LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

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inside...

- Labour regions rebel
- London tube
- Tuition fees
- Benefits
- Pensions
- EMU

New Labour





whose side are you on?

Labour Left Briefing

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AGENDA

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Brown's wasted budget opportunities

THE TORY press loved it. "Middle England" had been spared. And many Labour MPs were also delighted; increases in child benefit, relief for low-earning National Insurance contributors, money for childcare and the NHS. So Gordon Brown had squared the circle and pulled off a political miracle.

Or had he? What justification can there be for imposing a cut in the real value of public sector wages while handing back £700 million to big companies in reduced corporation tax and refusing to lift the ceiling on National Insurance contributions? And how does the increased tax on petrol amount to a "green tax" when investment in public transport remains derisory, or, in the case of John Prescott's plan for London Underground, speculative and dependent entirely on the whims of the private sector? £500 million for the NHS is welcome (though hardly generous from a government that's splashing out £750 million on the Millennium Dome), but it is not nearly enough to do the job that needs to be done urgently. The fact is that — thanks to the pusillanimity of this fundamentally conservative budget — cuts and closures in schools, colleges, libraries, and hospitals will continue across the country.

The Chancellor's changes amount to only the most modest adjustment of the overall pattern of income distribution established by the Tories. Basic benefit rates remain unacceptably low, as do state pensions. Meanwhile, high interest rates have pushed the pound ever upward, with dire consequences for manufacturing and export industries. Coupled with the ongoing east Asian crisis, the overvalued pound could well push the British economy into recession. What impact will the welfare to work and childcare measures have in a shrinking labour market?

If Brown refuses to invest and redistribute on a significant scale now, with public finances and economic growth looking so healthy — when will he? The real choice facing Gordon Brown is not between "middle England" and "the underclass" — two largely mythical beasts — but whether or not to break free of the Thatcherite shackles of fiscal and monetary conservatism. And here Brown's plan to ring-fence public finances — insulating fiscal policy from democratic pressures, just as he has already done with monetary policy by making the Bank of England "independent" (ie. unaccountable) — is ominous in the extreme.

Who's afraid of OMOV?

IT IS reported that Tony Blair's inner circle is scheming to stand a slate of media celebrities for the constituency section of the remodelled National Executive Committee. They think that in the one member one vote ballot to be held later this year name and face-recognition will be all. Service to the labour movement, political commitment, honesty, expertise, independence of mind will count for nothing. New Labour's strategists are showing an increasing predilection for this kind of "virtual" democracy, a dumbed-down, carefully orchestrated charade — so much more manageable than the real thing!

But this time they have miscalculated. Last year's OMOV ballot produced huge gains for the left — and that was before the single parent benefit rebellion and the Government's welfare reform offensive. Under the Party's new constitutional arrangements, MPs will no longer be permitted to stand in the constituency section. As we go to press, a wide range of left and centre-left groups and journals, including *LLB*, are working together to build a united, credible and diverse slate of rank-and-file activists.

The slate must be politically diverse, a refreshing contrast to New Labour conformity. Two broad principles should form the basis of unity. First, a commitment to Labour Party democracy, to guarding the rights and expressing the priorities of grass-roots Party members. Second, a commitment to Labour values, including the redistribution of wealth. As Liz Davies said in the last *LLB*, "We want a Labour Government enhancing, not dismantling the welfare state."

The coming NEC and National Policy Forum elections are an historic opportunity for, and challenge to, the Labour left, in its broadest sense. There is every reason to believe we can mount an effective, imaginative campaign that offers hundreds of thousands of Party members the chance to cast a positive vote for their beliefs. Blair's army of "luvvies" may rue the day they succumbed to Peter Mandelson's blandishments.

Time to show our strength

AT THIS year's trade union conferences, there will be a debate about what the New Labour Government has and has not, will and will not deliver. What cannot be denied is that the Government has shown itself far more willing to bend to pressure from big business than to respond to the many long-standing grievances of its trade union supporters. Blair's spokespersons have made it clear that legislation on workplace rights will be circumscribed by the CBI's anxieties. Private assurances to trade union leaders are worthless. Conferences should spell out their demands on the Government, and launch a campaign to secure them.

Trade unionists should draw the obvious lesson from the countryside marchers. Put people on the streets and the Government becomes much more likely to listen to you. Across Britain, millions grumble daily about conditions of work, tyrannical management and insecure employment. Meanwhile, trade union activists struggle to maintain basic union structures in the face of increasing casualisation and contracting-out. Workplace rights is a hot issue and could provide a powerful focus for the kind of popular, participatory campaigning needed to reawaken the movement.

Certainly this Government will not allow the pendulum of industrial relations to swing back towards the workers except under extreme duress. We're all looking forward to the minimum wage, but we cannot just sit back and wait for the Government to deliver. Unless the trade unions mobilise their members behind high-profile demands for an inclusive minimum wage that really abolishes poverty pay, we could be in trouble. A derisory minimum might actually act as a downward pressure on wages. Already, trade unionists report employers' plans to replace full-time staff with casuals paid the statutory minimum. And the exclusion of young workers will create a permanent secondary tier of cheap labour undermining older workers. Our demands for meaningful workplace rights and a fair minimum wage are modest and widely supported. But they will be ignored unless we flex our muscles and remind this Government who elected them and why. ❑

Recipe for redistribution

Can we afford the welfare state as it is? Can Keynesian economic policies work? Mark Donoghue, Treasurer, University of Kent Labour Club thinks so.

THERE CAN be no doubt that the welfare state's base has been steadily eroded over the last 20 years. Labour and Conservative governments have allowed it to creak under the strain of structural unemployment and poverty. Now the Labour Party is embarking on another restructuring that will probably be more about cuts than reform. These proposals are likely to owe as much to the New Right as the Social Security reviews and Acts in the mid-1980s.

Therefore the left must develop policies committed to the enlargement and saving of the welfare state, try to solve the blight of poverty and then argue for a return to Keynesian economics.

It can be argued that the increase in social spending means that the lowest tax threshold, the point at which people pay income tax on earned earnings, has come down to a point where the incentive to work and move off benefits is limited. This can be tackled by making the first £10,000 of earnings tax-free and then progressively increasing the rate of taxation — for example 25p in the pound for people earning over £10,000 rising to 50p or more for those earning over £100,000.

We must shift the burden of tax from the poor to the rich again. A related policy for a Labour Chancellor should be to abolish the national insurance ceiling on high earners. Further policies to boost public investment and stimulate a full employment economy must be carried through, for example, the lowering of share dividends to 1979 levels, the cutting of defence spending to the European average and the raising of corporation tax by 5%.

We must nationalise the transport system, public utilities, the coal and shipping industries and take back control of interest rates from the Governor of the Bank of England. A minimum wage of £4 or more is imperative to increase incentives to work and help tackle low pay. Anything under £4 is not going to do this. The Chancellor should cut interest rates. We must get the value of the pound down and not destroy the remains of our manufacturing industry. Rising interest rates hurt jobs.

These policies could lead to an increasing role for the state in providing decent child care for lone parents who want to work, removing the threats to disability benefits, dropping the Blunkett proposals for higher education, building new schools, increasing pay for public sector workers and rebuilding the NHS. We could reintroduce free eye and dental checks. All of this is obtainable.

Although there is not much chance of these policies being carried out by the current Chancellor, future Labour Chancellors must keep in mind that monetarist economics have failed. Mass poverty, structural unemployment and conflicting pieces of legislation merely lead to more means-testing and disenfranchisement. We can afford the welfare state!

Bayo Omiyiola fights on

LIVERPOOL City Council housing officer Bayo Omiyiola went to the High Court on March 19th and won the right to an appeal against his deportation. He had previously been booked on a flight to Nigeria for March 20th so the decision of the judges, following pressure from Bayo's campaign, his local UNISON branch and the national union came as a great relief to all his supporters. Campaigners celebrated in the pub before making their way back to Liverpool to continue the fight.

Christian Okeahalam Defence Campaign

John Stewart, Treasurer of the National Coalition of Anti Deportation Campaigns, writes.

CHRISTIAN OKEAHALAM has been fighting deportation since 1992. For the past year he has been reporting daily to Borough Police Station, south east London. On Saturday 7th March, while signing on at the police station, Christian was detained on the instructions of the Home Office. He was held in police cells for five days, then moved to Heathrow Airport pending removal. Intervention by his campaign managed to get the removal suspended but the Home Office would not release Christian and moved him to Harmondsworth detention centre where he is still being held.

Christian, a Nigerian by birth, has been living in the UK for twenty years. In 1993 he met Victoria Headley, a British citizen, and they married in September 1996. By this time they already had one son, Kingsley, and their second son, Joseph was born in December 1996. Both children are British citizens. The Okeahalam family will be torn apart if Christian is removed to Nigeria. To keep them together, the Home Office have proposed to constructively deport Victoria and the children as well. Christian's MP, Simon Hughes, is presently making urgent representations to the Home Office to secure his release. The Labour Government state that they are going to be "fair but firm" in treating people under the immigration laws. We believe that they should exercise fairness and allow Christian to remain in the UK with his wife and two young children.

- Send faxes of protest to Mike O'Brien, Minister for Immigration and Nationality (0171-273 2043), demanding Christian Okeahalam (Home Office ref: J154859) is released from detention and given leave to remain in the UK with his wife and children.

Stop deportations — amnesty for all!

Lobby of Parliament

Weds 29th April, 1.30 - 3.30
(Public meeting 3.30 - 5.30 pm)

Re-unite divided families! Restore benefits! End detention under asylum and immigration law!

National Coalition of
Anti-Deportation Campaigns

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

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Disability benefits still at risk

Thousands of disabled people lobbied MPs on 10th March in support of their benefits. Ian Malcolm Walker, Secretary of the Labour Party's disabled members' section, reports.

THE DSS claims to have seriously underestimated the number of disabled people in private households: there are 8.6 million — not 6.8 million as previously estimated — and uptake is between 40% and 60% as opposed to around the 75% estimate. Take-up of Disabled Living Allowance has been revised down from 60% to 40%. Yet instead of organising a take-up campaign, the DSS continues with the Benefits Integrity Project (BIP) which is costing many disabled people over £100 per week in benefit cuts. Often they win them back but delays at "review" (the first stage) are now around 12 weeks and delays at "appeal" vary from 6 to 15 months.

Disabled people are calling for the suspension of BIP to reduce the climate of fear, allow backlogs to be cleared and a thorough review of the methods and training to take place. They are also calling for the establishment of a Disability Benefits Task Force — involving a majority of disabled people from organisations of their own — to tackle the disadvantages disabled people face in the benefits system.

Recently the Disability Living Allowance Advisory Board (DLAAB) came to some worrying conclusions, saying "benefits should be aimed at helping towards the extra costs for the most severely disabled people". They also recommend that "the length of awards should always assume that there may be future advances in treatment or management of disability which may reduce the costs connected with disabilities". They go on: "assessment should be based on a combination of self-reporting and obligatory professional corroboration. It should take a multidisciplinary approach and include a review of rehabilitation undergone and any aids provided".

Their final comment, that lay adjudication should remain in the short term but medical and other corroborative evidence should be sought, represents the real attack on our benefits. It means the further "medicalisation" of disability. The DLAAB is saying that our descriptions of our lives are not facts, but doctors' descriptions of our illnesses and impairments are. They twist reality by saying we adapt to our impairments — even without an improvement in our condition, if we cope better we will lose our money. I fear that two more kites will be flown. One: disabled people make things worse by not using aids etc. that are available (it's in the DLAAB report). Two: improvements in science (in the DLAAB report) and the BIP data (despite its lack of robustness) will be further used to abolish life awards and "review-proof" status.



Disabled People's Direct Action Network in the vanguard for disability rights.

PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

I believe that the Government knew that the first wave of options — e.g. localisation, taxation and means-testing — would be too controversial but it was flying a kite to soften people up. To do this is a disgrace given the fear it causes.

Waving not drowning

Should having a highly dependent child prevent you working? Janet Mearns, network co-ordinator of the Children with Disabilities Project, says no.

Disabled children's parents, like others, want to work. Work brings in an income, confers an identity, enables you to meet people and improves your skills. This was recognised by Parents At Work, a working parents' support group. Waving Not Drowning is a project supporting working parents of disabled children. Disabled children are more likely than others to live in one-parent families and in poverty. The cost of looking after a disabled child is greater than for a non-disabled child. Caring responsibilities extend far into the future when you know your child is never going to be independent. Medical progress means that many babies who would not have lived even twenty years ago are growing up, often with severe multiple disabilities.

As network co-ordinator of the project I hear mothers of disabled children telling me that they find themselves in the same position other women were in a generation ago. No one expects them to go to work. Childcare is not available or the childminder or nursery demands an extra fee. Social workers and healthcare workers who inevitably become part of their lives assume a parent — mother — is at home or poised ready to take the child for check ups in the middle of the working week.

To support parents of disabled children who work or want to work I run a helpline. Some problems we can sort out, but I could not see a solution for the mother who wanted to return to part-time health visiting. Her low wage would need supplementing by her Invalid Care Allowance — which she could continue to receive if she deducted childcare costs from her wages, as she was entitled to do if she used registered childcare. Her own specially adapted home was best for her daughter with cerebral palsy, but there is no mechanism for registering carers in your own home!

The Waving Not Drowning newsletter goes free to over 800 parents of children with disabilities and another 300 professionals. The enthusiastic feedback I get from the parents and those who came to our oversubscribed conference last year shows that support for working parents of children with disabilities is sorely needed and is not being addressed elsewhere.

- To get a copy of the networking directory and other material, contact Parents At Work, 45 Beech Street, London EC2Y 8AD. Tel: 0171-628 3565 Fax: 0171-628 3591.

Pensioners of the future beware!

Andy Walker, Secretary, Ilford South CLP, argues that state pensions are fairer and more reliable than means-tested and private pensions.

STAKE-holder pensions, New Labour speak for private pensions, are likely to be recommended by the current pensions review as a replacement for the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) for new entrants.

According to the 1998 *Financial Times Handbook of Personal Pensions* the gap between the worst and best performing pensions is a staggering 300%. This means the poor mug who bought the worst plan would be receiving a pension of only a third of the lucky soul who chose the highest performing fund. The review may anticipate this objection to private pensions and may advocate low-charge, low-risk tracker funds as the only permissible vehicles for stakeholder pensions. Tracker funds are passively managed, that is, they just track an index of shares, say the FTSE All Share index, which keeps charges down and reduces risk. The majority of actively managed funds fail to beat trackers over a long period.

However, while trackers may be good news for the investor, it is doubtful that overall they are better than state provision. The problem is the uncertainty of the value of the final pension. Private pensions not only rely on investment performance but also the prevailing market annuity rates, both factors which change constantly. Also, trackers still produce different results because different methods are used to calculate the index. The latest *FT* figures show a difference of 11% between the best and worst All Share trackers over five years.

If trackers are allowed which include an overseas component, i.e. an element invested in a USA tracker fund, then, in effect, British jobs are being exported overseas. Advocates of privatisation will argue that the billions invested in industry will make up for the inequalities in pension provision, but there are other ways of promoting investment, such as granting generous tax relief.

Under current legislation employees not in occupational pensions can opt out of the State Earnings Related Pension Scheme (SERPS) and invest their National Insurance contributions into a private pension scheme. The SERPS pension cannot be taken until 65; the private pension can be drawn at 60. This is a major selling point for pension salespeople. If it does not create an equal pension age for both schemes, the Government will be seen to favour privatisation.

That our Party should be considering private provision after the mis-selling fiasco is interesting. Private pensions are often sold by high pressure salespeople, working in pairs, knocking on prospects' doors in the evenings without any prior consent to a sales interview. Contrast this gung-ho approach to the lackadaisical clear-up of the mess afterwards, a few polite letters encouraging policy holders to complete complex new forms. The clear-up rate would have been much more impressive if the methods used to sell the pensions in the first place had been employed, i.e. sending out staff to knock on doors and paying them only if they got the review form completed.

How the private sector sells pensions is shown in this quote from Scottish Equitable pensions director Stewart Richie: "If you stay in SERPS you are making the heroic assumption that the state is going to keep its promise on SERPS." I wonder how many thousands of people make the "heroic assumption" that private pension salespeople keep their promises, especially after the mis-selling disaster.

