming to a common and universal commitment to socialism not just as workers but through multiple roles, through their lived experience.

I am not talking of establishing prefigurative forms of socialist life and structures within capitalist society, but of something more modest and realisable. The great tragedy of post-1989 was the enormous strengthening of a public sentiment of "no more experiments". This has to be overcome. Socialism will be the creative and ongoing construction of ordinary people or it will not exist.

Particularly important is advancing the theory and practice of a socialist economy. Current debates about market socialism or other socialist models come in here. The best of them try to combine economic efficiency through real markets, qualitatively greater income/wealth equality, socialised control over investment, maximum workplace democracy, and participatory planning. None of them is fully coherent, nor provides the "basic structure" of what a socialist economy will be like. But insofar as their limited implementation succeeds in fulfilling their promise genuinely to promote self-organisation, collective responsibility and better functioning, they can significantly strengthen the will to "experiment" further. It is through pushing this process forward that we will become clearer about how best decisively to defeat our main class opponents.❑

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Scandal of Disney sweatshops

A Haitian workers' organiser has brought her campaign to Europe, reports Charles Arthur of the Haiti Support Group.

A REPRESENTATIVE OF a Haitian workers' organisation has just completed a trip to Europe to make contact with garment workers' unions and campaigning groups. Yannick Etienne co-ordinates Batay Ouvriye (Workers' Struggle), an organisation with an international campaign to pressure the Walt Disney Company to improve the lot of workers employed by its sub-contractors in Haiti.

Garment and other assembly operations are carried out in 45 factories in Port-au-Prince, 14 of them producing t-shirts, pyjamas and children's outfits for the Disney entertainment giant. Over 20,000 workers, mainly women, work in the assembly sector and receive the lowest wages in the entire Central American and Caribbean region, approximately £1.35 a day.

First stop on her journey was Liverpool where she met with the Women of the Waterfront. "I felt an immediate rapport with these women," Etienne said. "We are going through the same experience. It's not just the workers that are directly affected who must fight for their rights. It must involve their families and communities too."

In Liverpool, Etienne also visited a textile factory and met workers and union representatives from the GMB. "The union reps had some knowledge of Haiti because the GMB took part in a protest outside the Liverpool Disney store this year. Women workers wanted to know more because they buy Disney products for their children," she said.

Etienne met textile workers of Turkish and Turkish-Kurdish origin in east London who had recently organised a branch of the TGWU. Branch secretary, Tekin Katel said: "our working conditions are poor, pay is only £140 a week if we meet the quota. The bosses are always trying to get away without paying us. Only a few months ago we occupied a factory after the boss claimed bankruptcy and disappeared without paying wages."

After hearing Etienne describe the difficulties of the Haitian garment workers when they try to organise unions — intimidation, threats and dismissals — the branch vowed to help Batay Ouvriye.

For Etienne international solidarity is essential. "The problems faced by Haitian workers are much the same as those experienced by workers all over the world because the capitalist system is based on exploitation. Workers' organisations from different countries can only get stronger by co-operating."

At a meeting with Des Farrell, National Secretary of the GMB Clothing and Textile section, Etienne was clear that, far from wanting companies such as Disney and Nike to cancel contracts in Haiti, the garment workers would like more work from these sources. "That is why we are not asking for a boycott. We want Disney and factory owners to recognise workers' organisations, to negotiate with them and to send more orders," she said.

The importance of workers organising to defend their rights was stressed by Etienne when she met co-ordinators of the European Clean Clothes Campaign in Brussels and Amsterdam. The Campaign mobilises consumers to persuade clothing retailers and their suppliers to insist on improvements in working conditions in Third World sweatshops. Etienne told meetings of Belgian and Dutch campaigners that consumer pressure in the North needs to be complemented by stronger workers' organisations in countries that supply these markets.

●One of Disney's main contractors using Haitian labour to produce clothing bearing Disney images has just announced that it will no longer send orders to Haiti and will relocate to south-east Asia. Batay Ouvriye interprets this as a reaction to Haitian workers organising for better pay and conditions, and believes that the contractor, H.H. Cutler, is counting on a more docile labour force under the repressive regimes of Indonesia and China. Letters of protest to be sent to Michael Eisner, Disney's CEO, requesting that Disney's contractor should stay in Haiti and negotiate with workers' organisations. Write to: Mr. Michael Eisner, Walt Disney Company, South Buena Vista St., Burbank, CA 9152, USA, FAX: 001818-846-7319.

Solidarity against the World Bank/IMF

Gerard Greenfield, Research Co-ordinator, Asia Monitor Resource Centre, Hong Kong reports.

Over 180 finance ministers will converge on Hong Kong for a major meeting of the World Bank/IMF this month. In response, a coalition of activists, trade unionists, writers and NGO workers have established Solidarity Against The World Bank/IMF.

The World Bank will release two new reports during the meeting.

The first report, *China 2020*, celebrates the success of China's market reforms and demands further deregulation and privatisation over the next two decades. The widespread privatisation of state owned enterprises in China in 1997 alone will see 50 million workers laid off. Simultaneously, the social security system is being privatised and migration to the cities is being encouraged as the solution to growing unemployment. There are already 100 million migrant workers looking for work. China is now the World Bank's biggest debtor, and many of the reforms being imposed on workers this year conform to demands made by the World Bank.

The second report will deal with poverty in East Asia. The World Bank argues that poverty alleviation requires even greater privatisation of social welfare and fails to recognise the contribution of labour market deregulation and unemployment to this new poverty.

Our campaign will also focus on Hong Kong. The World Bank has argued that structural adjustment was painless! It is claimed that all of the workers who lost jobs under the mass plant closures in the 1980s easily found jobs in the service sector. We will highlight the real crisis faced by unemployed workers in Hong Kong, and the lack of income and job security in the casualised service sector. This will link up with our ongoing protest against the "freezing" of new labour laws in Hong Kong (including the right to collective bargaining) by the Government.

We're looking for financial support from overseas. We'd be very grateful for any suggestions anyone has concerning possible support from unions or NGOs.

●Please fax letters of solidarity to 010 852 2454 6094 (FAO Au Loong Yu) or email: auly@chevalier.net

"Why are the British actively preparing for more conflict?"

Brian Campbell, editor of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*, reports on how the British Army are responding to the ceasefire.

JUST OFF THE main Belfast to Dublin road on the northern side of the border in South Armagh is an area known locally as Faughilletra. It is a mountainous area where no natural boundary marks where the Six Counties ends and the 26 Counties begins. The area's natural hinterland is County Louth and the local people shop and socialise in the town of Dundalk. Even their accent is closer to that of County Louth than to anything heard in the Six Counties. But Faughilletra is in "the north". You know that because the British Army has a large fortified spy post atop the highest mountain. It is one of a string of spy posts along the South Armagh border, an area in which the British Army and RUC have had to rely on helicopters for transport because the roads were too dangerous for them to travel on.

The spy posts have been compared to the forts which the Romans built to guard the outer reaches of their empire. They are an expensive way of maintaining a fiction — that here is Britain and the Queen's writ still runs.

But it seems that this form of British rule is not expensive enough for the Labour Government. Despite the IRA ceasefire and the prospect of all-party talks in September, the British Army continues to build bigger fortifications. For four days and nights in the middle of August, British Army engineers worked round the clock to extend and reinforce the Faughilletra spy post. While Mo Mowlam talked of a new beginning and the benefits of a lasting peace, a constant flow of helicopters ferried concrete and steel to the mountain.

The problem is not unique to South Armagh. On the Springfield Road in the heart of West Belfast, a massive new British Army/RUC barracks is under construction. In Belfast, Lurgan, Derry and many rural areas, British Army and RUC patrolling has been stepped up since the ceasefire with the result that young nationalists are reporting increased levels of harassment. Many people are asking if there is a divergence between the security and political agendas.



During the last ceasefire, a similarly provocative building programme and increased troop deployment took place. It led nationalists to wonder if the British were serious about peace and it added to suspicions about the Tory Government's commitment to the peace process. The same thing cannot be allowed to happen again. Sinn Fein's chief negotiator, Martin McGuinness asked on 21st August, "Why are the British actively preparing for more conflict?" He said, "It is self-evident that peace requires the demilitarisation of our society in every sense. The deployment of military and paramilitary forces must cease. The military fortifications must go and the building programme of military fortifications across the Six Counties should end. The release of prisoners incarcerated as a result of the conflict must be part of this. The gun must be taken out of politics in Ireland."

It is clear that the peace process is at a critical juncture. The British Government can follow the same strategy as John Major did and strangle the process with stalling tactics and inaction. Or it can actively build confidence, for example, by implementing what has become known as the "equality agenda". Inequality in areas such as employment can and should be addressed as a matter of course. The Irish language should no longer be discriminated against and neither should other areas of cultural expression.

"These are fundamental rights, not matters to be bartered for in a negotiations process," said Martin McGuinness. "The immediate responsibility for equality rests with the British Government. There is an attendant responsibility on all democrats, but especially the Irish Government to ensure that the British take this up."

The choice is clear for the British Government. They can follow the strategy so noisily implemented in Faughilletra and prepare for conflict. Or they can build confidence in a peaceful resolution in advance of the all-important talks in September.

It is an important choice at a vital moment in Irish history.❑

Teamsters' victory

John Holmes, Bay Area Typographical Union #21, reports.

THE TEAMSTERS UNION has won its historic strike against the United Parcel Service (UPS). The dispute paralysed this giant parcel delivery company, which employs nearly one out of every 400 American workers, and transports about 5% of the US's gross domestic product. 185,000 US Teamsters took part in the most important labour struggle in the US in decades.

For 25 years now, the real wages of American workers have dropped dramatically, and multiple-tiered wage scales have divided the American labour movement, relegating younger and minority workers to low-wage, part-time poverty. UPS has been in the forefront: 60% of UPS workers are part-time employees, whose starting wage rates are less than half those of their full-time brother and sister unionists.

The Teamsters secured the curbing of part-time work shifts and the conversion of a sizable number of these positions into full-time decently-paid jobs.

"Demand your government rejects this junta"

Sean Coyne interviewed a leading member of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress soon after the recent coup.

Q. Tell us about the Sierra Leone Labour Congress and Sierre Leone.
A: The SLLC is a national trade union coalition like your TUC with twenty two affiliates covering around 400,000 workers. It has survived despite one party rule and military government. It is the largest single democratic organisation of civil society. Sierra Leone is considered by the World Health Organisation to be one of the world's most impoverished countries.

However, the country is rich in diamonds, gold, bauxite and rutile. It has been ruthlessly exploited by multinationals who have ignored the outrageous levels of smuggling that has propped up corrupt regimes.

Q: How did the coup come about?
A: Those in the front line of the so-called rebel war have long claimed that there was so little distinction between the rebels and soldiers that they called them "sobels". Both factions benefited materially from the war, leaving the people caught in the middle.

Their fusion was no surprise. They stormed Freetown prison to free their comrades awaiting trial for crimes against the people and then embarked on a bloody, brutal looting spree. The six hundred released were given guns and told to help themselves to anything they needed. Workplaces have been ransacked, homes and small shops stripped and wrecked, vehicles stolen at gunpoint. Gangs of drunken, aggressive young militia men and women have abused and sometimes murdered those trying to reason with them while the military authorities turn a blind eye and claim complaints are exaggerated.

Q. How have the trade unions responded?
A: The SLLC was able to call for and sustain a mass stayaway from work despite threats from the regime that all those not reporting for work will be immediately dismissed. We have formed an alliance with all other sections of civil society, including the religious councils, women's organisations, small traders, students and professional bodies. We have acted in unison on the need to mobilise and ensure that this junta is unable to consolidate its position.

Q. What are your main demands and what position have you taken towards the mainly Nigerian ECOMOG forces that have sworn to topple the regime in Freetown?
A: We have called for all measures including military intervention if necessary. We have issued an unambiguous statement that the overthrowing of the civilian government was a crime and must be put right before peace can be restored. We know that we speak with the overwhelming support of the people of Sierra Leone. The masses are tired of war and military rule. They took great risks voting for a civilian government and all their hopes are invested in that prospect. The very thought of being governed by this military junta is repugnant and will not be tolerated by the masses.

Our other demands are to revive the peace accord, for comprehensive demilitarisation and to find peaceful methods of resolving differences. Our young people can strip and clean an MK47 but cannot read or write.

The campaign to oust this regime is gathering pace. There are incredibly moving stories of workers refusing to be forced to work at gun point.

Q: What lessons have you drawn from the struggle so far?
A: First, we have to recognise the centrality of the working class in any activity to defeat the military regime.

Second, the need to build alliances with other sections of civil society based on clear demands, and what I would call an ultra-democratic way of working, is essential.

Third, we should begin to think about the form of government we need. Many of those elected last year wasted no time in supporting the military. Our representatives must be accountable, all business must be transparent and the trade union movement cannot be relegated to a back seat.

The workers' movement is in the forefront of defending democracy, and we must be in the forefront of ensuring that it works, which includes ensuring the wealth we produce is equitably distributed. Exploitation has to stop.

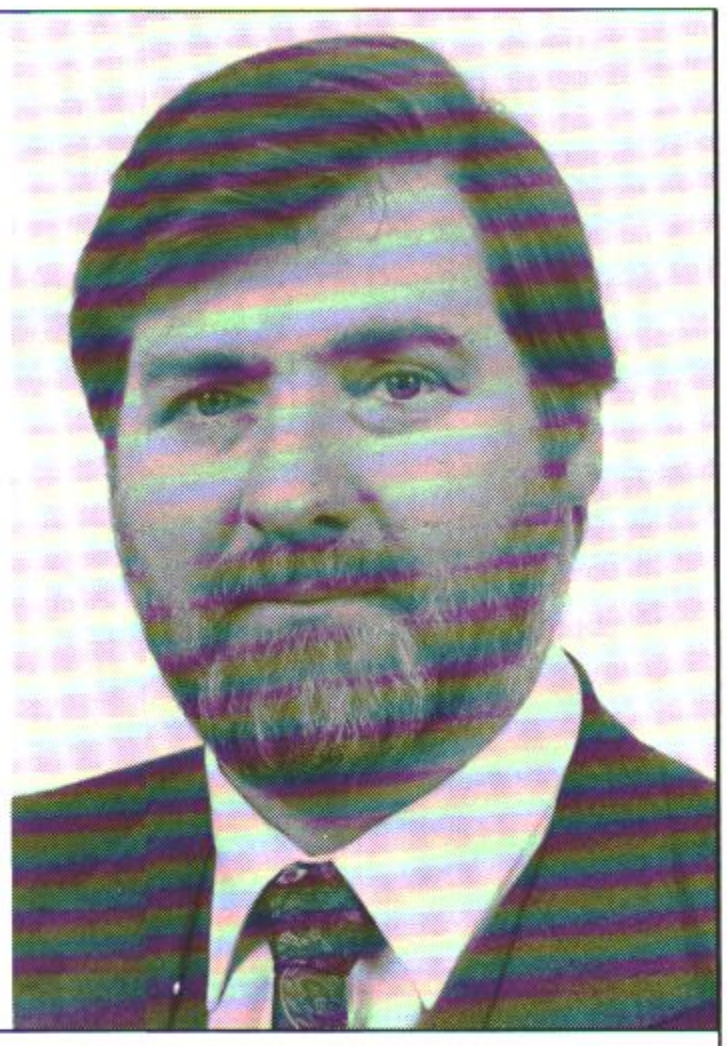
Q: You have received messages of support from all over the world. What else can be done?
A: These messages have been very heartening and encouraged us to carry on when the situation looked very grim. We now want our friends to think about what material help they can give us to rebuild our movement. We are also asking all workers' organisations to pressurise their own governments to reject the advances of this regime. We want to ensure that they have nowhere to turn for support and are totally isolated.

Sierra Leone is a small west African state which has been embroiled in a long and bloody civil war between military leaders and the Revolutionary United Front. After six years of intense conflict during which two-thirds of the population were displaced, general elections opposed by both the military and the rebels were held in February. A civilian coalition government formed under the leadership of President Tejan Kabbah immediately began trying to cement peace between the warring factions. Although this won widespread approval, the process soon ran into trouble — both factions felt threatened by a new third force of local civil defence militias drawn from and accountable to local communities ravaged by the war.

Recently, an unholy alliance of the military and the RUF joined forces in a coup against the civilian government, forcing the President to flee. These events featured only briefly in the British press which focused on the evacuation of European expats.

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the Michael Hindley column



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

NATO AND THE European Union (EU) both have the same starting point in the Cold War. Both were constructed to counter the extension of Soviet influence in Europe. Both — it must be admitted — succeeded. Once the Cold War was won logic should have led to the winding up of NATO. Curiously, just when we really don't need NATO many previously critical voices against NATO in the Labour Party have fallen completely silent. It is within living memory that Labour's official policy was for the mutual winding-up of NATO and the Warsaw Pact. Well, the Warsaw Pact more folded up than wound up, and there's still NATO — a bit like one of its old foes, Gromyko, always there whoever is in charge.

NATO has transformed itself quite neatly into the capitalist world's policeman and has provided an excellent solution for those who want a body to intervene in conflicts which, unlike the UN, is not subject to veto nor indeed discussion. The countries of eastern Europe are queuing to get in, in the belief — thoroughly mistaken — that membership of NATO will provide a guarantee against future aggression from Russia.