Government ministers refuse to refute speculation that means-testing the state pension may become Labour Party policy after the next election. Leaving to one side the electoral consequences of such a policy, the practicalities of means-testing are worth examining. The means test could not apply to pension income alone, otherwise it would create a disincentive for people to join occupational schemes and purchase private provision.

A pensioner's capital would have to be part of the test. Information technology may have advanced recently, but it will still be expensive to administer such a scheme because pensioners' capital fluctuates. Will an inheritance or windfall from whatever source have to be declared on an annual pension form? Say a pensioner spends some of his or her capital so that it falls below the means test; if it was spent on a holiday, will this be deemed feckless and disqualify him or her from claiming a state pension?

Every winter 30,000 people in the UK die of cold. An estimated one million pensioners do not claim state benefits to which they are entitled. From April, £15 million will be spent on testing ways of encouraging pensioners to claim extra benefits. If the additional benefits were claimed in full they would add an average £16.10 to the state pension, costing £1.7 billion in total. If this campaign succeeds it will mean Gordon Brown will have to raise substantial extra revenue — perhaps a reason to think it will fail.

Sun Life, a private pension provider, is a leading donor to the Labour Party. If our Party legislates for a bonanza for private pension companies at the expense of the universal state pension, ordinary members will wonder if we are acting on behalf of big business or pensioners.

The level of the state pension should be determined by MPs, not the vagaries of the stock market. The treatment of elderly people is a key test of a civilised society. Should we extend the means-testing regime that already condemns some of our pensioners to die of hypothermia, our claims to decency will be exposed as a sham.

Harry Watson 1907-1998

Harry died on Saturday 7th March. He was a lifelong communist and trade unionist. Formerly President of the Watermen, Lightermen, Tugmen and Bargemen's Union and Docks and Waterways Officer of the TGWU.

— Keith Watson

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NUS — action needed on fees

Kevin Fox, Secretary of Kent University Labour Club, calls on the NUS leadership to unite students and labour movement activists in radical action against fees.

OVER recent months the NUS leadership has been worried — not so much about the decrease in the number of students applying to university due to tuition fees, but its own performance. Failure to organise national action against fees, accepting this and the abolition of the student grant as inevitable, have aroused deep frustration among ordinary students. This failure to put principle before promotion is causing grassroot discontent that could threaten the position of the Blairites within both NUS and Labour Students.

Many Labour MPs do not support the introduction of tuition fees but, as the lone parents issue showed, will only speak out if they feel that there is sufficient pressure from ordinary people. The failure of the NUS to call for national action or build solid alliances with the trade union movement can only make the introduction of fees easier. If the student movement is to fight fees it must recognise that the abolition of free education is one plank of Blair's dismantling of the welfare state and that it is necessary to link up with progressive elements of the labour movement to fight this and other attacks on the welfare state.

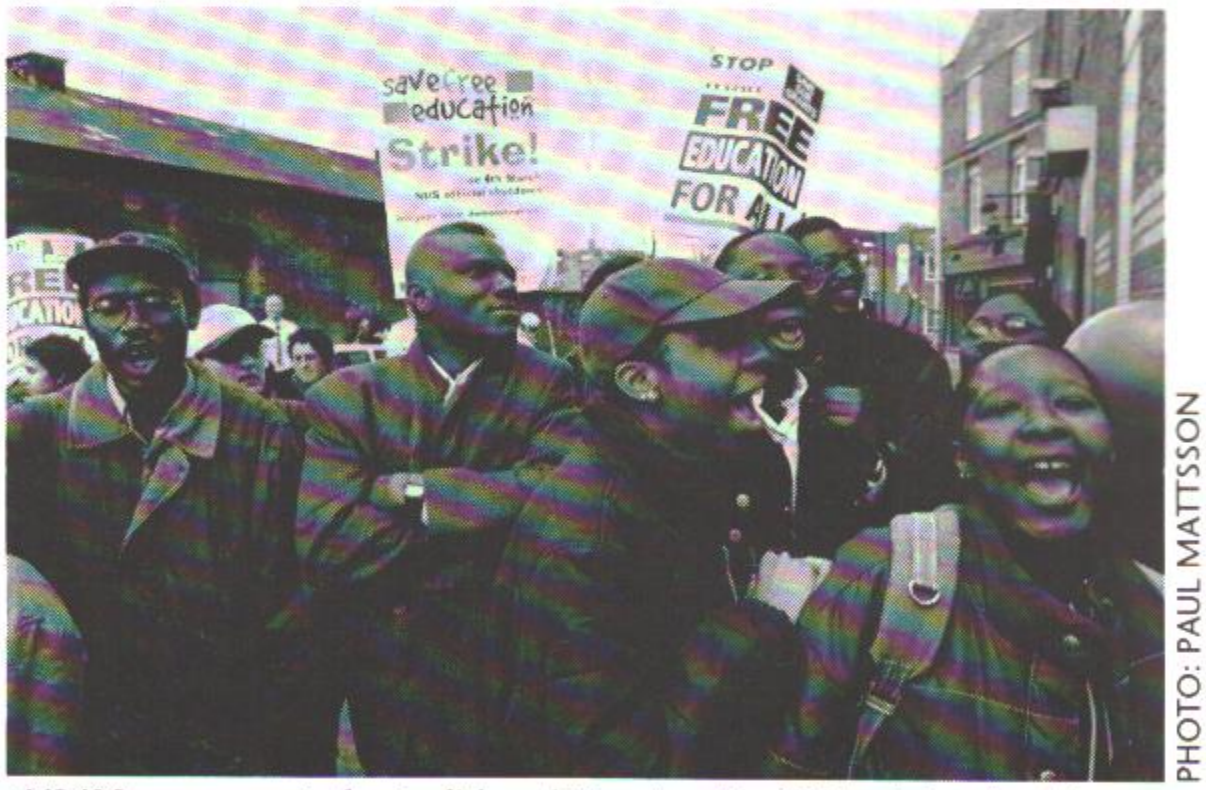


PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

4/3/98 — some students did mobilise despite NUS mis-leadership.

The NUS leadership must learn from its past mistakes. In conceding ground to right-wing policies such as the introduction of fees on a sliding scale, the Blairites in the NUS invited the Government to introduce a much harsher policy. NUS created the impression that ordinary students were not concerned about fees and were not prepared to fight against them. This was highlighted at the 1997 Labour Party Conference when David Blunkett thanked Labour Students and Young Labour for their support. Labour Students and the leadership of the NUS are under the illusion that we can only achieve change by working with the Government, in other words by going along with the Government at the expense of their own membership.

The Government has shown that it only listens when there is significant pressure from below. The recent Countryside Alliance demonstration is a perfect example. If Tony Blair is prepared to send a government minister along in support of a Tory march there is surely hope for an alliance of students and progressive elements in the labour movement.

Radical economic alternatives need to be presented as part of the fight against fees: progressive taxation, an increase in corporation tax, a reduction in defence spending and the slashing of dividend payments. These proposals need to be placed at the centre of the struggle against Blair's attacks on the welfare state. Only when students show their anger and fierce discontent by uniting nationally in solidarity, will the Blair Government even begin to listen. ❑

Opposing health cuts

Campaign action has stepped up in the south east as locals struggle against East Kent Health Authority (EKHA) to save their hospital, reports Abbie Sampson, Chair of Kent University Labour Club.

EKHA has recently undertaken a major review of healthcare provision. There are currently three hospitals with full services in the area (Canterbury, Ashford and Thanet), all with bed occupancy rates of over 90%. EKHA has decided that the area needs only two major hospitals. Early leaks indicated that one hospital would be downsized and eventually closed, but no hospital was named. This allowed EKHA to pit one community against each other, dividing opposition to the proposals, but locals united in opposition to cuts. Eventually it emerged that Kent and Canterbury Hospital would lose its 24-hour casualty service and many essential departments, and suffer reduction in numbers of beds from 400 to between 20 - 30. Travelling time in an emergency would be a minimum 30-40 minutes for someone in the Canterbury area, which EKHA believes is totally acceptable. EKHA insists that the move is not cash driven, while admitting that they are running at a deficit year after year.

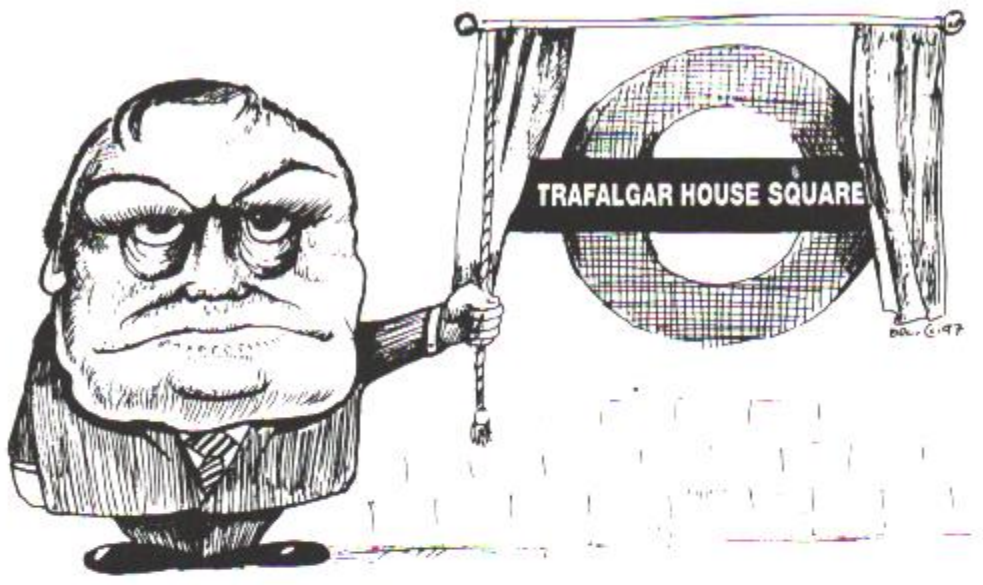
EKHA has been astounded at the scale of protests and demonstrations. All sections of the community have opposed the destruction of the NHS in their area by an unelected, unaccountable Tory quango. Local political parties have risen above petty squabbles, arranging well-attended public meetings and running effective poster and petition campaigns. Most impressively, every other Saturday protesters march defiantly through Canterbury, culminating in rallies that attract over a thousand people each time.

While the Labour Government is not directly responsible for this decision, it cannot simply shrug off responsibility and desert a local community trying to save essential healthcare provision. These proposals are not in line with the Government's current White Paper on Health that espouses the principle that healthcare should be in accordance with local community needs.

At present these proposals only affect those living in east Kent, but similar measures will be taken by other health authorities in the near future. Measures that close local hospitals are suicide notes for whole communities written against their will. There is no doubt that lives will be lost in the east Kent area if these proposals go through. This is why it is essential to resist such proposals resolutely. Local communities can defeat attacks by health authorities if they rally together in solidarity. Only then will local hospitals be safe.

LLB page 7

Derail the sell-off



John Cogger, RMT President and Chair of the TUC General Purposes Committee, spoke to *LLB* about John Prescott's proposals to privatise key components of London Underground.

"WE ARE very disappointed with John Prescott's statement. This is not a good move for people employed in those sections of the Underground. This is privatisation — though they don't call it that — and the whole history of privatisation in the rail industry shows that when private companies come in, the first thing they attack is staffing levels. To maintain their profits they reduce staffing because London Transport is a labour-intensive industry. And I don't think anyone will pretend that they will keep fares down.

"I agree with Ken Livingstone that we should be lobbying the Treasury. Gordon Brown is behind this. Such people haven't given the trade unions anything — even after we helped to bring Labour back from the wilderness. I think that London Underground should be run by the nation — or by the proposed Greater London Authority — with proper funding.

"Our next step is to set up a meeting with the other unions involved in the Underground so that we can agree a common way forward. Our members won't allow us to take this lying down."

Rail Privatisation Doesn't Work

Rally and lobby of Parliament

Thursday 30th April, 2pm
Central Hall, Westminster

Speakers include

Jimmy Knapp (RMT) and
Lew Adams (ASLEF)

Invitations sent to TSSA and the Parliamentary Labour Party

This rally will launch the public campaign to mobilise rail staff and the general public against privatisation under any guise.

● Jimmy Knapp (Gen. Sec. RMT) spoke to an extended Executive of RMT's London Underground Regional Council. He assured members that the campaign against privatisation should be led from the front and not just left to local activists.

Advert

The Greens in the European Parliament

Independent Labour Network

The **Independent Labour Network** set up by Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates as Independent Labour MEPs **is not a new party.**

It is a **Network** designed to help people to continue the struggle for socialism both inside and outside the Labour Party and across the European Union. It will hold meetings, commission research, publish pamphlets and contribute to newspapers and journals, comparing the British government with others in the EU. **The Network** will critically appraise the performance of the Blair Government in its term as President of the European Union.

The **Independent Labour Network** will co-operate with existing organisations in the trade union and labour movement, Green-Left organisations, anti poverty alliances and all those who are struggling to defend and develop a socialist alternative in Europe and to the Blair Government. **The Network** will consult with all shades of opinion on how best to move the real democratic socialist agenda forward particularly in the area of social welfare.

If you are interested in finding out further information, helping to build or making a donation (cheques made out to Independent Labour Network) to the Network please contact
Pete Brown 15 Linford Close Harlow Essex CM19 4LR Telephone/Fax: 01279 435735
Ken Fleet, 8 Regent Street Mansfield Nottinghamshire NG18 1SS Telephone: 01623 427622 Fax: 01623 427155

Hugh Kerr *Independent Labour MEP for West Essex and Hertfordshire East*
Ken Coates *Independent Labour MEP for Nottinghamshire North & Chesterfield*

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Council budgets still under attack

Cllr Christine Shawcroft, London Borough of Tower Hamlets, reports on why recent relaxation on financial restrictions won't lead to real changes.

LOCAL government finance began feeling the pinch when the last Tory Government, motivated by hatred of left-wing councils such as Liverpool, Lambeth and the GLC, began a series of punitive budget settlements, rate capping, and "overspending" claw-back regimes designed to cripple local services and local democracy.

Though under the Labour Government there has been some financial relaxation, attitudes towards local government seem hardly to have changed. While left councillors valiantly plug away all over the place, no council that I know of is actually controlled by the left. So who does the Government think it's attacking?

The 1998-99 Rate Support Grant settlement contains some good news. Education and Social Services Standard Spending Assessments are up, although figures from the Local Government Information Unit show that the education increase, from £17.84bn to £19.384bn, can largely be accounted for by inflation, increases in student numbers, and the teachers' pay award.

And although capping limits have been raised so that councils can spend an extra £2.535bn, central government grant increases are nowhere near this figure. It has been assumed that council tax and the business rates respectively will meet £806m and £497m of the increased expenditure. As Millbank wants London Labour groups to put in their manifestos a commitment not to raise council tax above inflation, they clearly hope that the increased spending allowance will not, in fact, be spent!



Christine Shawcroft

It is in the realms of Capital Allocations however, that the financial regime departs from any sense of economic reality. Local government raises all its own capital finance; government capital allocations are merely permission to raise the money and spend it. Councils are forced to waste money by short-term government restrictions. They are not allowed to borrow money to spend on building new homes, although the cost of keeping homeless families in temporary accommodation is crippling both councils' General Funds and the Government's Housing Benefit budget. Denied permission to spend on crumbling schools, councils are open to legal challenge over the effects on pupils' education.

A good Chancellor of the Exchequer is supposed to keep to the so-called "golden rule" — borrow only to fund capital investment, not to cover revenue deficits. Yet local government isn't allowed to keep to this "golden rule" — their borrowing is counted as if it were a revenue debt, and added into the Public Sector Borrowing Requirement. This has to be kept in check to prevent panic by City traders, the people who really control the economy of this country.

A simple re-definition of the PSBR, as has been done in other countries without floods, pestilence and famine ensuing, has so far been ruled out by the Labour leadership. Increases in capital allocation, the £250m New Deal for schools and the £570m Capital Receipts Initiative, while very welcome, are also missing the point.