First of all, keeping Russia out of NATO is the surest way of making Russia aggressive. Secondly, can anyone seriously imagine NATO (aka the White House) ordering American boys to intervene to drive the Russian tanks out of Hungary or Poland, especially as neither country has the oil reserves which prompted the west to save "democracy" in Kuwait by driving out the tyrant Saddam Hussein? (Am I alone in wondering what happened to the promises from the Kuwaiti royal family about introducing democracy as a price for intervention?)

The present Polish Government presents a sorry and desperate picture, offering up young Polish men to go and do NATO's bidding in return for a place at the table. The increase in the Polish defence budget to meet the bill for NATO membership will be crippling, for all NATO states' armaments have to be compatible, and soon Warsaw will be full of carpetbaggers selling death, hot on the heels of the carpetbaggers selling feasibility studies on privatisation.

As long as NATO exists there will never be a realistic chance of a truly independent European Force; the Pentagon and its supporters, always as numerous in a Labour Cabinet as a Tory one, will simply not allow one to develop.

EU expansion and NATO expansion go in tandem. The eastern states see membership of both as a sign of acceptance and some will be bought off with one, failing to achieve the other. The EU Commission has held out the prospect of relatively early membership for those countries most successfully detached from the old Soviet Empire — Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Estonia, in addition to Slovenia and Cyprus.

THE ECONOMIES of the applicant states could hardly be more open to the ravages of the market economy than now when their terms of co-operation with the EU are certainly not those of equals. Membership gives them some chance of bargaining. In addition their inclusion will force a fundamental realignment of the finances of the EU and certainly hasten the collapse of the Common Agricultural Policy. Weak as it is, the Social Chapter will be applicable to those low wage economies.

There is absolutely no way that an EU of over twenty member states can be run on the basis of the federalists' plan for a supranational government. Future co-operation will have to be intergovernmental pragmatic planning based on a multi-speed, multi-layered Europe. The Single Currency, which looks less and less likely by 1999, will be impossible after expansion, hence the madcap, going for broke attitude of Helmut Kohl.

This is not to say that I shall purvey the myth of salvation and prosperity through membership of the EU; but I shall not join in any atavistic campaign to persuade those countries and comrades to stay out. The more countries there are inside the EU the more obvious will be the need for a different, more pluralistic Europe.

The present and growing danger remains however, the isolation of Russia. The west's preferred candidate, Yeltsin, offered up his troops in like manner to the Poles, but to no avail. The biggest influence on the Russian economy is the Mafia, apart from the five IMF advisers who fly into Moscow once a month and stay at the Hilton for a week.

The west will yet pay a heavy price for the collapse of the Soviet Union. There was a chance of managed transition under Gorbachev, but the west chose literally to go for broke. Another collapse in Russia at the beginning of the next century could, as happened this century, plunge Europe into turmoil.

Open up the EU

FIGHT RACISM

Labour must inquire into deaths in police custody

Deborah Coles and Helen Shaw, Co-Directors of INQUEST, write:

THE RECENT cases in which the DPP's decisions not to prosecute police officers were quashed have given rise to unprecedented controversy. The cases present disturbing images of police violence and racism.

Shiji Lapite: two police officers arrest a black man who, they claim, struggles so violently that they have to kick him in the head and apply a neck hold with so much force that his larynx is ruptured and he dies. Yet his alleged violence leaves no significant mark on either officer.

Richard O'Brien: officers called to a disturbance subject a bystander to anti-Irish abuse; hold him face down on the ground with their knees on his back; ignore his pleas that he cannot breathe and drag him — dying or already dead — into the back of a police van. His wife and son are taken to the police station in the same van and are forced to clamber over his body when they arrive.

Derek Treadaway: forced to confess to robbery by what a High Court judge later describes as torture, handcuffed to a chair with a plastic bag over his head so he couldn't breath.

INQUEST has documented a pattern of cases involving police brutality or negligence that raise fundamental questions about the use of excessive force and inadequate treatment and care. It is our experience that decisive action is rarely taken to prevent these deaths occurring. Our anger and frustration focus on the fact that there is no effective investigation of these deaths, lessons are not learnt and those responsible are not brought to justice. Although there is an inquiry into the CPS handling of such cases and the Home Affairs Select Committee is to examine Police Complaints and Discipline, the Home Secretary should initiate an inquiry into the way in which deaths in custody are treated at every stage of the criminal justice system. Otherwise public confidence in the police cannot be restored.

Southall defies firebomb

ON 17th AUGUST, two hundred local people defied threats of violence from Sikh communalists to attend a Rally for Unity organised by the Southall Monitoring Group to mark the fiftieth anniversary of Indian and Pakistani independence.

The week before the rally, the SMG's office was firebombed by communalists, who resent the group's campaign against divisions in the Asian community which recently have led to fighting between Sikh and Muslim youth gangs.

Piara Khabra, the local Labour MP, initially denounced the SMG's efforts in the local and Asian press. Subsequently, he changed tack and addressed the Unity Rally, though he has yet to offer support for the SMG's plans to hold a Unity March through Southall on October 12th.

The rally was also addressed by representatives of the Hillingdon strikers (who demanded to know why no support had been forthcoming from Khabra), the growing Somali refugee community in Southall, and the Alliance Against Communalism. In addition, Urdu poets recited verses opposing communalism and the abuse of religion for political ends and local students made a powerful declaration of their intention to overcome divisions based on religion, race or nationality. Music, dancing and food rounded off a highly affirmative afternoon.

The Unity March on 12th October promises to be a landmark in Southall's eventful history. SMG supporters are building it by circulating an anti-communal petition among young people, visiting shops and workplaces, and seeking broad-based political support from the labour movement and the community.

●For more detailed information contact SMG 0181-843 2333.

Firmin Gnali Must Stay

Firmin Gnali, a political activist who worked to bring democracy to his nation, the Ivory Coast, is now seeking asylum in Britain. If he is sent back to the Ivory Coast, he will face the possibility of death at the hands of the Government. Firmin was a member of the FPI (Front Populaire Ivoirien), and a student union activist. In 1991 and 1992, he was arrested, detained and tortured by the military for his political activities. In 1993, the Ivory Coast authorities sacked him from his teaching job and forced him into hiding. On 23rd December 1993, a few days after Henry Konan Bedie proclaimed himself President of the Ivory Coast, Firmin managed to flee the country with a group of musicians travelling to England. He applied for political asylum in the UK in January 1994. His application for asylum was refused by the Home Office in May 1995. In May, the Home Office denied Firmin his final leave to appeal. Firmin has one final legal option, that of taking his case to the High Court for judicial review. He is now under serious threat of deportation back to the Ivory Coast. Firmin Gnali has recently been working as a musician and actor with Banner Theatre in Birmingham.

In the Ivory Coast today, members of opposition parties, opposition journalists, trade unionists and student union activists are still subject to systematic repression. Kidnappings, arbitrary arrests, political trials, imprisonment and torture continue to be carried out. There are more than 100 political prisoners in Ivorean jails today.

●For more information on this and other anti-deportation campaigns contact the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns (whom we thank for this report) at 22 Berners Street, Birmingham B19 2DR.

Science

One race — the human race

Keith Veness, Islington North CLP, argues that recent tests on Neanderthal DNA brilliantly vindicate a feminist theory.

THE RECENT WORK on "reconstructing" the DNA of Neanderthal fossils provides proof of the important "recent out of Africa" thesis. It debunks the ideas that we are "special creation" or hopelessly set in our ways and simply crude victims of our biology.

The recent coverage given to Chris Stringer was fair reward for his pioneering work. However, none of the media tied this into the work done on women's mitochondrial DNA that provided the first proof of this revolutionary change in understanding our origins.

Many on the left have cried "one race — the human race" in opposition to racist attacks. Most of us would have been hard pushed to prove it if challenged. Now we can.

Scientific theories and discoveries relied on excavating fossils and ancient tools. After Darwin much time was spent searching for "missing links" — something half way between the "great apes" and human beings. No such brute existed. Equally, much time was spent in the early part of this century seeking "proofs" that various "races" had ancient separate histories and each may even have had separate origins. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* in the 1930s purported that there were five "races" — Caucasian, African, Mongoloid, Polynesian and Amerindian — crudely represented as White, Black, Yellow, Brown and Red!

Such stuff we now know to be nonsense. However, simply digging up artifacts and odd bits of skeletons was never going to settle matters. Stalemates are often broken by introducing a new party to the dispute. Enter the microbiologists and DNA analysts.