A consultation paper on local government finance is expected soon. Let us hope that it is a meaningful consultation, and that local government finance is reformed in a way that makes economic sense, rather than continuing an old political vendetta.

● *LLB* supports Christine's nomination for the Constituency Section of Labour's NEC.

The Campaign for a People's London

The campaign against imposition of a London mayor digs in for a long haul writes Leonora Lloyd, steering committee member: The big debate is whether or not to call for a "No" vote in the forthcoming referendum. To do so would split the campaign. For example, while the trade union MSF has taken a decision to campaign for "No", other unions and the Liberal Democrats are calling for a "Yes" vote, on the grounds that any London government is better than the current position, and we can continue to fight for improvements.

The CPL itself sees its campaign as continuing after the referendum and even after the election of a Greater London Authority and mayor. We do not accept that the Government's proposals will end the current democratic deficit. We want a larger GLA than is proposed, with much greater powers, including the right to raise local taxes. We will continue to press for the mayor to be elected by and from the elected members and with much reduced powers. We will oppose the privatisation of the tube and the ending of democratic control of the fire service. The Government sees the London model as a pilot scheme to be extended to other metropolitan areas and maybe to all local government. Blair has correctly said that local government has many failings. But his response is to make it less democratic. He wants to turn local councils into boards of businesses, as the Tories did, and if they don't respond, to shut them down altogether and send in non-elected businessmen and bureaucrats to run them.

What the CPL wants to do is set up a real dialogue with all sections of society — trade unions, pensioners, disability groups, ethnic minority organisations, tenants, environmental and transport campaigners and so on — to find out what they really want from local government at local and regional level.

● Contact the Campaign for a People's London on 0181-723 8345.

North West Labour insists Blair listens

The North West Labour Party Regional Conference did not go well for Tony Blair. Many of the motions passed criticised or opposed the actions of the Labour leadership. Tony Dale, a member of the UNISON delegation to the conference, reports.

BENEFIT cuts prompted the loudest show of opposition. Conference unanimously called upon the Government "not to proceed with the withdrawal of the Lone Parent Premium in Income Support, and the Lone Parent Rate of Child Benefit". The motion passed also called for a review of welfare "to alleviating poverty, not cutting benefits to the poor". One delegate voiced concern that the benefit cuts would turn into "Labour's poll tax".

Motions on the unions called for:

- promised union recognition rights to be implemented "in the next session of Parliament".
- ballots on union recognition to require a simple majority of those voting.
- opposition to CBI attempts to limit recognition rights to bigger firms.
- opposition to "any proposal to weaken the link between Labour and the unions, or to prevent the unions playing their full role in the life of the Party at all levels".

The procedure for selecting Euro candidates attracted a number of motions. These were unfortunately remitted in favour of a Regional Executive statement. The desire for Labour's list (and priority order) to be decided by a ballot of all members was made explicit by speakers from the Regional Executive and delegates from the floor. The new procedure for electing Constituency representatives onto the National Policy Forum was heavily criticised.

Jack Straw's speech was interrupted by heckling from the relatives of those killed in the Hillsborough football disaster. The Conference called for the reopening of the enquiry. These demands won't go away until senior police chiefs responsible for the disaster, and the subsequent cover up, are brought to justice. On the final morning, workshops were held. The best attended was on welfare reform: everyone turned up to have a go at the Government over benefit cuts. Another workshop on *Partnership in Power* stated that Regional Conference would continue with resolutions and delegates from CLPs and affiliated organisations.

Most delegates seemed to oppose *PiP* but want to utilise the new *PiP* structures effectively. The discussions about the policy forums and *PiP* indicate big problems for the leadership with their flippant talk about democracy and accountability. Ian McCartney told Conference that Labour was a "party owned by the membership". The policy forums were promoted on the grounds they allowed the leadership to listen to ordinary members. *PiP* was sold as a two way listening process — delegates complained that the leadership was breaking the deal by not listening on issues like benefit cuts. What happens when large numbers of policy forums oppose benefit cuts?

Opposition to the leadership was the dominating feature of the weekend. No one appeared prepared to defend the Blair project. There is definitely more life in the Party than one would believe from the media. The honeymoon is over: the leadership had better start listening to the membership or it will end up reaping the consequences.

NEC and National Policy Forum elections

INFORMATION filtering out from Millbank Tower shows just how difficult the Party machine intends to make it for opponents of the Blairites to win election to the National Executive Committee or to the National Policy Forum. The deadline for nominations to both bodies has been brought forward to 5th June — meaning nominations must be sorted out at May GCs.

Nominees for the NEC must be supported by their own CLP and at least two others. These nominations must be from at least three different regions of the Party. Nominees must also be a delegate from their CLP to Party Conference.

The National Policy Forum will be elected by delegates to Party Conference. CLPs can nominate one woman and one man and in some regions (Scotland, Wales, North and Yorkshire, West Midlands and Central) a youth representative. Nominees must be supported by at least five CLPs from their own region including their own.

The left and centre of the Party are preparing a slate for the NEC and National Policy Forum. Watch this space next month for names of proposed candidates and the political statement on which they will be standing.

- Ring the *LLB* office on 0181-985 6597 with names of potential candidates for the National Policy Forum.

Deptford done over

Blairites have used chicanery to win control of Deptford CLP in Lewisham. Last year, complaints were made to the NEC that Alan Simpson had been invited by the GC to debate *Partnership in Power* without asking the consent of the sitting MP! This led to an "investigation" of CLP officers and opened the way to the NEC "invigilating" all GC meetings and activities through a Regional Officer.

Before last month's AGM letters were sent to selected members falsely claiming that the GC was unhappy with its officers and they should be voted out. However this was not enough to win. There followed an unprecedented number of new affiliations (including AEEU, SERA, Christian Socialists, Goldsmiths College, Poale Zion and Bromley Labour Club!).

Despite the rule that new affiliates can't vote at their first AGM, the NEC representative chairing the meeting ruled that their "intention" had been to affiliate for 1997 — despite evidence to the contrary from the new affiliates themselves. Challenges were over-ruled with claims that the matter was "debateable" but the NEC representative's ruling was final!

Five individuals now hold 14 posts.

Scottish Labour Party in rebellious mood

Cathie Jamieson, a member of the Scottish Labour Party Executive, reports on the recent conference of the Scottish Party.

THE FIRST Scottish Conference after the spectacular General Election and Referendum results was at times a strangely muted affair. Some interpreted this as partly due to the fact that many of the delegates and visitors are aspiring members of the Scottish Parliament, who were keen not to blot their application forms by speaking out of turn or being seen with the wrong people. Indeed, much of the frenzied activity that is normally associated with lobbying for votes for the Executive seemed to have transferred to aspirant MSPs desperately seeking their MPs and other worthies to sign their application forms, and provide the required hundered word reference.



Cathie Jamieson

However, Conference was in no mood simply to accept the Executive's recommendations. The first card vote, on scrapping Trident, was carried by 60% to 40%. Conference then rejected (by 65% to 35%) the Executive's recommendation to remit a Transport composite. This resolution included calls for a reversal of policy on scrapping of Duty Free, and a free concessionary travel scheme throughout Scotland for all severely disabled people.

The now famous resolution strongly critical of the Government's changes to lone parent benefit was carried on a card vote. A resolution from UNISON opposing PFI was narrowly lost because some delegates had used the wrong voting cards! There were hotly contested questions within the Scottish Executive itself. A TGWU resolution on workers' rights (including repeal of anti-union laws and the right to take solidarity action) was supported by the Executive, and subsequently passed by Conference.

Despite attempts to change the Executive's position on supporting the principle of OMOV for selection of candidates for the Euro Elections, agreed only at the February meeting, the Executive restated its position on this — and, although the resolution was eventually not called due to pressure of time, was recommending support.

Following *Partnership in Power*, proposals were put to Conference which create similar structures for the Scottish Executive. Numbers will be reduced, with the Party organisations losing two seats elected across Scotland, but retaining the geographical basis of electing eight seats, in future by OMOV. Trade unions also lose two seats, and the womens' seats also disappear, with quotas now applying in all sections. The Co-op Party also loses its right to an automatic place on the Scottish Executive, but after challenging the original proposal for the Co-op Party and Socialist Societies to have only one seat between them, did manage to get agreement for an extra seat on the Scottish Policy Forum as of right, and an increase to two seats in the Co-op / Socialist Societies section, showing that hard lobbying can sometimes be worth it!

The Campaign for Socialism meeting held a fringe meeting entitled "Socialists in a Scottish Parliament". Chaired by Cllr Irene Graham from Glasgow the meeting heard excellent contributions from John McAllion MP, Alex Falconer MEP and Marlyn Glen (Scottish Executive candidate) and a Scottish Executive report from myself. Highlight of the event was Audrey Wise MP who gave a tremendous and rousing speech not just on lone parent benefit, but on a whole range of issues concerning children and families. It was a pity that the group of Young Labour members who were apparently being shepherded round various meetings with a TV crew in attendance didn't wait to hear Audrey's speech — they would certainly have learned a great deal about the basic principles of socialism and the sorts of policies which can put these principles into practice.

Last but not least, I was re-elected to the Scottish Executive, and would like to thank all those Party members who have supported me over the past two years.

- *LLB* supports Cathie's nomination for the Constituency Section of the NEC.

London Labour resists *PiP* changes

Labour's NEC wants decision-making regional conferences to be replaced by toothless Forums — but members are fighting back, writes Leonora Lloyd, Greater London Labour Party Regional Executive.

The left won a somewhat unexpected victory at a recent special meeting of the Greater London Labour Party Regional Executive. The meeting discussed proposals for the annual conference in June (postponed from February, as previously reported in *LLB*). Members were presented with a "Prospectus" that would have led to biannual meetings feeding into the national forums. They were also asked to consider drastic changes to the set up of the Executive (now to be called a "board"): much smaller than at present, with no places for the six delegates elected at the recent regional women's conference.

Both proposals were rejected almost unanimously. If passed, the proposals would have taken effect immediately. Even right-wingers could not stomach that. Coming from trade union and "old Labour" backgrounds, they are accustomed to rule changes taking effect at the AGM that follows the one that agreed them.

We also agreed that meetings should be annual: if we are supposed to be feeding into a process of continuous debate then biannual meetings, whether based on resolutions or on Policy Forum discussions, are not enough. As a result, the six women's places were affirmed for the next year at least, and our coming conference will be based on resolutions. All this depends, however, on whether the NEC wants to flex its muscles and insist on its own proposals being carried out. Given the opposition from both left and right, it may decide to turn a blind eye. If Party members had understood the full ramifications of *Partnership In Power* they might have voted against it.

Moral: keep reading *LLB*. ❑

More expulsions in Leeds

Mike Davies, ex-Vice-Chair, Leeds North East CLP, reports.

FOUR more members of Leeds NE are threatened with expulsion, for being honest, active and democratic. Any one of these faults may be overlooked, but suffering from all three is clearly unacceptable.

Garth Frankland has been a Labour Councillor for Chapel Allerton for eighteen years. He is hard-working and well-respected both in the ward party and the diverse, multi-racial local community. Having genuine community links is, of course, another unforgivable new sin. The charge against Councillor Frankland is the old catch-all kick-out clause, 2A.8: "a sustained course of conduct prejudicial, or in any act grossly detrimental, to the Party", which means whatever Blair's apparatchiks choose it to mean.

The false allegations fabricated to support this charge are:

1. That Garth Frankland has engaged in intimidatory behaviour towards members, including the Leeds Labour Party Organiser. It was alleged that during his councillor's report in November 1996 while referring to Paul Boateng as that "bastard" he said that "if (the Party organiser) wasn't careful, what happened to Boateng's car would happen to (his)". This statement was made in the knowledge that Paul Boateng's car tyres had been slashed on a previous visit.

This meeting was attended by over a score of Party members who know that no such statement was ever made.

2. That Garth Frankland sought to undermine the support for the endorsed Labour Party candidate and that subsequent to the Labour victory in Leeds North East he was prepared to campaign against the newly-elected MP.

Councillor Frankland repeatedly called for support for the candidate and worked regularly on his behalf throughout the campaign. And what can one say about the thought-crime of being "prepared to"?

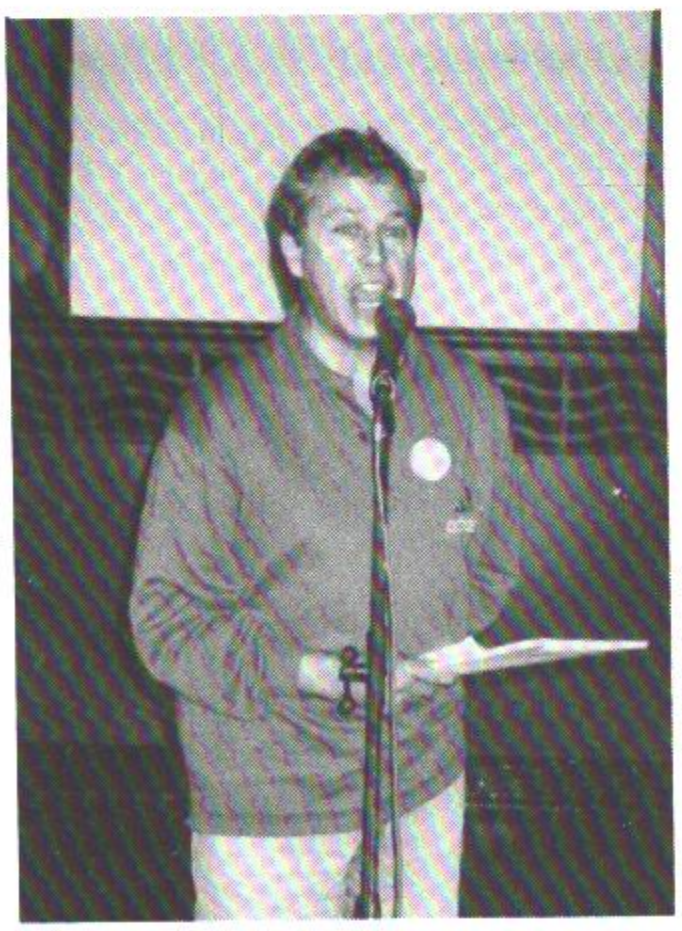


PHOTO: STEVE FRENCH

Mike Davies

3. That Garth Frankland contributed to the newsletter of a shadow organisation in Chapel Allerton ward during the period of the branch suspension.

Chapel Allerton ward was suspended only until the General Election, after which Councillor Frankland wrote an article for the resumed ward Newsletter. We were then informed that the ward was still suspended.

The other three activists in the firing line are Malcolm Christie, universally respected CLP Treasurer for a dozen years; Lorraine Hardy, Secretary of this and her previous CLP and Euro Party Officer; and Mike Eslea, Chair of Chapel Allerton ward. The allegations against them are equally spurious. The best, against Malcolm Christie, is that he belonged to an organisation called: "Defend the Constitution of the Labour Party".

All the allegations are false and are easily proven false. Unfortunately our experience of New Labour's "disciplinary" process shows this to be irrelevant. The NCC panel will be sent to Leeds with instructions and will carry them out, regardless of such irritating distractions as the facts. Meanwhile Chapel Allerton Branch remains suspended for the crime of campaigning to be reinstated; and Leeds NE Constituency remains suspended for the crime of keeping the rules.

A stunning further development is the decision of the NEC to "investigate" Leeds Campaign Group. This clearly prefigures moves against other local Campaign Groups, the national Network of Socialist Campaign Groups and the Campaign Group of MPs itself. Comrades in Leeds are confident of the full and open support of the parliamentary Campaign Group. The alternative for Campaign Group MPs is to look forward to being alone when Blair comes for them.

Euro hopefuls stitched up

AS *LLB* went to press Labour's National Executive was expected to finalise the process to select candidates for next year's Euro election. The outcome is likely to be one of the most centralised and undemocratic selection procedures ever seen in the Labour Party.

Tony Dale
Manchester Central CLP

The NEC proposal put out for "consultation" gives the key decisions to selection panels composed of regional and national officials. The wider involvement of members is restricted to making nominations to the panel.

Each CLP will be asked to nominate two names, one man and one woman. A ballot of all the members in the Euro Constituency Labour Party will be held to vote on the CLP nominations and where appropriate to decide whether to re-nominate the sitting MEP. This process will produce a large list of potential candidates: for example in the North West it is likely to produce 30 names when Labour is likely to win a maximum of six seats. From the nominations the selection panels will decide on the composition and order of the Labour list.

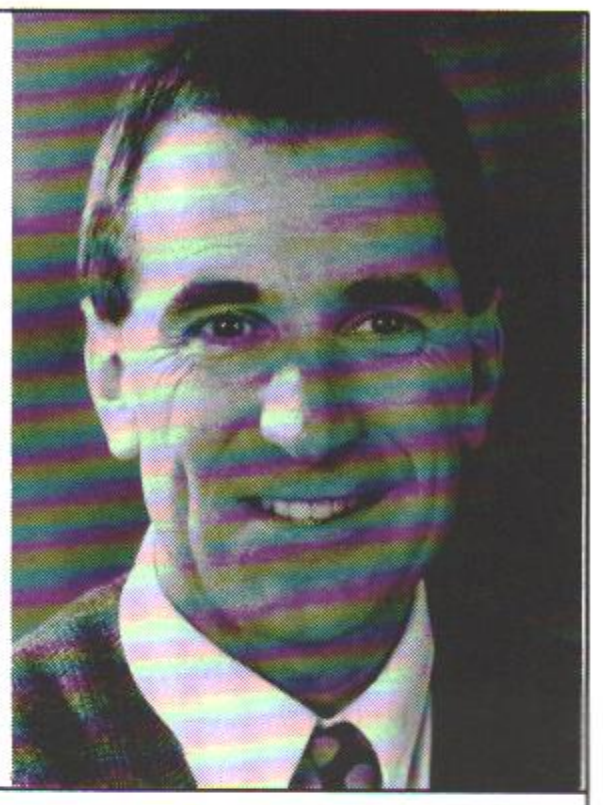
In the "closed list" system voters can only vote for a Party and not prioritise individual candidates. The numbers of seats in each region will be distributed between the parties in proportion to the votes gained. The candidates are elected in the order they appear on the Party list.

There is no legitimate reason why all Labour members in the new Euro regional constituencies cannot be balloted on the composition and order of the Labour list. The only motivation behind the proposed procedure is to allow the leadership maximum control of the final list of possible Labour MEPs.

In contrast the Tories are going to organise meetings in each region open to all Tory Party members to vote on their Party lists. Compared to Labour's undemocratic centralised procedure this procedure appears to be a model of democracy.

the Alan Simpson column

The Secretary of the Socialist Campaign Group of Labour MPs.



LET'S begin with some of the positive things about the Budget. The increase in Child Benefit was great; not simply because it was unaccompanied by a commitment to tax it, but because it was underpinned by the belief that Labour's tax policies should favour the child rather than judge the household. This is a tax principle we should be proud of.

Good too was the decision to cut VAT on home insulation products; no Chancellor should tax energy-saving more than energy consumption. And the Chancellor's declared objectives — challenging poverty and unemployment — ought to be the clarion call of the whole labour movement. But the most laudable of desires always has to face the question "can we deliver them?" You can't answer this without reference to the macro-economics of the Budget itself — and of the world beyond.

In the week leading up to the Budget I sent the Chancellor a copy of my own alternative. It was based on far more worrying concerns about where globalisation and deregulated economics are taking us and what Britain is likely to face this year.

We already had a pound which was 20% overvalued, interest rates way too high for business and manufacturing (but apparently not high enough to dampen a wayward consumers/credit boom) and a collapse of South East Asian currency values which is rolling its consequences towards us.

"A large, unco-ordinated global contraction is under way. We are experiencing only the beginnings," argues Robert Reich, former US Secretary for Labour and others have made the same point. This is not the time to be pursuing tight monetarist policies. The Budget we needed was one which launched a planned reflation of the economy, not one obsessed with tight controls on spending.

There is a double need for this. The combination of all the above will cause the economy to slow down in the second half of this year. Government assumptions about manufacturing output have already been cut to assume that it will be at a virtual standstill. But in "real" terms (adding inflation into the costings) it means negative growth and job losses. Since this will all happen as "Welfare to Work" produces its first highly motivated trainees we will face the dilemma of persuading employers to take on "New Dealers" at the same time that they are giving "old dealers" their cards. This will not be a pretty sight.

It is hard to feel part of an inclusive society when business is going bust. There is an even greater absurdity about "declaring war on the work-shy" when you are also throwing the economy — and jobs — into reverse. Even the City recognised this and wanted Labour to take £3 billion out of the economy to lower the value of the pound and to cut interest rates. My calculation was that this was overcautious. You could take £5 to 10 billion in a budget for redistribution and reinvestment and have a serious jobs programme for the unemployed to get into.

MOST of the exciting areas of work we could generate are around environmental economics — a national programme to tackle cold homes and fuel poverty; a start on the backlog of disrepair in schools; rebuilding comprehensive, public transport networks within a five year timetable; reversing the under-funding of the NHS; a national programme of pre-school nursery building (and training).

Such a framework would give real meaning to the New Deal and real hope to the millions who have suffered in silence and poverty during the Thatcher/Major years. What's more, Labour would have no particular difficulty in finding the cash to pay for it. Some of this could come by redirecting subsidies (or tax exemptions) currently going into corporate welfare. And if the Chancellor didn't want to remove the subsidy then it could be changed into a public stake-holding. That way you can make "jobs" the precondition for any public subsidies and hold corporate welfare accountable in the same ways we presume to do in personal welfare.

We could also save money by abandoning most of the jumble of means-testing in the benefit system. If Labour wants flexible labour markets you can only make this work through a combination of universal benefits and progressive taxation.

When Labour looks at combining Family Credit and Income Tax in the Working Families Tax Credit we will find it is far more complicated than just combining two bureaucracies (and having a gentler "target" for claiming back payments). It will roll into other means-tested measures such as Housing Benefit and Council Tax rebates which could pose even greater complications than we have now. The best way might be to scrap Housing Benefit altogether, returning to subsidies on properties, not on occupants. Some calculations already suggest we could do this and cut rents and set minimum housing standards and save money. All of this was set out in my budget, but little appeared in Gordon's.

I'd like to think that even now, Gordon is squirrelled away with my budget working out how to incorporate it in his own. But whether he does or not is immaterial. The second half of this year will see monetarist economics hitting us hard. And when the squeeze goes on, tight money merchants will scream out that welfare is unaffordable. Our response must be that it is the monetarist demands of global capitalism which are unaffordable.

- Alan Simpson's alternative Budget: *Securing Britain's Future* — is available from him at the House of Commons.

My alternative budget

EMU: what the Government

Bernie Moss, lecturer in European history and author of *The Single European Currency in National Perspective*, rejects EMU and the myth of globalisation.

EMU IS probably the most momentous issue to face Britain since the Munich Pact of 1938. In the country and the labour movement debate on it is at a distressingly low level for several reasons. First, the information we receive is controlled by an elite of specialists who are true believers in the EU. Sceptics ignore the workings of the EU at their peril and the public, which may be Eurosceptic for the wrong reasons, remains poorly informed of the dangers that the single currency poses to economic growth, social welfare, wages and employment.

Second, the Government has put a damper on debate with a decision to delay entry that seems to be a Solomon-like compromise between the Europhiles and Eurosceptics. In reality the Government is preparing entry but does not want to risk losing a referendum. Polls show that support for entry, which as elsewhere divides on class lines, is running at 30%. The Government justifies delay by a Treasury Report that shows the British business cycle to be out of kilter with those on the continent, which are increasingly out of harmony with each other.

No mention was made by Gordon Brown of the disastrous deflationary effects of EMU, which has already reduced growth by at least one per cent a year and increased unemployment by seven million. Characteristically, Brown rejected immediate membership for the wrong reasons. Lower interest rates on the continent, he said, would mean too much expansion, too high wages, and necessitate a tax increase! There was no awareness that before long Britain might have to run a large deficit to combat recession that would disqualify it from membership.

Third, discussion of EMU is dominated, like all major issues facing the Government, by the myth of globalisation, the notion that national governments are no longer capable of regulating economies in the face of global markets. This myth, which justifies lower deficits and Tory spending limits, welfare reform and social cuts, is paralysing the Labour Party. Globalisation must be seen in historical context primarily as a self-fulfilling neo-liberal prophecy. Foreign trade and direct investment are no greater today than they were on the eve of WWI. Intra-European trade in manufacturing goods has stagnated since the 1980s; Britain runs a trade deficit with the EU to which it sells less than half of its exports.

The greatest globalisation concerns currency speculation. Resulting from the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system and the abolition of exchange controls by Thatcher's and other neo-liberal governments, short-term financial flows have limited effect on long-term investment. The other major manifestation is the multinationals, which control sources of high technology, but are really nationally-based firms that can be controlled by governments willing to do so.

Many Labour MPs think that the EU and EMU are remedies for globalisation when the reality is that they are a cause of the disease. The formation and deepening of the EU, sweeping away national barriers, protection, exchange control and regulations, were its regional instrument. By lowering tariffs below that of the US and Japan the EU has vitiated European industrial and technology policy. The hard euro mandated by Maastricht will further expose European industry to ruinous competition.

Fourth, many Labour activists think that the debate on EMU is a re-run of the old debate of British membership of the European Community (EC). It is too easy to accuse sceptics of nationalism or chauvinism when the internationalism of EMU is literally that of the free market and finance — a Europe run by central bankers. There are profound reasons to be sceptical of the monetarist direction the EU has taken, but few people would propose withdrawing from the common market or neglecting the EU and Europe as an arena for struggle and a framework for solidarity and minimum standards.

The question is really strategic: where can labour best defend its values and interests. Nation-states may change — the Scots may declare independence — but the people or nation remain the repository of democracy and the public good. Labour depends on social norms, ideology, and legislation that are not available on the European level where it is divided by linguistic, cultural and political barriers, unlike capital which speaks a single language of profit.

The nation remains the chief locus of loyalty, solidarity and regulation in Europe. From its liberal foundations the EU has always contained a bias in favour of capital. Maastricht consecrates the competitive open market as the guiding principle, making public intervention problematic. Still, the EU can provide minimal levels of social protection and perhaps fiscal harmonisation, but even this minimum can only be won by mobilisation on the national level (a point Ken Coates in his employment campaign seems to have forgotten).

The EU has been successful in creating a free market, but has failed in areas requiring constructive action — transport, commercial, industrial, regional, social and employment policy. The TUC talks of a social dimension, but the failure of EU social policy is patent. It took twenty-five years for unions to obtain minimal works council legislation.

The TUC never had a chance of getting European collective bargaining, which was its quid pro quo for the single market and currency. Its hope of gaining some say over the latter was always based on delusions about the nature of the EU. Much was made of the social protocol, but it excludes matters

Cardiff Euro Summit Protest!

For a People's Europe — Defend the Welfare State!

The next Summit of European Union leaders will be held in Cardiff on the 15th and 16th June. A number of organisations and individuals have agreed to organise a demonstration to coincide with this event, to be held on Saturday 13th June.

- **Sponsor the March: contact Euro Summit Demonstration Committee, Cardiff Centre for Trade Union Studies, 131 Crwys Road, Cardiff CF2 4NH.**

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doesn't want you to know

of pay and strikes and requires respect for national usages and setting only minimum standards. The new employment chapter and resolution adopts the Blairite philosophy of lower charges on employers and labour flexibility, confirming the unwillingness of members to contribute funds to European job creation.

The social deficit is linked to the democratic one: the absence of a legislative process that reflects popular needs and opinion, particularly that of labour. Hopes placed in an interventionist EU super-state are ill-founded. The EU lacks the constitutional and institutional foundations for social and economic governance.

The market bias of the EU was exploited by neo-liberal governments in the 1980s to create the single market and currency. The pivotal change came from the turnabout of the French under Mitterrand from interventionism to hard money and free markets. Mitterrand did not prove that national action in the face of global markets was futile, for he was blocked in his recovery programme by the very people who preferred EMU, that is Delors and other Europeanists in his government. Many Labourites find it hard to believe that EMU is Thatcherism writ large, since she opposed its federalist consequences, but she was in fact instrumental in introducing the deregulatory and hard money policies that resulted in the single market and currency.

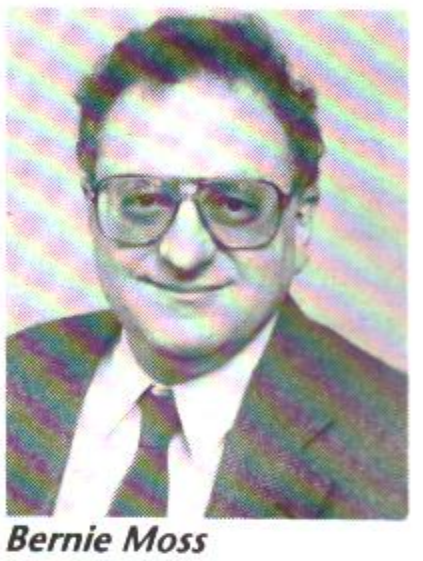
The single currency followed logically from the single market with the mobility of capital and currencies tied to the D-mark at a high level. The recommendations of the Delors committee, composed of central bankers, were for the establishment of an independent central bank aiming at price stability free from any democratic influence or accountability. To assure a strong currency governments would have to reduce their debt and deficit and refrain from market intervention. Labour would have to keep its wage demands below productivity and bear the cost of adjustment. What attracted UNICE, the employers' union, to EMU was not the reduction of transaction costs and risk premiums on currency exchange, which were minimal, but the depressive effect it would have on wages and benefits.

Monetarist policies associated with EMU have already done their damage. In broad simple terms restrictive monetary policies have reduced growth in Europe from an average of five per cent before 1973 to two per cent since the 1970s, raising unemployment from 8.4% in 1990 to 12.5% today. As a result, income has shifted from wage earners to capitalists, nine per cent of GDP in France between 1982 and 1994 and over three per cent in Britain, which has fallen to Victorian levels of inequality alongside Portugal as the most unequal society in Europe. In order to meet the Maastricht convergence criteria, which are enshrined permanently in the Stability Pact, governments have had to make deep social cuts — health, pensions, investment, unemployment and regional assistance.

This social compression has not occurred without popular reaction, a loss of support for the EU in the Europhilic countries of Spain and Portugal, the hostility of German opinion, which has mixed motivations, and a wave of protest in France that nearly defeated Maastricht in a referendum and last June elected a rose-red-green government under Lionel Jospin pledged to job creation and a revision of the terms of Maastricht.

Most informed observers like Delors doubt that the single currency can survive without political union. The Treasury shows that the trade cycles of member states are not synchronic; they move at varying rhythms and in different directions, requiring different monetary policies. The deflationary model, mandated by treaty and enforceable in law, may not survive states protesting (due to popular pressure) its rigid structures fettering national growth. Robin Cook recognised the problem when he said we are being forced to choose between "a softer euro, which would not be workable, and a harder euro, which would not be popular." EMU contains the seeds for endless disputes, blockages, compromises and package deals involving non-monetary matters.

Rather than provide a new élan for Europe, it is likely to compound the existing policy paralysis. Frustrated in efforts to alter policy to suit national requirements, governments may consider exit as they did last century from the Latin monetary union. EMU will divide Europe internally between capital and labour, and externally between the ins and the outs, which will include not only Britain, Sweden, Denmark and Greece, but also the candidates for membership in Eastern Europe.