The perceived wisdom of zoology was that humans diverged from apes over 15 million years ago. The classification was on a tree with "great apes" (the gorilla, chimpanzee, orang utan etc.) on one branch and us as the only survivors on the other. However, using blood tests and comparing DNA etc, the facts were startling. The "asian apes" did indeed separate from us 15 million years ago. However, the "african apes" and ourselves shared a common ancestry for a further ten million years — only diverging 5 million years ago. The tree's two branches thus had orang utans on one branch and gorillas, chimps and ourselves on the other! Further detailed tests showed that chimps are slightly more closely related to us than gorillas. To kill a chimpanzee is awfully close to murder in evolutionary terms.

Most scientists now concede that we are indeed "african apes" of a somewhat specialised variety. The split between tree and jungle apes and the early "australopithecines" on the drier savannahs is generally accepted as the start of a separate "human" branch of evolution.



A revolutionary change of direction created the genus "Homo" which split from the "apemen" of australopithecus over 3 million years ago. This I believe to be the "aquatic ape" theory. Recognisable human-type creatures left Africa and spread over Asia and Europe at least one million years ago. These were the "Homo Erectus" that were called "Java Man", "Peking Man", etc., depending on their excavation site.

Perceived wisdom was that we all descended from these various ancient humans and thus had long and separate ancestries. The find in 1856 in the Neander Valley in Southern Germany of a more recent skeleton led to the classification of "Homo Sapiens Neanderthalis", a close relative and an assumed ancestor. Larger and more heavily built, it was a creature better adapted for the ice-age. It was assumed it was our direct ancestor. (Fanciful nonsense arose about "cavemen" — hulking brutes smashing each other over the heads with clubs. The Flintstones are clearly Neanderthal in conception.) We can now deduce that this is not so.

Studies of human descent are suffused with sexist language — man, mankind, the ascent of man. Feminism's contribution is to ask different questions. In the study of DNA, we are usually handicapped in that we all get half our DNA from dad and half from mum. You only have to go back a few generations for everyone's family tree to be hopelessly interlaced and muddled.

There is however one exception. The mitochondria in cells are small separate entities that we inherit only from our mothers. They are clear signposts leading backwards through the female line to our origins. Thousands of pregnant women throughout the world from every continent were asked to donate afterbirth to provide the best source material for the study. The results were starting. There were hardly any changes of note between various continents. We all shared common ancestors less than 150,000 years ago. There is no ancient Asian or European DNA in any samples. We are all Africans of very recent standing.

Indeed the biggest differences were between South and East African peoples on one side and West Africans and the rest of the world on the other! This suggests that we left Africa between 120,000 and 90,000 years ago and spread, via the Middle East, to Europe and Asia. We supplanted the Neanderthals and other human types in a relatively short time. By 70,000 years ago we travelled to New Guinea and Australia and by 40,000 years ago had crossed the "Bering Land Bridge" into North America. Our evolution and history is both very recent and shared.

Now, the amazing success in piecing together ancient DNA from Neanderthal fossils has vindicated the so-called African Eve theory. The DNA of Neanderthals is sufficiently different to show that they were not our immediate ancestors and did not interbreed with the newcomers. We truly are only one race — there is only one humanity, we are recent, African and all closely interrelated. The combination of brilliant science and feminism has at last explained our ancient history and refuted the racial nonsense of the last two centuries.

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Conservatism

Tories are at each others' throats. They are going to split and probably never recover. Good riddance. But while socialists are rubbing their hands in glee the end result may prove bitter-sweet writes Simon Kennedy.

FOR 71 OF THE last 100 years they have held office. The stability and longevity of Britain's natural party of government has been part of the landscape. But election commentators struggled to find words to express this year's defeat: "wipeout", "melt-down" and "annihilation" were among the favourites.

Hague's election as leader saw the Thatcherites' revenge for the wayward pro-European years of Major's tenure. The 92 MPs who backed him in the final round knew he would commit the party to unabashed Eurosceptism. The stage is set for a major split.

"Unless the Conservative Party is a broad church, it doesn't survive," pleaded Heseltine. Hague's response was the diplomatic equivalent of two fingers: "I intend to say this is my policy — follow me".

Once the pro-Europe wing had been cursed, Thatcher could offer her blessing. As ex-minister George Walden observed, she backed him "only when the youngster learned to mouth granny's words on Europe."

Hague's first Commons speech as leader announced the start of a guerilla war against the Amsterdam Treaty and he supported a referendum on the Treaty at the Scottish Party conference. Euro-sceptics hold a big majority and the key positions in the shadow cabinet. Exclusion gives Clarke's supporters the choice of all defeated factions: wait to die slowly, or split as soon as possible taking with you the maximum number. Clarke is now waiting his moment, pledged to style himself on Heath's permanent oppositionist role from the back benches. Refusing to be compromised by a Shadow Cabinet position, and indicating that his criticisms of the Government will be "robust", he has the best possible platform to build his faction.

Two previous Tory splits have occurred, both over decisive issues of international economic policy: in 1846 over agricultural subsidies, and in the 1900s over trade. Given their small parliamentary numbers, and their distance from office, a dramatic and sudden split is unlikely. Rather the European faction are preparing for a "staged separation", as one of them told the press, beginning as a continual defiance of the Euro-sceptic whip, then resignation, culminating in an alliance with the Liberal Democrats. Reports also emerged at the time of the leadership election of talks with Labour.

The outlines of an alternative organisation already exist in the mainstream Macleod Group and the Tory Reform Group. European policy is the focal point of questions as to how post-imperial Britain positions itself in the world, awakening the great post-Second World War debates over alliance with the USA and the type of domestic economy that should be pursued. Simultaneously it questions the theme that has established the Conservatives as a party with mass support: the idea of the nation. The rise and decline of the Conservative Party should be seen in parallel with the ascent and descent of the British empire. British politics is now readjusting in the search for a new period of capitalist democracy.

The modern party, although rooted deep in British history, matured in the middle of the period of imperial expansion. In the 1840s the working class-based Chartist movement was gaining wide support with an increasingly sophisticated political strategy. The developing revolt in Ireland throughout the century threatened disorder. In response, an alliance was built around landowning aristocrats of loyalist forces in the North of Ireland, the petit bourgeoisie, military chiefs and some industrial capitalists. As the franchise widened it was clear that no party that stood solely for the interests of the landed would be elected. Disraeli famously found the formula for combining an economic policy with appeal to the working class in the slogan "One Nation". This nation was built on empire.

Chamberlain similarly championed imperial expansion as the source of social reform. The Conservative Party allowed economic concessions to the working class while speaking the integrating language of a unified nation. The working class was allowed to organise for separate interests within the boundaries of approved Labour Party politics.

From 1955 the share of the Tory vote has declined, as it struggled to adjust to the diminishing role the country played in world affairs. The profession of imperial leader has become redundant, symbolised in the Hong Kong hand-back. Losing the Ulster Unionists in the 1970s, and Scotland and Wales in the most recent election, shows the emptiness of the claim to represent all the peoples of the state. The Conservative Party in Scotland is now beginning to dissolve. The rot will ceaselessly spread southwards.

Thatcher's attempt to revive the mass base of the 1930s convinced a few of success in the early years, but by the end of the decade ministers started to head for the doors. Thatcherite economic logic dovetailed with the interests of the enormous British military complex and the City, both of which are fused to the Conservative Party. London remains one of the biggest futures markets and funds management centres in the world, directing up to half the world's acquisitions and mergers. There are good reasons why these interests want to avoid any European entanglement that would limit their money-making.

The present split in the Party, like those before, centres on a major strategic political and economic dilemma, expressing a real division of conflicting capitalist interests. As well as not having much empire left to lead, Thatcher has also put paid to the notion of the party as protector of the "One Nation".

Setting free the unhindered powers of the market undermined the social support the party relied upon. The securities of community, workplace and tradition are immaterial to the march of money. On Black Wednesday their precious pound was annihilated by the same speculators they sanctified.

Hague's proposed return to what Major called "a golden age that never was" is therefore tarnished beyond recognition. As the party gazes into the electoral void a new conservatism is being constructed.

The Labour Party under Blair has adopted the same policies favoured by capitalism

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goes cannibal

without the "feel bad factor". But when the effects of this course become more apparent it is inevitable that the high poll ratings will be reversed. The Millbank machine must be aware of what's ahead. Despite the landslide in seats Labour actually received a smaller share of the vote than when defeated in 1951 and 1955, and when victorious in 1945, 1950, and 1966. This forms a powerful reason for Blair to speed the process of "centre" recomposition.

The joint cabinet committee including Ashdown indicates the future coalitionist direction. There is every reason to suppose the Clarke faction will be invited sooner or later.