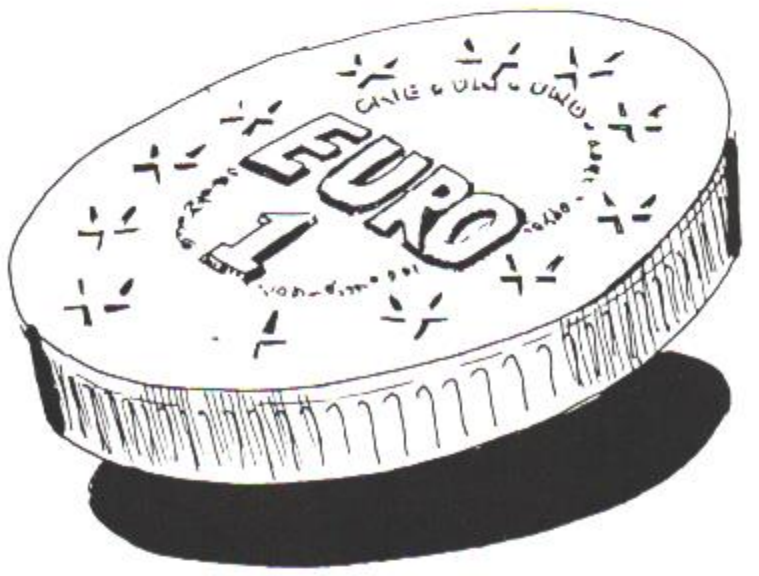


Bernie Moss

Delors acknowledges that EMU will produce more unemployment and protest out of which he hopes will come demands for political union. But further transfers of sovereignty to the EU are unlikely. Few governments, certainly not the British, would want to dissolve themselves into an artificial European entity that lacked democratic and constitutional foundations. Second, as countries like France under popular pressure become disillusioned with monetarism, it will become increasingly difficult to achieve any European agreement on economic and monetary policy.

The tension and conflicts produced by EMU are far more likely to produce a reaction against federalism and a re-centring of economic and social policy in the member states. If EMU is the disaster that its structural flaws indicate, the day of British reckoning may never come.

● Bernie Moss is available to speak on EMU in the London area. Call 0171-435 5909.



Blair and Mowlam on the fence

The sooner the British Government recognises its own role in the conflict, the sooner we'll get a meaningful settlement, argues Brian Campbell, editor of Sinn Fein's *An Phoblacht/Republican News*.

TO THE puzzlement of almost everyone involved in the Irish peace process, Mo Mowlam and Tony Blair spent March talking up the prospect of a lasting agreement. The positive spin was so overdone that the Irish Taoiseach, Bertie Ahern, felt he had to brief journalists during a Saint Patrick's Day trip to Toronto on the need to adopt a more realistic view.

Similarly, all the main players talked about the enormous difficulties ahead. Unionists have spoken about the prospect of an agreement being negligible — John Taylor, the UUP deputy leader, puts the chances at less than five per cent.

Mowlam and Blair are clearly playing to the gallery. It comes naturally now to members of this Government to believe that reality can be changed by winning the fickle hearts of the media, and so Mowlam tells everyone who will listen that an agreement is close.

But this frantic optimism hides a fundamental reality. Mowlam talks as if the British Government really has nothing to do with the problem. During interviews she never acknowledges that she represents the most powerful protagonist in the conflict. Instead, she speaks as would a benign counsellor trying to mend a sadly broken marriage between "the two traditions". Of course agreement is closer if you consider the two sides to be irrational forces who have to be persuaded of a middle way of enlightened liberalism.

Blair talks of agreement being "tantalisingly close" and it is not hard to see where he's coming from. Middle England thinks it stands aloof from the conflict in Ireland and suggests a common sense compromise which is so obviously acceptable to everyone.

But of course it's not obvious and it's acceptable to hardly anyone. That is because Blair and Mowlam are wrong. The British Government is not taking a full part in the negotiations if it continues to act as a neutral referee. It is a party to the conflict and must take responsibility for that. The conflict is not some ancient quarrel between irrational neighbours. It is a conflict of rights — national and civil — and their denial. Who has responsibility for the RUC and their interrogation centres? Whose forces operated a shoot-to-kill policy? Who is responsible for endemic discrimination in the public sector and in local government?

There is pressure on David Trimble to engage with Gerry Adams — and without that type of engagement there can be no lasting agreement — but there should be similar pressure on the British Government to begin an honest engagement in the talks.

For example, there can be no lasting agreement while political prisoners remain in the jails. So far, Mo Mowlam has refused to face up to that reality until an agreement is signed. But it must be addressed now. Similarly, the unacceptability of the RUC is an issue which is not going to go away. Without proper, accountable policing, or while British forces continue to strengthen their bases and harrass young nationalists, no agreement is going to stick. Mowlam must also address the imbalance in employment, the discrimination against the Irish language and a range of equality issues if an agreement is to stick.

Moreover, the British Government must be responsible for managing the inevitable change in Ireland. Instead of wishful thinking and high-intensity spin-doctoring, Mowlam should expend energy on producing solutions on the ground if she wants to see a lasting agreement. Only then could her confidence carry credibility. It is time for the British Government to roll up its sleeves and engage meaningfully.



Central America: Economic Rights, Economic Wrongs

A day of information, debate and discussion on Central America focused on:

— the impact of economic globalisation on people's lives
— locally based economic initiatives that put people and sustainability first

Saturday 9th May 1998, 9.30am to 5.00pm
St. Hilda's Community Centre, 18 Club Row, London E2
(Liverpool Street Station)

Invited speakers:
Rene Canjura, FMLN Mayor of Nejapa, El Salvador; Blanca Rosa Molina, President and Gender Worker of the San Ramon co-operative Union, Nicaragua; Representative of National Indigenous and Peasant Co-ordination (Conic), Guatemala.

For details contact: Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign, 129 Seven Sisters Road, London N7 7QG. Tel: 0171-272 9619 email: nsc@gn.apc.org

Sierra Leone's liberation from within

Sean Coyne reports from Freetown, Sierra Leone, recently liberated from nine months of brutal military rule, thanks not least to the heroic efforts of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress.

IN MAY 1997, in Sierra Leone in West Africa, a military coup toppled the democratically elected government of Tejan Kabba. It was an event that was hardly noticed by the British media. After all, many of the countries of West Africa have been under military rule for large parts of their independence.

But this coup was something different. A general election had been held in which huge numbers of people had walked and stood for days in the baking heat to cast a vote. Meanwhile, the army and the so-called rebels of the Revolutionary United Front continued their protracted civil war, killing thousands and displacing more than a third of the population. During the war, Amnesty International drew attention to the chronic abuse of human rights carried out by both sides. Mercenary organisations like Executive Outcomes were bankrolled by De Beers of South Africa to "protect" the country's diamond mines — in readiness for privatisation.

Following the election, it became increasingly apparent that the military and the rebels were pursuing much the same interests. The worst of the thugs were put in prison awaiting trial, but they didn't have to wait long. After barely a year of civilian rule, the military and the RUF combined forces, sprung their leaders from prison and overthrew the government.

Immediately after the coup, even as looting and thuggery were rampant in the streets, the trade union movement swung into action. The Sierra Leone Labour Congress, representing half a million workers, declared an indefinite General Strike and in a bold statement demanded that the junta hand back power to the elected government and return to barracks.

Over the next few months, the comrades of the SLLC combined with students, religious communities, women's groups and others to popularise their demands and to maintain the momentum of the General Strike. Trade union activists were arrested, beaten and harassed, but the General Strike remained solid. Despite threats, brutality and bribes, the movement and its leaders held firm.

It is hard to imagine the hardship the workers of Sierra Leone experienced during this time. Not a single factory, government office, school, bank or service functioned. Food was (and remains) in very short supply. Electricity was cut, and clean drinking water became rare. As the junta ran out of money its uncontrollable militias were paid from the proceeds of looting sprees and smuggled diamonds.

Finally, after a decisive intervention by West African Peace Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) forces — dominated, ironically, by military-ruled Nigeria — a sanctions campaign that starved the regime of supplies, and the guerrilla activities of the locally-based community defence groups known as Kamojors (local hunters), the junta collapsed, but not before its soldiers wreaked havoc in the poor quarters of Freetown and other cities. The damage which has been done to the country is hard to assess. As one leading trade unionist put it while the ECOMOG bombardment was underway: "It's as if the bottom has fallen out of the middle of the country and the people are all standing on the edge of an abyss wondering if they can climb out or if they will be pushed in."

Without the General Strike and the struggle of the SLLC, the junta would have been able to consolidate its power over a war weary population and survive the sabre rattling of the Commonwealth, UN and OAU.

Since the liberation, there have been acts of summary justice meted out to collaborators. Mban Kabu, SLLC Director of Education commented: "Given what had happened in the preceding nine months, it is perhaps not surprising that when the opportunity came, local people would find the desire for retribution irresistible. We believe that a speedy but absolutely fair due process of law must be put in place to deal with the collaborators and lawbreakers.

"Even within the trade union movement, several leaders who attempted to please the military have been rejected by the members and replaced by new leaderships which proved themselves in the opposition to the junta. This will be the case throughout civil society. It's part of the necessary process of renewal, of regeneration and the assertion of grass-roots democracy.

"Sierra Leone has an impoverished people, but it is not a poor country. It is blessed with valuable minerals. We can grow our own food if given the opportunity. The Sierra Leonean people value education and have shown that that they are prepared to sacrifice everything for democracy. The task of the restored government will be to harness this.

"The workers, our members, will commit themselves to the rebuilding of a new society if they can be convinced that it will be in their interests, and that their children will benefit. The old formulas based on the need for belt-tightening and austerity, deregulation and free-marketeering, and all the other measures so popular with international financial institutions are totally inappropriate in our situation. We need investment in the people, the strengthening of infrastructure through judicious use of mineral wealth, programmes to ensure self-reliance and above all a government responsive and accountable to the people who elect it."

The butchers of Jakarta are not welcome here!

Protest 4th April 1998
Central London

Assemble: 11am Jubilee Gardens by Waterloo Station
Rally: 1.30pm Trafalgar Square

President Suharto, the military dictator of Indonesia, is responsible for the mass murder of over 500,000 Indonesians and the deaths of one third of the East Timorese population. He will be in London on 4th April ... let's give him a reception he will never forget.

- Protest called by the British Coalition for East Timor, the Indonesia Human Rights Campaign and the Campaign Against the Arms Trade.

Communalists move towards power

India has just had its second general election in less than two years and another one could be in the offing. Achin Vanaik outlines the Hindu communalists' likely next steps and calls for the Indian left to chart a new course.

THE FORCES of Hindu communalism and right-wing reaction have reason to be both pleased and concerned by the verdict of the latest general elections. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies increased their tally of seats from 192 last time to 252, still short of the 272 seats needed to form a simple majority. Their vote share increased by only a few percentage points to around 25% and its individual seat tally by only 18. Most of the gains went to its regional allies and even its own increase was largely explained by the fact of its having forged such alliances. The real gains of the BJP were that its period of "untouchability" vis-a-vis other parties (which had earlier refused to ally with the BJP) has ended, and that it has now established a genuine national presence.



Achin Vanaik

The fractured verdict indicates that the BJP's relative success had less to do with its communal ideology than with anti-incumbency factors in various states (the BJP itself lost badly to the Congress in two states, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, where it is in power) and with continuing unhappiness with the political alternatives, the Congress and the United Front of (supposedly) anti-Congress and anti-BJP regional parties. Compared to the last elections in 1996, the UF was the biggest loser while the Congress was at least able to stem its decline temporarily, largely because of the Sonia Gandhi factor.

The most obvious outcome of these elections is the strengthening of the ongoing trend towards greater regionalisation of Indian politics. There was simply no all-India factor or issue. The national parties, the BJP and the Congress, have to pay more attention than ever to making alliances with state-level parties.

Any government formed by the BJP will enjoy at best a knife-edge majority and will not last a full term. The BJP will have to moderate its public stand on contentious issues to placate allies which do not share its ideological commitments. There is therefore no immediate danger that the BJP can push aggressively towards the construction of a Hindu state with Muslims and other religious minorities relegated to inferior status.

This is some consolation, but not much. Everyone will now prepare for another election within a year or two. The battle then will be primarily between a Congress-led coalition and a BJP-led one with the left squeezed out of the picture while its erst-while regional allies go with either the Congress or the BJP. Even the mainstream left (the two Communist Parties) has been tempted to tag along with the Congress as the "lesser evil".

The BJP's strategy for the coming period is fairly clear. They want to form a government. They will go slow on contentious issues. But they will use the resources of the central state to do five things.

First, they will try to consolidate the strength of their partners in the Sangh Combine, the family of Hindu communalist organisations, particularly the RSS, the parent cadre organisation that is most strongly and ruthlessly committed to remoulding India in a strongly right-wing authoritarian and anti-Muslim direction.

Second, the Sangh Combine will try to infiltrate the various apparatuses of the state like the civilian bureaucracy and the government-owned and run media, particularly television.

Third, they will use government resources to strengthen their presence in areas where they have recently gained a foothold, such as the south and east of the country. In doing so they will try to undermine their strongest regional opponents, particularly the CPM in West Bengal.

Fourth, they will push their policies in areas which can pay enormous dividends in the long run — the home ministry and education. The RSS has already made clear its desire to control this key portfolio.

Five, a BJP-led government will try to do "two good things" (ie. two quick-acting populist measures), then go back to the electorate to ask for a longer term mandate.

The left has been served a clear warning in these elections. The Left Front as a whole (comprising the CPI, CPM and some smaller left parties) saw its seat tally fall from 52 to 48 this time. The CPM has held its own in West Bengal, largely thanks to a split in the state Congress unit. The BJP grabbed a seat in West Bengal for the first time while its vote share increased significantly.

The more than a decade-long strategy of the mainstream left to forge a "left and secular front" or a "left and democratic front" nationally, with the help of non-Congress and non-BJP allies, has failed comprehensively. None of these allies share the left's strong ideological commitment to secularism or its hostility to neo-liberal economic policies. What is more, they have not hesitated to spurn the left on the ground. In states like Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Andhra Pradesh they have actively sought to reduce local left strength despite national alliances. The Congress, of course, knows that the left will prefer it to the BJP and awaits left support nationally.

Only if the left itself can become stronger electorally and politically in the next decade can there be any hope of establishing a genuine third front committed to secular and democratic politics. But to become stronger the left has to engage in principled opposition politics in the states where it has some chance of growing — like Bihar, UP and Andhra Pradesh. To grow in these areas it must oppose not only the BJP but its own allies in the UF whose record of corruption, unprincipled politics, criminalisation and unconcern for any genuine politics of redistribution has enabled the BJP and its allied parties to emerge as major players.

● Achin Vanaik is the author of *The Furies of Indian Communalism*, Verso, 1997.

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450 organisations from 88 different countries are taking part in a Global March against Child Labour. The first leg started in January in Manila and is now crossing India. In February the Latin American march began in Sao Paulo and on 1st March the African leg kicked off.

The aim of the march is to draw attention to the exploitation of 250 million working children worldwide. Millions are expected to march part of the way in solidarity and the whole demonstration plans to arrive on 1st June in Geneva where international leaders will be meeting to draft a new ILO Convention on child labour.

In Brazil alone, nearly 10 million children work, typically in agriculture, manufacturing and construction. 500,000 of these are under ten years of age. Children earn $3 a day for the heavy work of breaking stones to build roads in the country's interior.

Organisers of the march are campaigning for a seven-point programme including laws against child labour and greater funding for education.

Despite a lack of progress in the integrative aspects of the Dayton Peace Accord, western governments are planning to spend $130 million on new aid projects in Bosnian Serb areas. But amid much hype about working with a more co-operative group of Bosnian Serb politicians, there is real concern that such aid will strengthen the hand of leaders opposed to ethnic tolerance and long-term peace.

Two key provisions of Dayton remain a dead letter in the Bosnian Serb Republic: the arrest of war criminals and the return of refugees. To date Bosnian Serb authorities have arrested no war crimes suspects. And despite 1998 being proclaimed as the "year of return", so far only about 3,000 of the 560,000 Muslims and Croats expelled by the Bosnian Serbs have been allowed to return according to the UN.

Brcko is a typical town, publicised for its multi-ethnic town council and police force as a successful example of post-war reconciliation. But in reality not a single non-Serb refugee has returned to Brcko, where Serbs formed only 20% of the pre-war population. In this light, genuine economic, social and political reconstruction remains a pipedream.

In Chile, indigenous Mapuche people are being routinely arrested, tortured and incarcerated for protesting against the illegal logging of their ancestral lands. Despite local communities in the Lumaco municipality having legal title to 3,000 hectares of their own land, logging companies, in connivance with the authorities, have fenced off and devastated about half this area. Non-violent protests led to violent evictions and jailings of Mapuches, often with no charges being laid or information released. The area has now been militarised with anti-terrorist laws imposed. Demonstrations locally and in the capital have been brutally attacked by the police.

Chile is now supposed to be a democratic country but there is still no recognition of indigenous people's rights in the constitution. Protests to the President and Interior Minister are requested, addressed to the Moneda Palace, Santiago.

● For more information, contact Mapuche International Link, 6 Lodge Street, Bristol, BS1 5LR, telephone 0117-927 9391, email mapulink@aol.com

MAI — don't celebrate yet

Reports of the demise of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment may be premature, warns Mike Phipps, Brent South CLP.

SINCE THE article in the February edition of *LLB*, there has been a flurry of press coverage on the MAI, the new treaty OECD countries are negotiating to open up the world to the unfettered movement of capital. Much of this coverage claims that the MAI is unlikely to be agreed before its arbitrary deadline of 27th April due to a lack of agreement among the treaty's main sponsors.

Before campaigners break open the champagne however, as a *Times* article suggested, it should be borne in mind that the current spin is based solely on a press conference held by the US negotiator stating they will not sign the MAI in its current form. This could be a ploy to apply pressure to other participants. It's also likely that a core agreement could be signed leaving difficult issues until later — a recipe for strengthening even further the hand of the richer countries over the poorer ones.

The MAI is a set of rules aimed at protecting the freedom of multinationals and restricting what governments can do to regulate their activity. Yet the OECD countries proposing it have already lodged 1,000 exemptions to the treaty, only 12 from Britain, but many more from the US, including all state and local government activities. This scramble for special treatment undermines the whole rationale of the MAI: if it's such a good deal, why are governments so desperate to exempt themselves?

The real purpose of the MAI was revealed by the Dutch negotiator when he said his country would not accept all exemptions lodged by developing countries; one law for the rich, one for the poor. Meanwhile the Department of Trade and Industry here, taking virtually the same attitude as the previous government which started the negotiations, continues to play down the treaty's likely effect on a country's ability to regulate international corporations. In fact, the MAI will prevent governments from protecting the environment, labour rights or the local economy. Under the North American Free Trade Agreement, which contains similar clauses, Mexican local authorities are being sued over their refusal to allow US companies to establish toxic waste dumps.

The DTI line that poorer countries will not be pressurised to sign the MAI is also proving false. The OECD has already begun a series of meetings in Africa, Asia and Latin America to do just this. Once the MAI becomes a reality, it will be seen as a stamp of approval for transnationals, leaving countries that refuse to sign up starved of investment.

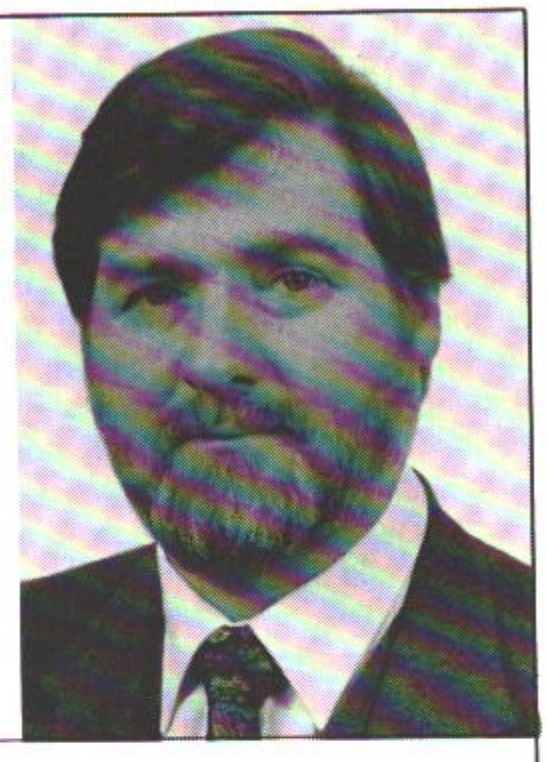
The MAI will be enforced by special international corporate courts with the power to demand millions of pounds of damages. There is now concern that the terms of the treaty could prevent local councils and other bodies from acting in support of people taking action in other countries, as occurred at the time of the apartheid regime in South Africa. A spokesperson for the Burma Action Group said that "Burma may be forced to spend another decade under military dictatorship because we cannot express our solidarity."

A coalition of 600 organisations internationally now opposes the MAI. The campaign is growing rapidly and is scenting victory — at least for the time being.

● For more information, contact World Development Movement, 25 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR, telephone 0171-737 6215, website http:// www.oneworld.org/wdm/

the Michael Hindley column

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



MEPS maul MAI

THE European Parliament issued a severe jolt to the so-far little challenged progress of the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) when it passed with an overwhelming majority an amendment from the Socialist Group calling upon member states not to sign the MAI in its present form.

Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) as ever are more alert than New Labour at spotting dangerous and undemocratic developments in the field of the global economy. Remember it was an alert NGO, the World Development Movement, not Her Majesty's loyal opposition which successfully challenged Douglas Hurd on the arms for aid scandal with Malaysia.

The MAI is a prime example of the staying and paying power of the Transnational Corporations (TNCs). During the eight years of negotiations to get the GATT settlement, the TNCs, supported very much by the European Union, were insistent on liberalising the financial services sector, where they have an overwhelming advantage, but met with stubborn resistance from the developing world, led principally by India and Brazil. Since the TNCs did not get as far as they wanted within the multilateral bargaining structure, they decided to continue to press for financial services liberalisation through another international body where they had full control, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Here only rich countries are members and the rising stars, like South Korea, are admitted on approval. Now while I am in favour of international rules on investment, such rules should be developed within the UN framework where each country has one vote and the developing world has a voice.

The OECD experts have been working on guidelines for a long while now, if not exactly in secret, at least beyond the purview of elected politicians. New Labour inherited this situation, which is a barely passable excuse for the fact that the government briefings are written from a business and trade point of view with little sign of an ethical foreign policy standpoint nor openness to Parliamentary scrutiny. The OECD's guidelines focus exclusively on the rights of TNCs and the duties of recipient countries. In the 1970s it used to be the other way round, but these days New Labour bends over backwards to accommodate big business.

PERHAPS the most dangerous element in the MAI is the proposal for disputes' settlement. Again, the left should welcome regulation if the developing world has an equal say, along with the trade unions, NGOs and consumers. But under this proposed disputes procedure an aggrieved private party can ask for an adjudication on whether a particular country's laws breach the MAI which guarantees equal treatment for all investors. This in effect destroys a country's ability to develop its own potential; for example a developing country could not favour its own nascent banking sector without being challenged. What will happen is that international law on investment will be driven by litigation, and financial interests in the west will be able to scour the world to bust open the financial markets.

New Labour's briefing papers emphasise the importance of overseas investment to Britain and say anodyne but noncommittal things about environmental standards. We in the European Parliament are amazed at how civil service-led this Government is; in Europe there is considerable cross-party opposition to the measure. The right is as worried as anyone about the lack of oversight. The Parliament's External Economic Affairs Committee has spent several months looking at the MAI, debating, listening to witnesses, writing a report, moving amendments and finally adopting a very critical report by a majority of over three hundred.

The timetable for the introduction of the MAI is now slipping. Civil servants had hoped for a quick passage before anyone read the small print but now the timetable has gone back to autumn from early summer. The longer it is delayed the more the doubts grow. The USA has tabled over three hundred pages of proposed exceptions, realising that it could find its own laws subject to vexatious litigation.

There is still time to mobilise on this issue and pressurise New Labour into inserting some content into its soundbites on ethical foreign policy.

Metin Goktepe murder: five police sentenced

In Afyon, Turkey, five police officers have just received prison sentences of seven and a half years for their part in the murder of the journalist Metin Goktepe two years ago. The court hearing was the fifteenth in a case which has received world-wide publicity.

Metin Goktepe, 27 years old, worked for the socialist daily *Evrensel*. He was beaten to death at the Eyup Sports Stadium while trying to cover the funeral of political prisoners killed by security forces in January 1996. At first the authorities attempted to cover up the murder and made contradictory statements about how he met his death. The refusal of eye witnesses to be intimidated and the strength of protest both inside and outside Turkey forced the authorities to admit police involvement.

However, the five convicted officers will in fact serve little more than a couple of years each. Six other officers were allowed to go free due to "lack of evidence". Moreover, those who permitted this atrocity to occur and then tried to cover it up have not been brought to justice, namely: Orhan Tasanlar, Istanbul ex-Chief of Security and M Ali Aydin Akdemir, Eyup Area Chief of Security. Metin Goktepe's lawyers are to appeal and the case will now go to the High Court.

Metin's case has become symbolic in Turkey and has put the spotlight on the Turkish state's anti-democratic practices, its systematic use of torture and its continuing violations of basic human rights.

● Contact the Campaign for Human Rights in Turkey on 0171-275 8440, email: campaign@migranet.simplyonline.co.uk. Fax: 0171-275 7245.

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Star struck

Chris Kasrils, Deputy FOC *Morning Star* NUJ Chapel, writes.

FEBRUARY 25th found Labour MP Jeremy Corbyn on a picket line with *Morning Star* journalists. Nothing new there, since their paths have crossed on many occasions over the years from Grunwick to Wapping.

What made this situation different was that Jeremy was on the line showing solidarity with the workers of the socialist daily who were on strike against the suspension and subsequent sacking of their editor John Haylett. His initial suspension took place at the January 24th meeting of the management committee of the People's Press Printing Society, the co-operative that owns the paper's assets.

It followed chief executive Mary Rosser's presentation to the committee of a dossier of complaints against Haylett. She did so without previously informing him that the dossier was being compiled and without putting the complaints to him for comment or explanation. Management committee members were given no prior warning that anything serious was being planned for the normal bi-monthly meeting, nor was the item scheduled on its agenda. Haylett was not allowed to speak in his own defence, even after committee member Pat Hicks, since elected to the General Executive Council of the Transport and General Workers Union, moved that Rosser's document outlined a clear case of "gross industrial misconduct".

This was passed by eight votes to six and, without further delay, Rosser announced that Haylett would have to be suspended and announced that a three-person inquiry should be set up to investigate the allegations against him.

Amazingly, two of the three were Rosser herself and her assistant Bob Newland who is not even a member of the management committee. The third member, Carolyn Jones of the Institute of Employment Rights withdrew from the committee when it became clear to her that agreed procedures were being thrown out of the window and that it was nothing more than a kangaroo court.

Rosser opposed Haylett's appointment as editor three years ago — preferring her son-in-law Paul Corry — but was outvoted on the management committee. She may have trusted to the traditional reluctance of *Morning Star* staff to take industrial action at the paper, but was quickly disabused of this notion. Within days of the suspension, NUJ members dragged out a mandatory chapel meeting for seven hours, thus preventing production of the paper. They also voted overwhelmingly for official all-out strike action, which has been solid.

NUJ general secretary John Foster, his FBU counterpart Ken Cameron and Haylett addressed a pre-strike rally that drew 300 supporters in London's Conway Hall. Two mass lobbies of management committee meetings have also taken place.



Industrial action looms again in the Driving Standards Agency (DSA), the government arm that runs driving tests. The traditionally gung-ho management plans to close three of their five call centres (the offices which take bookings for driving tests) and make up to 115 staff redundant. Before Christmas DSA announced proposals to generate savings to fund the acquisition of software packages. These are likely to include systems allowing the public to book tests direct from a computer terminal, although no survey has been undertaken to determine whether customers want this. DSA is meeting current service targets already.

DSA proposes to close call centres in Birmingham, Edinburgh and London. The unions submitted arguments that DSA's business case was flawed, with no guarantee of improved benefits for customers and instead the contracted-out Theory Test work should be brought in-house and test fees raised if additional revenue was necessary.
Minister for Roads Baroness Hayman agreed that DSA should consult further with the unions, aim to limit the risk of compulsory redundancies and take no action on job losses during the consultation process. Despite this, DSA is already taking measures to prepare for compulsory redundancy such as moving areas of work from offices scheduled for closure without consultation. DSA also plans to recruit staff to offices remaining open on cheaper and more flexible contracts.

Officials of PCS are having discussions with members about the possibility of industrial action. PCS members in the Driving Examiner grades are already incensed about proposals to abolish an entire grade, destroying career prospects for most of them. This is also likely to provoke industrial action. DSA is prepared to negotiate only on the details of introducing its plans, not the future of the grade. This is not surprising, given DSA's perennial attitude to consultation. One of the managers taking this forward was previously active in helping create a breakaway scab "staff association".



Glenn Kelly, Bromley UNISON branch secretary and national secretary of the Campaign for a Fighting Democratic UNISON has successfully forced his employers to a climbdown following a threat to sack him.

Bromley Council officials had alleged serious misconduct and misuse of his facility time, linking his role as national secretary of the CFDU. National UNISON officials were contacted by Glenn's employer for their views on the CFDU. It took a concerted campaign of letters and faxes from branches across London to stop UNISON HQ officials issuing internal union circulars about the CFDU to Tory Bromley Council.

Glenn's members attending a noisy lobby outside the hearing recognised the real reason for the attacks on him. It was, according to Cathy Smith, Chair of Bromley UNISON, "because he a bloody good branch secretary and had been leading the fight against the privatisation of services in the borough." In the face of opposition by UNISON members and their willingness to take action to defend Glenn, Bromley Council was forced to back down.



CSL Managed Services has won a contract to provide a range of accounting information and management services to the Lord Chancellor's Department. Eighty-four staff will be transferred or seconded to CSL. CSL has a record of hostility to trade unions. Although it generally grants recognition to unions now, it still refuses to negotiate on pay. This is the case with its recent winning of the IT contract with Sheffield City Council. ❑

Where the working class is

Sheila Cohen, founder of *Trade Union News* and editor of the pamphlet *What's happening? The Truth About Work — and The Myth of "Partnership"*, based on the contributions of 15 workplace activists, outlines the reasons for its publication.

SO, WHAT is happening out there in the world of the workplace? For those lucky enough to have a job, the short answer is: labour intensification. Contributions from bus drivers to car workers tell the same story — increased workload, tightened production targets and too much work chasing too few workers. Pressure on production is no longer just about the relative intensification of labour within existing hours; it also involves absolute intensification from 12-hour shifts and compulsory overtime to "flexible" working time patterns with rosters at any point within 24 hours.

Things are getting worse, but in the same way for all groups of workers. The traditional image of the "sped-up" car worker contrasted to the tranquil, caring nurse or "professional" bank clerk is no longer valid. Council workers and car workers alike are confronted by a level of job insecurity in which the farcical early 90s "Job-For-Life" agreement at Rover can be held up as an example of magnificent corporate generosity. The pamphlet reveals just how meagre that generosity is. Job insecurity is accompanied by increasingly casualised, "flexible" under-employment, managerial aggression, draconian sickness systems, mythical shorter working weeks spending "leisure time" on call at work, and, of course, the overall ideology of "competitiveness" which pits worker against worker rather than workers against management. Or does it?

What's Happening? describes a refreshing tendency for activists and their members to kick these management strategies back to square one. "Ambulance workers don't go in for smartass managers and smooth talk. The workers will go to the union rep first, the manager second. Management jargon doesn't wash with the workforce," writes one ambulance rep. Failure to be impressed by new management techniques is shown in the postal workers' successful strikes against teamworking. Such "knock-back" victories, while inevitably vulnerable to renewed management offensives, provide a platform to build longer-term strategies.

What's Happening? emphasises workplace activity and organisation as a crucial component of political advance — an emphasis unfamiliar on the left. Socialists have shown support for strikes, but consistent focus on rank-and-file workplace unionism irrespective of the highs and lows (or should one say "upturns" and "downturns"?) of industrial struggle is dismissed by most as "workerist", "economistic" or just plain non-political. In contrast, the perspective embodied here and in its sister project, Trade Union Forum (a non-aligned organisation aiming to build links between rank-and-file activists), is one of identifying everyday organisation and resistance as containing a dynamic potential for political growth and awareness. While left activists have attempted to organise and unite broad lefts, the logic of such cross-movement activity remains suspended above the nitty-gritty level of concrete workplace struggles. *What's Happening?* attempts to take political awareness and class analysis down to that level — which is, after all, where the working class is.