A referendum on the voting system is promised. State funding for political parties will break Tory links with business and Labour's connection to the unions. The stage will be set for a new centre bloc of those committed to neo-liberal policies and closer European integration. The conditions are therefore coming together for Clarke and his allies to leave.

First, British capitalism faces a major economic challenge. British politicians will have to decide whether they want to be part of the European development or not. Second, the present leadership of the Tory Party is going for all-out Eurosceptism, forcing the pace of the split. Third and lastly, Blair is fashioning a new regroupment strategy that will provide the faction with a comfortable home.

The 1st May wipeout should be seen as the end of a period in British history — the end of the Conservative Party. What impact on political direction will a shrill right-wing force have on the Prime Minister who calls himself an "English patriot"? As the Tories race rightwards it's very likely Blair will follow.

LLB Labour Party Conference fringe meeting
"Reclaim the Labour Party"
7pm Monday 29th September
Royal Albion Hotel, Brighton
Speakers include:
Tony Benn and Ken Livingstone

*** end of Conference _LLB_ quiz night, 8-45pm, Thursday 2nd October, Royal Albion Hotel, Brighton.**

*** date for your diary:**
LLB AGM
"The left and the Labour Government — what now after Conference?"
Saturday 8th November
London

Win a trip to the World Cup Final!

Fancy two tickets and a trip for two to the World Cup Final next year in Paris? That's first prize in an *LLB* raffle being run in support of the Liverpool dockers. *LLB* supporter Peter Frankental won the tickets in a national Fantasy Football competition. But rather than benefit himself, he decided to give them to *LLB* to run a raffle for the sacked dockers.

A small group of us began looking around for other prizes and got a surprisingly good response: a return flight to Cuba, sponsored by Progressive Tours, a week's holiday in a cottage in the New Forest, three bottles of Havana Club rum from Vinceremos Wines and a signed Tony Benn book so far. The raffle will run till January and every *LLB* supporter and subscriber has been sent tickets. Proceeds will be divided between the dockers and *LLB*, with the dockers getting three-quarters of all the money. The Merseyside Port shop stewards have indicated their support and money will start coming through as soon as costs have been cleared.

The dockers' need for funds could not be more urgent. Four months after it was elected, the Labour Government, itself a major shareholder in the Merseyside docks, has done nothing to help the sacked workers, now approaching their second anniversary in dispute.

You can order your tickets by contacting _LLB_ Dockers Raffle PO Box 2378 London E5 9QU, or telephone 0181-556 8113. Tickets are £5 for a book of ten cheques payable to "_LLB_ Dockers Raffle"

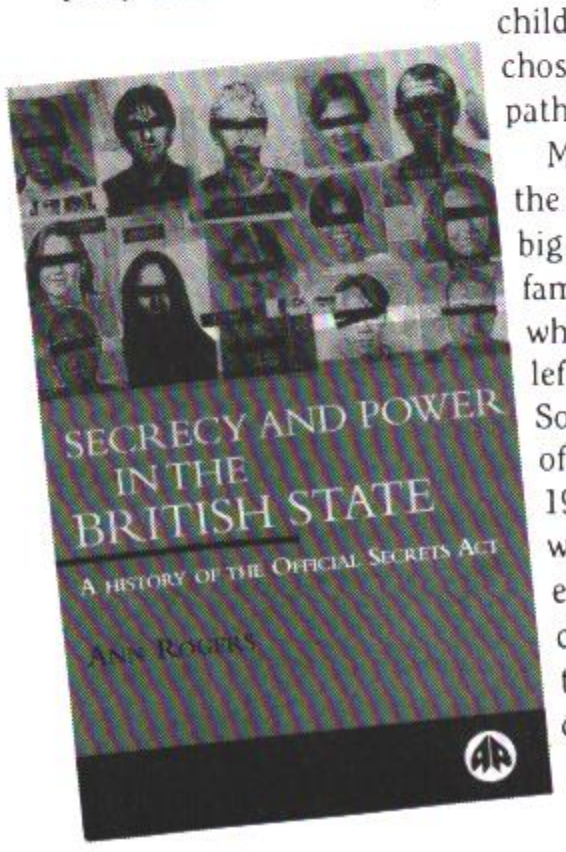
The party's over

Communist nostalgia dominates the autumn's new books. Mike Phipps issues a reading list.

What was it like growing up as the children of communist parents in the post-war period? In ***Children of the Revolution*, Phil Cohen** interviews men and women from a wide range of communist backgrounds, including comedian Alexei Sayle, *Guardian* journalist Martin Kettle and Brian Pollitt, son of veteran Stalinist leader Harry Pollitt.

Many of the interviewees had a marked sense of being different from other children. Some were embarrassed by their parents' public communist activities. Many went on holiday to eastern Europe while their peers went to Blackpool. Jackie Kay remembers, aged seven, writing about her father in an essay: "My dad is a party man, he organises parties." Gillian Slovo's foreword also expresses a sense of feeling "special", both proud of what her parents did and yet hiding it as if ashamed. She discusses two themes that recur in the book: the conflict between family life and party work and how some household issues had ideological connotations. "My parents had standards," she writes, "and they stuck to them — not standards of personal behaviour which could be restricted to an individual, but a morality that embraced a nation. For a child it was a hard act to follow. How could we not applaud their selflessness? But at the same time how could it not dawn on us that it was this very generosity to others that deprived us of our parents?"

Many write of their parents' almost religious faith in the Soviet Union, others on how their communism fostered a puritanical approach to moral issues. Alexei Sayle, in a somewhat bitter contribution, suggests this led to double standards: communist fathers who used the "cause" to escape family commitments, to philander or go "drinking with the proletariat." Some describe a more menacing interference by the party in their lives. Martin Jones' father moved the whole family to East Germany soon after World War Two, and would enlist the party-state authorities to push his adolescent children down a chosen career path.

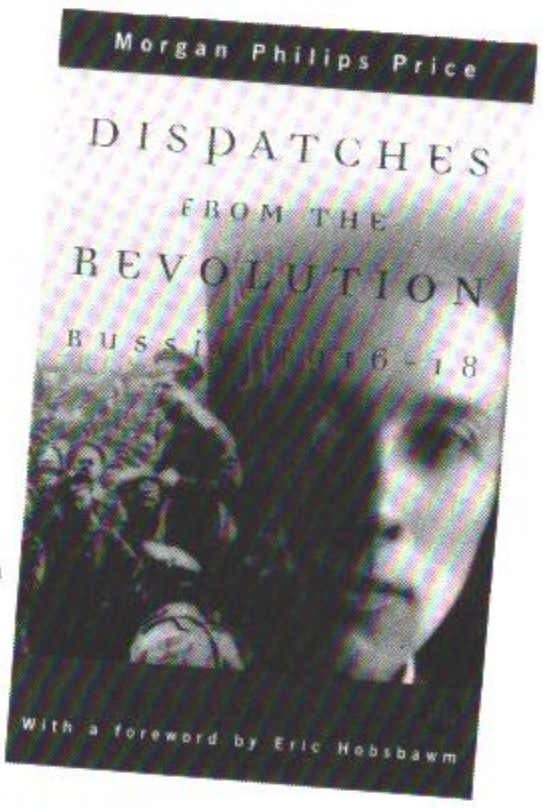


Many talk of the party as one big extended family, although when members left, as over the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956, they were often excommunicated from the family circle. Martin Kettle, who joined the Communist Party at university observed that for him this "wasn't so much about becoming an adult as staying a child."

Unwavering faith in the loveliness of the Soviet Union, despite its historic collapse, also features in **Andrew Murray's *Flashpoint: World War Three***. Sadly this is quite a flaw for a book about international relations. Murray has assembled some useful material about the limits of globalisation, the relative strength of the world's trading blocs, Germany's growing economic influence in eastern Europe and the increasingly parasitic nature of the British economy's external operations. But his analysis is vitiated by his crude taking of sides and his eagerness to attribute the "smashing up" of the Soviet Union to imperialist plots rather than internal degeneration. His propensity to see the USSR as a force exclusively for good on the world stage, even bringing "revolutionary government" to Afghanistan, makes one doubt his grip on reality. Similarly he ridicules Thatcher's seminar in 1990 on the German "national character", while himself arguing that Germany is pursuing the same policies in central Europe today as it did during World War Two. This leads on to a parroting of the pernicious myth that Germany's desire to recognise an independent Croatia was the real cause of the war in former Yugoslavia. There's little to be salvaged here amid the quotations from Stalin and Palme Dutt: a great pity because we do need a serious analysis of the New World Order.

Devotees of the Russian Revolution will also be interested in ***Dispatches from the Revolution***. Writer **Morgan Philips Price** was a Liberal MP until 1915, a member of the Communist Party from 1922 to 1924 and Labour MP for the Forest of Dean from 1935 to 1959. This book collects edited highlights of his first-hand reports of events in Russia 1916-18 when he became an active supporter of the new Soviet Government.