● *What's Happening?* £3.50 per copy, £2.50 for orders over ten, £2 for orders over 50. PO Box 21013, London NW1 1WR. Cheques to Trade Union Forum.

Victory for London left in TGWU?

John Perry, Secretary of South Thames Transport and General Workers Union, gives his analysis of the union's recent elections.

IN THE past the left has always backed sitting candidates, concentrating on uniting to defeat the right. This time Inner London's General Executive positions were fiercely contested by two opposing broad left camps.

Chris Green and Pat Hicks challenged sitting "left" candidates, Steve Riley and Colin Coughlin. The decisive victory of Hicks and Green's ticket was greeted with delight from those wanting progressive left policies actually implemented.

By campaigning and organising effectively over the years, the left succeeded in neutralising the right and winning progressive policies, particularly on equality. Many questioned the TGWU left's organisational discretion yet it has achieved more success on adoption of policies than many other unions' "open" broad lefts.

Turning the union from a right-wing cartel to a progressive left body took self discipline and a commitment to working collectively. Previously the left in Inner London successfully backed both Riley (a prominent mid-70s Fords activist) and Coughlin. Recently Riley was criticised for miscommunication and refusing to follow collective left decisions. Former Tilbury docker Coughlin backed Riley as a joint ticket knowing it is unheard of to challenge sitting left candidates. Both candidates failed to respond to concerns raised. The challenge had to be made and Hicks (London cab driver) and Green (a strike leader in last year's British Airways strike) won the confidence of many who wanted a progressive, not posturing, union.

Their victory means a variety of self-promoting and self-defined left individuals have to wake up to the fact that it is delivery of policies not occupation of a committee position that is of importance. This election is a victory for progress and a dawning for the left.



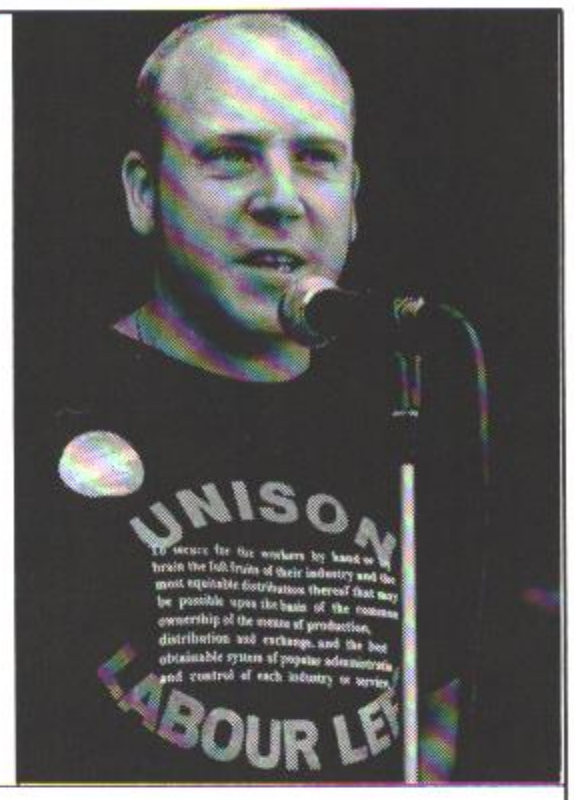
The launch of the New Deal in Hackney shows the potential for the private sector to profit from the scheme.

The tender to operate the scheme was won by Reed Personnel, who advertised for consultancy posts at a salary of £13,000 — undercutting the equivalent jobs in the Employment Service (ES) which are paid £15,000. Civil Service Union PCS pointed out that this could net Reed an additional £50,000 a year in Hackney alone. Reed may make an additional profit, because all "clients" will be found jobs through their existing services. Therefore Reed will be paid twice: by the employers who pay fees for this, as well as by the New Deal contract. Reed apologised to ES managers after the posts were advertised in local Job Centres without their knowledge.

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the Geoff Martin column

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



WITH THE NHS rapidly approaching its 50th birthday in July, you might have thought that the labour movement would be preparing a major bash to mark one of its finest achievements. You would be wrong. So far, the evidence suggests that the only events in the pipeline are being organised by NHS managers at local level. Car boot sales and tombolas are being pencilled in and junior Health Minister Paul Boateng is going to give a sermon. I can hardly wait.

With the *Independent* reporting that up to 80 hospitals across the UK face closure or merger under New Labour, wouldn't the fiftieth birthday of the NHS be the ideal point for the unions to mobilise a massive public demonstration in defence of the basic principles of health care free at the point of need?

Leaving the celebrations to the same NHS top brass who have been ripping the service to shreds since the Tory reforms of 1990 is madness. It's like asking Frank Field and Harriet Harman to organise a benefit for the Welfare State Network.

I recently spoke at a meeting in Canterbury where the local hospital is threatened with closure and where regular demonstrations of over 6,000 people have been hitting the streets. When 6,000 people take to the streets of Canterbury you know that there's something big going down. Similar protests in defence of the NHS are kicking off all over the UK. Why not bring them all together in one place to mark the NHS's half century?

TALKING of hitting the streets, thanks to *Labour Left Briefing* I ended up having to travel in to central London on the day of the Countryside Alliance march. From what I saw — top of the range Land Rovers and designer leisure wear — the argument that the march was a mobilisation of impoverished farm labourers was total garbage. What the march really represented was the first stirrings of the organised hard right since the general election.

The pitiful capitulation of the Labour front bench to this bunch of landed scroungers showed us yet again that this is a government that responds to pressure. For the past ten months all of that pressure has come from the right. The tobacco industry, the newspaper proprietors and the fox torturers have all forced concession after concession out of Blair and his cohorts. So when is organised labour going to latch on to this reality?

I was delighted to hear John Edmonds from the GMB saying that the unions should take note of the Government's response to the Countryside Alliance and begin preparing to put hundreds of thousands of our members on the streets in support of the trade union agenda. The question is when John, when?

What will be the trigger for a major official mobilisation? Will it be a sell-out of workplace rights, a dragging down of the minimum wage rate or the continuing squeeze on our public services? All or any of these will do as far as I'm concerned. Our job now is to force the pace for national action from local and regional level. We need that pressure on!

● Next month...more football nostalgia from the early 70's.

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

AT THE end of March, Communication Workers Union (CWU) members will receive ballot papers to elect a new General Secretary, the most important post in the union. The union currently has two Joint General Secretaries, Tony Young and Derek Hodgson, a legacy of the merger in 1994 of the National Communications Union, representing telecoms workers, and the Union of Communication Workers, representing postal workers. Both JGSs are standing for election.

There are a total of four candidates for the post: Peter Morris from the Telecoms Clerical Constituency and Billy Hayes from Postal — in addition to the two JGSs. Many branches, and the unions' Broad Left, are recommending a vote for Billy Hayes. All the other three are united by their politics (outright Blairites), divided only by the section of the union from which they originate. Derek Hodgson claims to secure a large number of nominations from postal branches. He is an unreconstructed right-wing bureaucrat, at home in the smoke filled rooms of an earlier era.

Billy has been a member of the CWU (and its predecessors) for 24 years. Elected to the NEC in 1992, four months later he was elected to his current position of Assistant Secretary. He believes that the union should become a united force across all constituencies, protect job security by fighting casualisation and the growth of contractors, aim for a shorter working week, with 5 and 4 day week working for all our members (some post office workers still work a six-day week) and seek improvements in leave.

Camden Council's management has broken off local negotiations with UNISON, the trade union representing 170 library staff who are on official strike. The strike arose from management plans to make redundancies, impose job cuts and change working patterns of staff in advance of implementation of the "strategic review" of library services. Continuous strike action by UNISON members (who constitute the overwhelming majority of library staff) began on 26th February. Only one out of thirteen libraries is being opened by management.

● Solidarity messages to Camden UNISON, 59 Phoenix Court, Brill Place, London, NW1 1ES. Tel. 0171-911 1633 or call David Eggmore 0171-359 1983 (home).

In memory of Eileen Gersh

Revolutionary socialist,
Hackney South CLP
who died on Wednesday 18th March.

For memorial details email: charli.barbara@btinternet.com

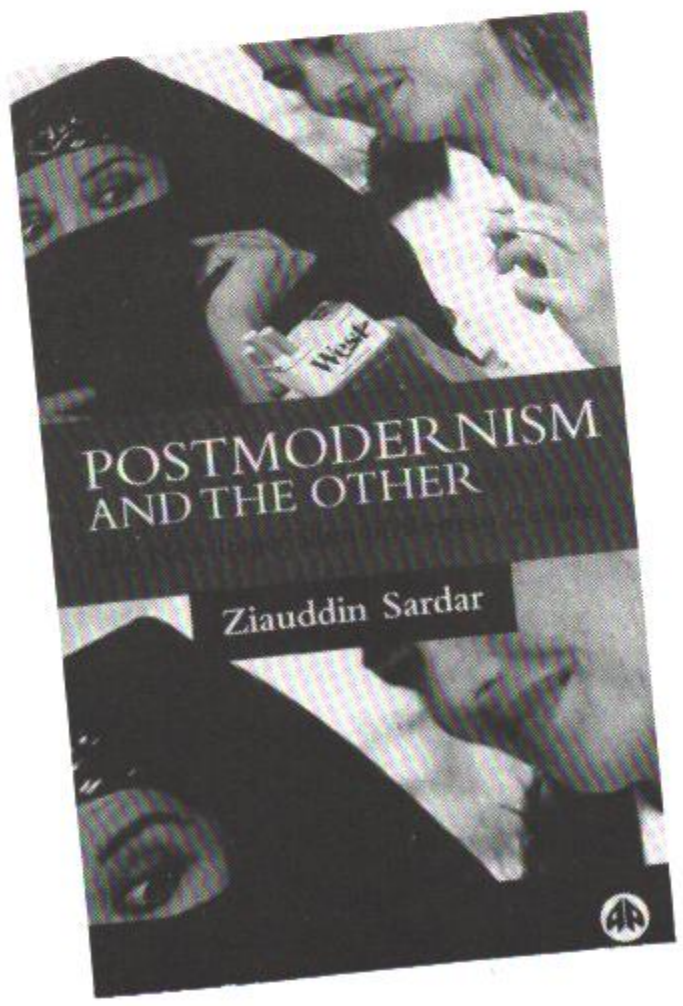
Fighting racism, fighting imperialism

Mike Phipps reviews Black and Green *by Brian Dooley, £12.99 paperback and* Postmodernism and the Other *by Ziauddin Sardar, £14.99 paperback, both published by Pluto.*

WHEN in Roddy Doyle's novel (and film) *The Commitments*, the leader of a group of Dublin soul musicians tells his band, "Say it once, say it loud, I'm black and I'm proud. The Irish are the niggers of Europe, lads", he was tapping into a long tradition. Many British 19th century writers droned on about the racial inferiority of the Irish; one eminent anthropologist even argued they should be categorised as "Africanoid".

The comparison between Irish and Black, however, took on a new dimension when the American civil rights movement began to organise against institutionalised discrimination in the deep South. As TV pictures showing the police repression of peaceful protests were transmitted around the world, a group of women in Dungannon, Northern Ireland, were quick to make the connection. Frustrated at the electoral gerrymandering and the twelve-year housing waiting list for Catholics, they picketed the local council and produced a "Declaration of Independence", demanding an end to discrimination. This was in 1963 — four years before the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was set up.

The civil rights movement in the North of Ireland was consciously modelled on the American one and arose from similar grievances: the systematic denial of basic rights, gerrymandered boroughs and the application of laws that were different to those of mainland Britain. Citizens of Northern Ireland for example could lawfully be whipped with a cat o' nine tails; nor under Westminster convention was it possible even to raise such anomalies in Parliament.



The civil rights movement also adopted similar tactics. The 1969 Belfast to Derry march was styled directly on the Selma-Montgomery demonstration: both were brutally attacked by the police. When Bernadette Devlin was catapulted into prominence by her election as an MP three months later, she was able to visit the US and make personal contact with civil rights activists and Black Panther leaders, visiting Angela Davis in jail. In fact, she got on better with radical black activists than the well-off Irish-American community from whom she was supposed to raise funds.

The latter, according to Bernadette, "looked and sounded to me like Orangemen. They said exactly the same things about blacks that the Loyalists said about us at home." The comparison between the two civil rights struggles was not well received among most Irish Americans and her singing of "We shall overcome" at one event led some to cancel their contributions.

The opponents of civil rights had their links too. Unionist leader Ian Paisley had ties with US segregationists and received one of his mail order degrees from Greenville University, South Carolina. In 1983 the US Supreme Court ruled that this college's record on racial integration was so poor it did not qualify for federal tax credits.

Today the solidarity has come full circle. Last year Angela Davis addressed a public meeting in California calling for the release of Bernadette's daughter Roisin McAliskey "from the shackles of British imperialism" — a sign that in the North of Ireland at least much still remains to be achieved.

● Ziauddin Sardar's book is a critique of postmodernism — and an important one. Its thesis is that the theory of postmodernism fails in the very thing it sets out to achieve. If modernity embodied the idea that the path of development of western civilisation was the only way forward for all societies, postmodernism sought to question this Eurocentric view.

Instead, argues Sardar, its emphasis on cultural relativism and the idea that the truth is ultimately unknowable have produced a new colonial "anything goes" outlook. "Now that the west itself doubts the reality of its own reality and truth, it seeks to maintain the status quo and continue unchecked on its trajectory of expansion and domination by undermining all criteria of reality and truth." Behind its promise to synthesise different cultures and traditions lies a monolithic project, the expression of a civilisation hellbent on excluding most of the world from its monopoly of power and resources.

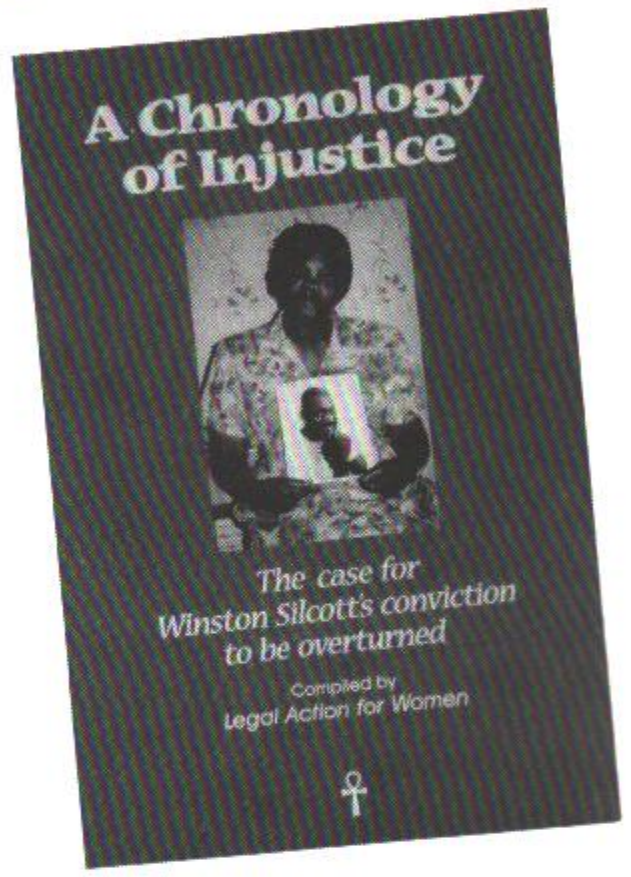
An arid philosophical debate? Not when applied to recent international events. If capitalist modernity produces barbarism — an estimated 187 million people perished in warfare between 1914 and 1990 — then postmodernism relativises this, extenuates it and makes it acceptable in context. The ambivalence of postmodern morality, the ability to see all sides, does not allow a value judgement to be made against barbarism as such; instead it promotes a culture where all modes of behaviour are "valid" as long as its own privileges are not threatened. Hence the profound cynicism governing the west's attitude to the mass killing, torture and rape in Bosnia, or the slaughter of 25,000 civilians in the Chechen capital Grozny — an "internal Russian" matter. Saddam Hussein on the other hand...