The book includes a remarkable debate between Lenin and Provisional Government leader Kerensky at the First Congress of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies in June 1917. He contrasts this with Cossack provincial assemblies where the majority of speakers were officers — barred in the more advanced Soldiers' Councils — and where socialist speeches from the rank and file were greeted with shouts of "disgraceful insubordination!" In fact a great strength of the book is its coverage of events away from the capital, including the emergent women's movement in Kazan and its campaign against polygamy and the veil.



The book's chief interest, however, lies in what Price could not get published at the time. The British Government imposed "D notices" on reports that were critical of the Tsarist Russian army, Britain's allies in World War One. In particular, news of military atrocities against Jews, including the razing of entire villages, was suppressed as part of the war effort.

Official secrecy is the main concern of another Pluto offering, **Ann Rogers' *Secrecy and Power in the British state***. With New Labour shelving its manifesto commitment to introduce freedom of information, this short history is very timely. Britain has long been one of the most secretive countries in the western world and the 1911 Official Secrets Act, rushed through in a climate of anti-German hysteria, was for the next 80 years the cornerstone of this policy. It effectively outlawed any disclosure of the workings of government to the public or media.

The book discusses the collapse of the high-profile cases of the 1970s and 1980s, such as Clive Ponting's leaking of information on the sinking of the Argentinean cruiser Belgrano to the Select Committee investigating the Falklands War, and the publication of MI5 agent Peter Wright's memoir *Spycatcher*. These cases effectively discredited the Act. It's worth recalling too how the *Guardian*, currently basking in the success of its exposés of Tory MPs' corruption, was not always so unswerving in its defence of press freedom. When junior civil servant Sarah Tisdall leaked documents about the arrival of Cruise missiles at Greenham Common airbase, the *Guardian* caved in to pressure to disclose its source to the authorities; Tisdall got a six month sentence.

The book's weakness is its failure to bring the story up to date. The Official Secrets Act was rewritten in 1989 — vaunted as a liberalisation at the time. In fact it closed loopholes, specifically outlawing both the "public interest" defence which Ponting used to secure his acquittal, and the defence of prior publication elsewhere — the key argument that made the prosecution of *Spycatcher* so laughable.

A culture of secrecy and an absence of a

Communalism's resistible rise

John Pinto of the Alliance against communalism and for democracy in South Asia reviews The Furies of Indian Communalism *by Achin Vanaik, Verso, £15 paperback.*

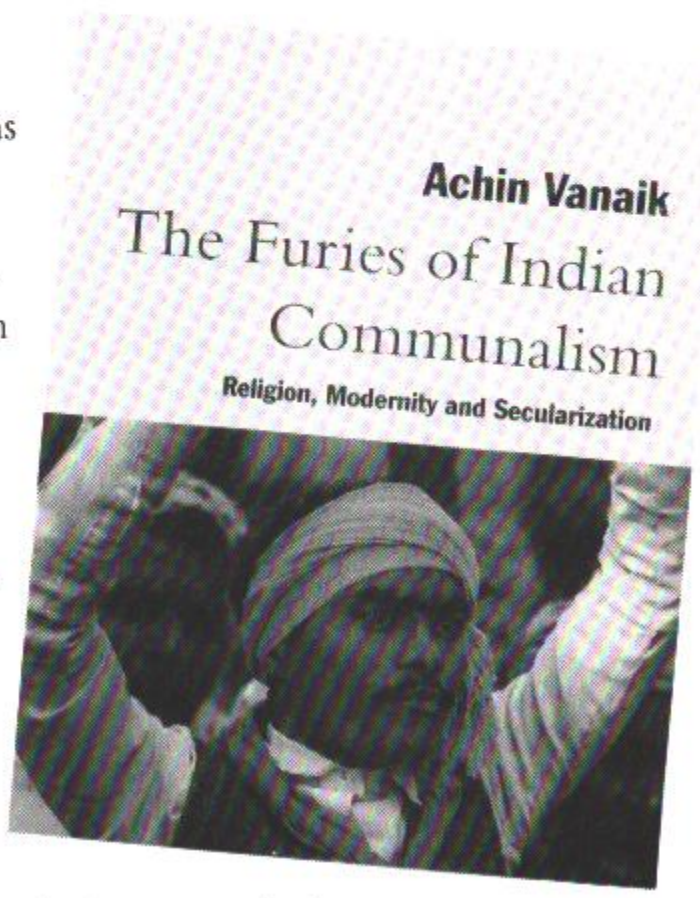
IN AUGUST India celebrated fifty years of independence. In the Hindu-Muslim communal conflict during the Partition of India millions perished. The fervent hope of that generation of Indian nationalists was that never again would Hindus and Muslims be so bitterly divided. The official commitment of the Indian state to secularism, social justice and democracy was seen as the guarantor of communal amity and prosperity — referred to as the Nehruvian consensus after India's first Prime Minister. In the last 25 years this consensus has unravelled as successive governments have pursued policies that have marginalised social development in favour of market-orientated neoliberalism. Politicians have eroded the state's commitment to secularism by pandering to religious pressure groups.

Communalism may be loosely defined as a political ideology which makes use of religious and cultural differences to achieve political ends. The main beneficiary of the breakdown of the Nehruvian consensus has been the Hindu communalist movement led by the right wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) which is hostile to secularism and seeks to build a theocratic Hindu state.

Achin Vanaik makes a rigorous and powerful analysis of the Hindu communalist movement. He rejects the classification of it as fascist, adopted by some sections of the Indian left. Instead he sees the movement as an extremely reactionary, religious nationalist and authoritarian movement capable of instigating anti-Muslim pogroms. He argues that the Hindu communalist movement differs from religious fundamentalist movements and other religious nationalist movements by systematising hostility to another religious group (ie Muslims) in its pursuit of social and political goals. By dedicating the book to the anti-racist militant Suresh Grover, director of the Southall Monitoring Group, he recognises the divisive role communalism in India plays in Asian communities in this country, especially in weakening the anti-racist struggle.

Vanaik argues that communalism is a modern phenomenon. It is caused by the failure of a religiously plural society, like India, to establish a proper balance for co-existence of the religious and secular spheres. Like all modern societies there has been an on-going process of secularisation in India. Religion no longer plays the same role in people's lives as in the past. He believes that the most powerful antidote to communalism in the long term will be a deepening of the process of securalisation of Indian society and a further strengthening of the Indian state's commitment to secularism, human rights and democracy. He sees the rise of new social movements like the women's movement, the lower caste movement and environmentalist movements as positive features in the Indian political landscape. He argues that the Indian left should ally itself with these new social movements to halt the forward march of the communalists. This alliance would have to build a new consensus that rejects market oriented neoliberalism in favour of a sustainable and humane socialist alternative. The empowerment of these new social movements as well as the institutionalisation of human rights would need to be central to this new consensus.

The author defends the secularism of the Indian state against its detractors. Secularism has come under attack from anti-modernist and anti-post modernist Indian intellectuals who believe that secularism and modernisation are responsible for the rise of communalism. They argue that secularism is a Western idea, and as such is totally alien to a "traditional religious society" like India. They view India as a conglomeration of "religious communities" and argue that "religious communitarianism" is the best defence against communalism. Vanaik argues that they confuse religion and culture and disputes their characterisation of Indian culture and society. He further shows how their arguments legitimise Hindu communalist discourse. Such cultural relativism also informs the way in which naive multiculturalists in Britain deal with Asian communities. The result in both cases is that patriarchal religious communitarian rights are defended against individual human and democratic rights. The chapter dealing with culture and religion in the book provides good arguments to counter this negative tendency.



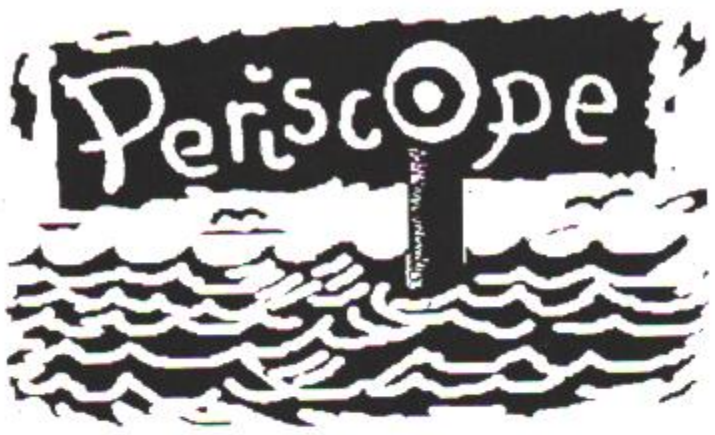
This book provides the activist and academic with powerful analytical tools to understand the phenomenon of Hindu communalism. It is also an important case study on how to counter corrosive post-modernist ideas like cultural relativism. These ideas weaken the progressive struggle for a better world and must be challenged.❑

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statutory "right to know" in Britain has also helped cover up the truth about nuclear accidents. **John O'Dea**'s book ***Exposure: living with radiation in Ireland*** makes clear the links between the two countries. The Irish Sea receives regular discharges from the Sellafield reprocessing plant, formerly Windscale, scene of Britain's worst known nuclear accident, and is believed to be the most radioactive sea in the world. In Ireland itself, 20% of deaths are due to some form of cancer. The book explains the science behind different types of radiation, covers a range of issues from nuclear weapons to ozone depletion and provides some useful campaigning tips.

●Books reviewed: Phil Cohen, *Children of the Revolution*, Lawrence & Wishart; Andrew Murray, *Flashpoint: World War Three*, Pluto, £9.99 paperback; Morgan Philips Price, *Dispatches from the Revolution*, Pluto, £8.99 paperback; Ann Rogers, *Secrecy and power in the British state*, Pluto, £10.99 paperback; John O'Dea, *Exposure: Living with radiation in Ireland*, Irish Reporter Publications.

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Shrimpton shown short shrift

Sulking **Michael Shrimpton** who, angered by the Labour leadership skulked off to the Tories at the Uxbridge byelection, had been snubbed by the left many years before. As West Sussex Euro-PPC in 1989, he made an unsuccessful 120 mile round trip to gate-crash a County Party meeting in Chichester to whip up support. Eventually, chair Dave Stevens grudgingly introduced the ingratiating interloper: "Comrades, Michael Shrimpton," he spat, "tells me he's just dropped in to say hello." Shrimpton rose and began, "Well, hello..." Stevens swiftly snapped "Thank you for that contribution, now on to our next agenda item..."

If truth be told

If you run "**Dearing**" through some computer spellcheckers one suggested alternative is "Derange". Makes sense.

Hunting for friends

In their desperate search for "workers' organisations" to defend their jobs, the hunting fraternity tried to put a scare on Labour MPs out to ban hunting. Nothing to do with cruelty of course, but the need to defend rural jobs. Outflanked by the TGWU's Rural Allied Workers Section (the only union representing rural workers, policy to ban hunting since 1957), the hunters' mag *Horse and Hound* came up with a union demonstration in favour of hunting by... the **Union of Democratic Mineworkers**! Let's hope the UDM do for the hunting fraternity what they did for the mining industry.

Hunters don't give a xxxx for Fosters

Soon after Arnold Garney, editor of *Horse & Hound* rallied the hunting fraternity with "It's time for the gloves to come off", a death threat was sent to Michael Foster. **Michael Foster, Labour MP for Worcester**, is introducing a bill into Parliament to ban hunting with hounds. True to their powers of logic, the hunt supporters sent the threat to... **Michael Foster, Labour MP for Hastings and Rye**.

Not so simple

One thing forgotten in the **Sir David Simon** affair is that he isn't even a member of the Labour Party. Soon Party membership will be a severe block to a career in the Party.

Progress watch

Labour's hard-right modernisers' magazine, with as much access to government ministers as it wants, has financed its latest issue on defence through sponsorship by Short Brothers... and GEC Marconi... and Thomson CSF Radars... and Bombardier... and Hughes... and, well most of Britain's arms manufacturers and related industries. The CIA's friend, John Spellar MP, has a two-page spread, alongside fellow Defence Minister John Reid and Secretary of State George Robertson. Can no one see a conflict of interest here?

Did you enjoy your last copy of Progress, sent free to all Party members courtesy of the arms industry? Now your New Labour Party is offering you the chance to get up to £5,000 personal accident insurance — from a company which has refused to offer recognition or recruitment facilities to MSF. This has got up the nose of the normally loyal Blairite MSF General Secretary **Roger Lyons**, who has written in protest to **Tom Sawyer**, Labour's General Secretary. So before you fall off your ladder, check your insurance company out.

Just bridging the gap

The *Independent* featured Cambridge University students in July in an attempt to portray student hardship. They came across one who, apart from his gap year, had "never had any full or part-time work." He has a low rent, a one thousand five hundred pounds loan and a "monthly allowance of £300" from his parents, which he finds "perfectly adequate". He isn't planning to work over the summer either, because he will be "writing a play". And where was this overpriviledged example of the country's elite on the July 11th? In Bournemouth, at the **Young Labour Conference** of course.

Turkish delight

At a time when the European Union is keeping pressure on Turkey over its human rights abuses, it is nice to know it's got some friends. While the rest of the world keeps up a non-recognition of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, seized by invasion in 1974, **Richard Balfe MEP** managed not only a visit to the occupied territory, but to address its leader formally as "President Denktash".

What chutzpah

In its summer newsletter, **Labour Friends of Israel** make the claim that "It was LFI wot won it" — the General Election — and that it had been campaigning across the country for what it claimed were "LFI candidates". The euphoria of the election is dampened, however, by the fact that they have "lost many friends from the House of Commons" as older Zionist MPs are replaced by younger ones with more commitment to justice for the Palestinians.

The front page of the issue carries a letter of congratulations to Prime Minister Blair from beleaguered right-wing Israeli Premier Benjamin Netanyahu. The key MP profiled is New Right **Stephen Twigg** who "hopes to assist" LFI during his short spell in Parliament. Who chaired LFI's first meeting at the House of Commons of the new Parliament? **Barbara Follett**.

Lord Muck pleads poverty

HAVING BEEN rightly excluded from the national sports academy, English cricket, or rather those who speak in its name, are trying to con Chris Smith and Tony Banks into letting them flog off television rights to home Test matches to the highest bidder, who will inevitably turn out to be Rupert Murdoch.

Tory peer and former Tesco boss Lord MacLaurin, now the chairman of the England and Wales Cricket Board (anglocentrically abbreviated to "ECB"), is pushing through a big shake up which aims to make English cricket "harder" and "more competitive". The initial result of this move could be the sacking of some one third of current full time professional county cricketers. This drastic move appears to have the approval of the Professional Cricketers' Association, one of the feeblest ever excuses for a trade union. The General Secretary of the PCA is David Graveney, who is also currently serving as the Chairman of Selectors for the England team — something like trying to be union convenor and head of personnel at the same time. Graveney was also the chief organiser of the 1989 sanctions busting tour of South Africa led by former England captain Mike Gatting.

In an effort to bounce Smith and Banks into removing home Tests from the list of events (including the FA Cup Final and Wimbledon) which must be broadcast free to the nation on BBC TV, MacLaurin and his henchmen are pleading poverty. Don't believe a word of it, comrades! English cricket has just signed a huge sponsorship deal with Vodaphone, and if it was prepared to introduce floodlit cricket on a large scale and rationalise its own domestic competitions it could enhance the game's revenues and popularity. Meanwhile, ticket prices for a home Test match start at £25, and county membership fees average more than £70 per annum.

English cricket's biggest problem is that its social base is too narrow and too unrepresentative. Denying the bulk of the country access to Test matches on television will only exacerbate that problem. C'mon, Banksie, stand up for the ordinary punter; keep Test matches on BBC.

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CORRESPONDENCE

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

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I have studied *LLB* (June) and feel bound to write to you. It is difficult to see *LLB* as a magazine supporting Labour in any way. I am not aware of any right-wing journal that is more critical of the Government. If you can discover one I would be pleased to send your magazine £10.

I believe that continual carping at a time when a Labour Government has been elected with a large majority is both ineffective and likely to recoil on the heads of the originators. Further, if you are a democrat, you (reluctantly in many cases) have to accept that Tony Blair and his policies are what the people of this country appear to want.

My search for a balanced left-wing journal continues. You meet my needs no more than the Fabian publications on the other wing of the Party. Please try again.

Jack Horn, Abingdon

My article on the election performances of the SLP, Socialist Party, and Scottish Socialist Alliance (June *LLB*) seems to have caused some controversy (see July's letters). I think I should clarify the point I was making.

During the election campaign Tony Blair seemed to be adopting many discredited Tory ideas. Often little appeared to separate the two main parties on policy. Yet opinion polls showed the public wanted better public services ("even if it means some increase in taxes"). Therefore, wasn't the time right for a socialist challenge to Labour? But the "socialist alternatives" polled on average less than 2% where they stood. Either this suggests there was something wrong with the SLP strategy or we should conclude, as Paul Allender does, that "the truth is that the overwhelming majority of the British electorate have very little understanding of, and therefore sympathy with, socialist ideas". I disagree. I believe there is far greater support for socialist values than the election suggests.

If socialists were not voting for the SLP where were they? The evidence is clear. In last year's NEC elections 73,000 Party members voted for Dennis Skinner. This compares very favourably with the 72,000 votes polled by the socialist alternatives.

I am not saying socialists should bury themselves in the fight inside the Labour Party to the detriment of other struggles. *LLB*'s work in solidarity with the dockers is evidence that holding a Labour Party membership card does not prevent you from supporting the workers' side in the class struggle.

Nor am I saying that socialists must stay in the Labour Party until the end of time. A split may be necessary eventually. The way things are going it is possibile that Labour's left wing could be forced out through disciplinary action.

The success of any socialist project independent of Labour will depend on its ability to appeal to the thousands of Party members who at present support the Labour left MPs. The election results shows that the SLP's strategy is at the very least premature.

Tony Dale, Manchester

None of the recent post-mortems over the Uxbridge byelection have said the obvious: large numbers of "traditional" Labour voters work at Heathrow Airport and Hillingdon Hospital. They will have been alienated by Blair's refusal to back the workers involved in these disputes. Furthermore, by bringing both Robert Ayling (whom the Telegraph called "thug, fascist, bully, the Brute of British Airways, the Unacceptable Face of Management"), the chair of Pall Mall Services and Lord Simon of BP, Blair has, figuratively, spat in the faces of everyone who has supported Labour over the past 18 years.

Anyone who has watched the recent *World in Action* programme about BP will be extremely concerned that Lord Simon will be "bringing to government the expertise acquired over years on the BP board". Does that mean he will hunt down and kill trade unionists like their counterparts in Colombia? Every working class voter in Uxbridge who voted Labour in the General Election will have been hoping that Blair's move to the right was just temporary in order to get into office and put right everything Thatcher had destroyed. Having seen him in his true colours they realise that their vote was wasted.

The only way now is for sufficient numbers of workers to persuade their union to disaffiliate from Labour and find a new forum for advancing the interests of the proletariat — either the Socialist Party, Socialist Labour, or the Socialist Workers Party.

Keith Ackermann, Tilbury

In your piece "Our money or his life?" (July) Stefan Tobler complained with much passion, but little accuracy, about my article on the Brazilian Joe Tadeo dos Santos, Aka Piazza. The article originally appeared in the *Evening Standard* and the *Daily Mail*.

It may be unpalatable, but unfortunately the facts printed in the Evening Standard were true: Piazza was in receipt of multiple benefits to which he was not entitled, and the figure of two hundred thousand pounds is a very conservative estimate of the overall costs of his benefits and treatment. He repeatedly lied about the infectious nature of his condition, and repeatedly exposed others to the risk of HIV and TB infection. He said the nurses who said he had TB were "lying fucking bitches". Nor was he "simple". "Keep out of my business" he threatened me in September 1996. "I am going to keep what I have."

The "whole episode" did not leave Piazza "in despair", if anything he appeared to enjoy the attention, and it was his choice to give TV Globo in Brazil a live interview. Also his mother had known for three years that her son was HIV positive, and had been repeatedly contacted by a number of Piazza's friends.

Piazza died on 22nd June in the Mildmay Mission Hospital. Had he been alive, Piazza would have viewed Stefan Tobler as a "useful idiot". Yet another silly liberal willing to help him buck the system. If Stefan Tobler believes all immigration controls should be lifted, then he ought to have the courage of his convictions and say so. If not, he must agree that Jose Tadeo dos Santos had no right to be here, and no right to the many benefits he illegally accessed. Finally, yes, my husband is black. What does this have to do with anything?

Jo-Ann Goodwin, London NW6

AOB

"I use *Clinique* all the time and know exactly what I want... The packaging is simple and grey — very modern looking, but that's very New Labour too" - **Jim Murphy** Labour MP for Eastwood on *Clinique* unscented shampoo.

"I am trying to create the truth" - **Peter Mandelson MP**.

"My skin is combination. A bit oily over the nose and dry on the cheeks. I think I need an exfoliator"- **Jim Murphy MP**.

"Loyalty to the idea — the first political obligation — not only justifies dissent. It demands it" - **Roy Hattersley**.

"I don't want to smell all girly in the House" - **Jim Murphy MP**.

" Camelot has done a wonderful job. It is not Camelot's fault that the House required it to undertake its work in a particular way" - **Kate Hoey MP**.

"I play football twice a week and wouldn't want to be spotted in the changing room with a load of *Clinique*" - **Jim Murphy MP**.

Ethical foreign policy — R.I.P.

The review of arms sales announced by the Labour Government a few days after sweeping away the Tories raised expectations that repressive regimes would no longer look to Britain to provide their weapons. Jon Green, from the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT), looks at the reality.



PHOTO: PATRICK DELANEY

Ann Clwyd and other MPs with Timorese activists.

THE ARMS TO Iraq scandal was a low point for the Major administration. Labour's declaration of an ethical foreign policy was seen as a chance for the new Government to make a clean break with the practice of selling arms to regimes with poor human rights records. However, when it comes to the arms trade words are one thing, actions are another.

Britain is the second largest arms manufacturer in the world after the US. Many of the countries that British companies have dealt with may not fulfil the letter of Labour's new ethical foreign policy. Attention focused on Indonesia. The previous Government agreed to export licences for Hawk fighters, Alvis armoured cars and Tacitica water cannons. There could not be a more clear cut case of a country buying weapons for "internal repression or international aggression". Indonesia has illegally occupied East Timor for over twenty years in contravention of UN resolutions. There have been well documented cases of weapons being used by the Indonesian army against civilians in East Timor. It was for this reason that 136 MPs including over one hundred Labour MPs signed an early day motion calling on the Government "to stop the sale of all military, police and security equipment to Indonesia."

It came as a huge disappointment to human rights activists when Robin Cook announced that the exports would proceed, claiming that "it is not practical to backdate these new criteria to apply to decisions on licences already taken by the previous administration." This limp excuse does not bare examination. Legal opinion obtained by the Government was not conclusive, however the World Development Movement obtained a legal opinion arguing that it was "extremely unlikely" that the decision of the previous administration would bind the new Government. There have been recent precedents of arms sales being revoked in the cases of Iraq, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia.

In Labour's first test of their ethical policy they have caved in to the Foreign Office. The pressure on the Foreign Office seems to have come from both the DTI and the MoD. Worried that Robin Cook might actually mean to deliver a real change of policy they raised the spectre of huge job losses. Labour's actions so far seem to have favoured an expansion of the arms trade. Tony Blair put pressure on the German Government to accept the expensive Eurofighter. The DTI also agreed to GEC's bid for a major expansion into arms production by dropping the ban on bidding for Siemens' military interests.

Arms manufacturers are delighted with the Government's new policy as Labour seem to be prepared to drop restrictions which might prevent a huge expansion in military exports. This may have been damaged if the Government had revoked the arms licences to Indonesia. "Protecting jobs" (how about arms conversion?) has been placed ahead of the human rights of the people of East Timor.

This raises serious questions about Labour's ethical foreign policy. Will new licences be granted in the future to Indonesia? The signs are worrying. Robin Cook went out of his way to question whether Hawks were used against the people of East Timor. It is no wonder that Michael Howard questioned whether there was a significant difference in policy from the previous Tory administration. The scale of backbench opposition to arms sales to Indonesia shows that the Government will face a strong challenge at Party Conference. CAAT has concentrated on trying to amend a resolution that will have the support of the Labour leadership. This will give an opportunity to put the Foreign Office statement to the test at Conference. The leadership will hope that their honeymoon will carry them through. The best outcome for people facing repressive regimes would be a conclusive defeat for the Labour leadership.❑

Mandate your CLP to support amendments to Resolution 435 which add at end: " to immediately revoke the licences, granted by the Conservative Government, for the export of Hawk aircraft and armoured vehicles to Indonesia."

CAAT's fringe meeting at Labour Party Conference will be at 1pm, Tuesday 30th September in the Sussex suite of the Old Ship Hotel. Foreign Office Minister Derek Fatchett MP and Ann Clwyd MP will discuss "Indonesia, Arms Exports and an Ethical Foreign Policy".

●Arms exports and employment

CAAT now has two reports which indicate that economic considerations reinforce, rather than undermine, the ethical and political case for scaling down the UK's commitment to arms export's. The reports are *Killing Job: the arms trade, economy and unemployment* (£5), based on the research of Professor Paul Dunne of Middlesex University and others, and *How the UK government subsidies the business of death* (£2.50), which draws on research by Dr Neil Cooper from the University of Plymouth. They are obtainable from CAAT, 11 Goodwin Road, London N4 3HQ.

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