This provocative book has an excellent section on the role of western relief agencies which claim to "represent" in the media the "real" interests of countries in the throes of a crisis, while pursuing their own political agenda, like Care International which headed the campaign for US troops to be sent to Somalia. Sardar concludes that postmodernism, in claiming to co-opt traditional cultures, actually ossifies them and prevents their forward development. Instead the vibrant experiences of the non-west can map the way towards a genuine multiculturalism and pluralism of outlooks.

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Winston Silcott, political prisoner

John Stewart reviews
A Chronology of Injustice: The Case for Winston Silcott's Conviction to be Overturned.



FOR A while in the late 1980s and early 1990s there seemed the possibility of a real breakthrough for campaigns against miscarriages of justice. Starting with the dramatic release of the Guildford Four in 1989 and the victories of the Birmingham Six in 1991, Judith Ward in 1992 and the quashing of the convictions of the Tottenham Three, the legal establishment in the UK was rocked to its foundations by the success of the justice campaigns and a slump in public confidence in the police and judicial system. In response to this new situation, the Royal Commission on Criminal Justice was set up under Lord Runciman; it promised much but delivered little.

This new booklet draws attention to Winston Silcott's continued imprisonment more than six years after he was cleared of the murder of PC Blakelock during the Broadwater Farm uprising in October 1995. The booklet gives a clear and concise outline of the victimisation of Winston by the police and his demonisation by a racist media. Even now, for those who have not met Winston and his family, it is hard to mention his name without thinking of the aggressive-looking photograph released by the police and published on the front page of *The Sun* on the second day of his trial for the Blakelock killing.

Winston's continued imprisonment is formally for the killing of a local gangleader, Anthony Smith, at a party in Hackney in 1984. *A Chronology of Injustice* shows that evidence from several independent witnesses, long available to the lawyers, makes clear that Winston acted in self-defence and that in any normal case he would have been released long ago. However, this is not a normal case and the pressure of a racist media who have turned Winston into a 'hate figure' and the powerful lobbying of the police, who resent his acquittal on the Blakelock killing, have combined to keep Winston in prison. Winston Silcott remains a victim of a double miscarriage of justice and the most well known political prisoner currently held in a British prison.

This pamphlet has been compiled by Legal Action for Women, which in the past has worked mainly on cases directly affecting women. However the group has been working with Winston's mother, Mary Silcott, on his case. As *A Chronology of Injustice* points out, in nearly all of the justice campaigns over the last period women have been at the fore-front — the mothers, daughters, sisters and partners of those wrongly imprisoned have been among the most determined to demand justice. Often, the burdens of holding campaigns together have fallen largely on the women.

Winston's conviction in the Smith case is currently being reviewed by the Criminal Cases Review Commission. *A Chronology of Injustice* has been submitted to the CCRC in the hope that, after giving the document their "unbiased attention", the Commission will refer Winston's case back to the Court of Appeal, which will order his release. It is a hope that labour movement activists and anti-racists everywhere will share.

● *A Chronology of Injustice*, by Legal Action for Women, published by Crossroads Books, Crossroads Women's Centre, PO Box 287, London NW6 5QU, £4.00.

Militant mix

Mike Marqusee reviews new albums by Cornershop and Asian Dub Foundation.

Though heavily indebted to Lou Reed and the Velvet Underground, Cornershop's hit single *Brimful of Asha* is a catchy pop tribute to India's Bollywood playback singers (notably Asha Bhosle), the invisible artists who provide the voices for the musical sequences which appear in nearly all mainstream Indian movies.

Cornershop's new album, *When I was Born for the 7th Time*, is an eclectic assembly, yoking together 70s funk, country and western, indie rock, hip hop and south Asian traditions. It's the product of a cut-and-paste approach to pop music which is usually good fun, if facile and sometimes aloof. One track features the late Allen Ginsberg singing his lyric "When the light appears boy" over an acoustic folk bhangra background. There is a winning cover of Lennon and McCartney's *Norwegian Wood* — one of the first Western pop songs to exploit south Asian sounds — sung in Punjabi, a neat piece of cultural re-appropriation!

The unexpected success of *Brimful of Asha* sparked a brief flicker of media interest in an emergent "New British Asian", "Anglo-Asian" or "Second Generation" culture. A number of articles linked Cornershop with Asian Dub Foundation, the militantly anti-racist Bethnal Green band whose latest album is the excellent *R.A.F.I.* (*Real Areas for Investigation*). Although ADF share some influences with Cornershop, the sound they make is something else altogether: a thunderous, passionate, lyrical, politically sophisticated dance music.

The album kicks off with *Assassin*, a paean to Udham Singh, the revolutionary secularist who assassinated one of the colonial officials responsible for the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar in 1919 — and was subsequently hanged by the British in Pentonville: "A bullet in the head won't bring back the dead/But it will lift the spirit of our people." In *Dub Mentality* ADF explain what they're up to: "Dub is the place we come to argue and debate/ It isn't just a backdrop to our herbal intake/ ... Listen to the sound of the drum and bass/ Different communities meet up in the same place/... Cut and splice and regeneration/ Militant mix and equalisation/ These are the methods for a serious operation/ Pushing back the borders of your musical civilisation."

***Free Satpal Ram* explains and analyses Satpal's case (see *LLB*, last issue) in a musical idiom that expresses both rage against injustice and a fierce determination to challenge it. This song knocks the spots off of the bloated rock anthems that have made millions for our derivative Britpop heroes, but for obvious reasons it is unlikely to receive the airplay needed to climb up the charts.**

Political inspiration isn't the first thing I look for in music and if ADF was just PC they wouldn't be worth listening to. Their musical sources may be diverse — rap, dub reggae, punk rock, south Asian songs, sounds and rhythms — but ADF succeed (unlike Cornershop) in fusing them into an original and coherent sound with a visceral impact.

From lesbian separatism to the backlash

Liz Davies reviews The New Feminism *by Natasha Walter, Little, Brown & Co, 1998 £17.50*

THE New Feminism received much publicity on publication. Extracts from the book reprinted in the newspapers concentrated on the author's argument that feminism has moved on from 1970s second-wave feminism and that women and girls are now free to enjoy their bodies, dress to please themselves and are confident in their sexual attractiveness. The argument has echoes of the "girl-power" slogan of the Spice Girls (referred to approvingly in the book) and women behaving badly in the *Girlie Show*.



PHOTO: DAVID POPE
Liz Davies

There is more to this book than that, although inevitably the media concentrated on the references to sex and fashion. Describing "the reality gap" Walter sets the truth against the view that women now have it all: women working full-time still earn on average 80% of men's full-time earnings, the numbers of women entering professions is now very healthy but still few women have made it to the top, lack of child-care hampers women's employment opportunities, and sexual harassment in the workplace is a widespread experience for many women. She also deals with the reality of women's lives where they survive on welfare benefits. She deals in detail with the evidence collected by Sue Lees that crimes of violence against women are regularly treated more leniently by the criminal justice system than other crimes, and that women giving evidence in rape trials are made to feel that they are the one on trial.

She is engagingly confident about the expectations of women, citing widespread support among both women and men for statements emphasising women's right to work, fathers having greater involvement with their children etc. There are three profound difficulties with the book: First, I am deeply suspicious of anyone claiming both to discover a whole new movement and there and then to speak for that movement.

Second, in order to support her argument that young women have grown more confident, she has to create a straw-woman image of 1970s man-hating lesbian feminists forbidding men from participating in debate or action and hence doing women no favours. In my experience, as a feminist active from 1980 or so, this is wholly a myth. Unfortunately, the press is always keen to perpetuate this myth. The press created it in the early 1970s with the images of bra-burning Women's Libbers. It is sad to see feminists today repeating this myth. Dea Birkett in *The Guardian* on 10th March 1998 wrote that for a full decade from the late 1970s feminists avoided penetrative sex!

Third, the emphasis on women's right to enjoy fashion and our bodies is double-edged. Clearly feeling confident about one's body is liberating and the desire to adorn oneself is one that many of us enjoy. But by celebrating this, Walter fails to deal with the manipulation of women by the beauty industry: the obsessions with women's bodies, the use of women's bodies to sell anything, the constant pressure to be thin, the way we are all bombarded with images of beautiful women in expensive clothes. It has been stated over and over again that the images propagated by the beauty industry are influential in creating eating disorders, low self-esteem, depression and self-destructive behaviour in women. It is impossible to celebrate the joy of dressing up without recognising the dangerous role that the beauty industry plays.

In that respect, Walter has allowed herself to be used by the backlash and the parts of her book that were serialised in the press were those dealing with sex, fashion and the myth of the man-hating feminist.

- *LLB* supports Liz's nomination for the Constituency Section of Labour's NEC.

Back to Keynes and out of EMU

Brian Burkitt, Senior Lecturer in Economics at the University of Bradford reviews Europe's Economic Dilemma *(MacMillan), J. Mills (1998)*

DESIGNED TO stimulate both hosannas and brickbats in equal proportions, this is a lucid, well-written and coherent exposition of the Keynesian argument that unemployment occurs due to a lack of aggregate demand rather than being a result of supply-side problems, such as lack of education, investment and training.

Although written largely before the election, it constitutes an implicit but devastating rebuke to the "New" Labour Government's strategy of emphasising Welfare to Work programmes, while abdicating demand management to the Bank of England. A more disastrous policy for future living standards and job creation is hard to imagine!

John Mills' book also demonstrates the outdated, monetarist basis of the Maastricht Treaty and subsequent moves towards EMU. He emphasises that any effective future framework for the EMU must be based upon flexible economic policy co-ordination between member states, that permits effective redistribution and growth policies rather than the current bureaucratic, centralised deflation.

Labour has postponed a single currency decision until after the next general election, but the decision whether to join or to opt-out remains the most crucial, long-term decision in British politics. Given this context, every member of the labour movement should read (and eventually re-read) John Mills' timely and decisive contribution to the debate.

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CORRESPONDENCE

We welcome feedback, however letters over 250 words will not be considered. Those via email (or PC disk) are particularly welcome.



PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU.
llb@labournet.co.uk

The debate over Stalinism in the Socialist Labour Party is at risk of turning into farce. The tragedy is the 20-odd million people (including the entire Bolshevik Central Committee which served with Lenin) who perished through state action during Stalin's rule, do not have a say on this matter.

Paul Lockwood (April *LLB*) is disingenuous to pretend that we are here discussing what "capitalists" say about Stalinism. Capitalism has had longstanding business and political relationships with most Stalinist regimes including the old Soviet Union, China, Vietnam and in the division of Germany after the war. Brutal actions by the Soviet Union in Afghanistan against villagers and peasant farmers show that it is not just imperialists who commit war crimes. Support given by the Soviet Union to barbaric proxy regimes such as that of Mengisto in Ethiopia shows the true value of it as a bulwark against imperialism.

What *LLB* readers are discussing is their view, as socialists, of the legacy of Stalinism. No one should suggest banning political debate in any labour movement organisation. That, after all, is the method of the right-wing and Stalinism. My advice would be don't bother getting involved with an organisation steeped in Stalinist methods; far better to pursue socialist politics and methods elsewhere.

John Calderon,
Hackney

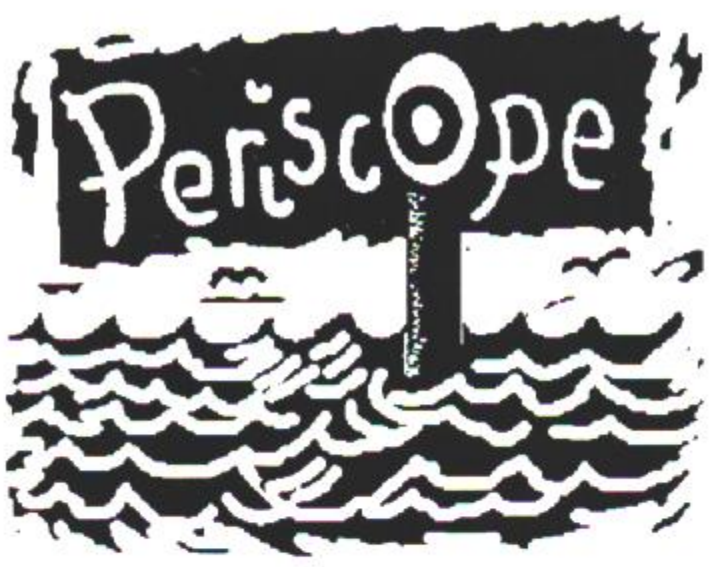
Past Labour left strategy could have been described as a two-stage journey. First, win control of the Party; secondly, for a radical Labour government to bring about socialist transformation in Britain.

This centralised the role of the Party. It was important that the Party alone selected its candidates (i.e. left-wingers) for public office and kept First Past The Post (FPTP) as the easiest way of maintaining an overall Commons majority.

Blair's centralised dictatorship, systematically pursuing proto-conservative policies, makes wholesale socialist transition of the Party a distant or unlikely prospect. The demise of social democracy and historical communism has, with accelerating globalism, thrown into confusion the prospect and meaning of socialist transformation.

A reorientation of strategy is needed. Neither the belief that the Labour left can win control of the Party outright, nor the setting up of a new socialist party (as the sad history of the Socialist Labour Party demonstrates) will get us anywhere. Most of the electorate is to the left of Blair, but has no means of electoral expression, and there are serious people prepared to fight New Labour from the outside (e.g. Coates and Kerr in the Euro-elections). We need to fight for a democratic and proportional regime in the Labour Party, and an electoral system allowing votes for the extra-Labour Party left without hurting the Labour Party, which also gives a choice between Labour Party candidates. Neither the closed regional list system (proposed for the 1999 Euro-elections) nor the Alternative Member System (for the Scottish and Welsh assemblies) meet these criteria. The only system to do so is the Single Transferable Vote (STV). I believe for these reasons it is strategically sensible for the socialist left inside the Party to campaign for STV.

Peter Bowing,
Hungary



Something fishy going on?

Last year's Newlyn Fish Festival had some unwelcome guests — the **British National Party**. It was their aim to show that only a BNP government could guarantee the rights of British fishermen. But how will they convince British fish to stop migrating and stay in British waters?

Dome doomed?

Cynics have suggested that it's impossible to find an article in support of the **Millenium Dome**, but Periscope's found one! Er...actually it's in *Progress*, set up by Peter Mandelson's former aide Derek Draper. And it's by...Peter Mandleson.

For fox sake

Hunters' friend, Labour MP **Kate Hoey**, was involved in the talking out of the Wild Mammals Bill on 13th March. Described as an Ulster Unionist by one MP and Kate Tally-Hoey by another, she let slip there were more Labour MPs living in her constituency than any other. A suitable case for the (humane killer's) trigger-ballot?

Millbank calling

The **Millbank** Tendency hasn't been on the defensive for some time. So what a shock to see their new telephone "scripts". One model question is "What's the point, you're just the same as the Tories?" Obviously, this must be in the script because it's a frequently asked question — significant numbers must be leaving for this reason.

No more tea at No. 10

The Government wrote to the **TUC** saying no new members will be appointed to Industrial Tribunals (now called Employment Tribunals) until October 1999, while ministers review the system. Does this mean the end of union appointments? It's already clear the Government doesn't think too much of the unions. When the TUC sent in its response to the consultation on the future of London, it didn't even get an acknowledgement. On chasing it up, the response was: "The Government does not take into account the views of marginal and extreme groups".

A man called Smith

To counter *Guardian* Diary claims that no-one knows who the supposedly dull Employment Minister **Andrew Smith** is, look no further than *LLB*'s sister paper, ***Oxford Labour Left***, in 1984. On socialism, "We have to get across how it's only by having popular control over the means of production and capital that these values can actually be put into practice." On Ireland, "Britain can't 'solve' the situation; we have to set the course for withdrawal of the troops." On the tasks for left Labour MPs? "It must be a key objective of any Labour MP to get some accountability of the cabinet or shadow cabinet to the Parliamentary Labour Party and to the movement — to conference decisions." Ever keen to assist!

Tea for two

The first prize in *LLB*'s raffle for the Liverpool dockers of two World Cup Final tickets pales in comparison to the delights on offer at a recent Brighton Labour Party bash: tea for two in the Lords with **Baron Bassam**! Nice of ex-squatters' leader Steve to find the time, what with the new KPMG consultancy job.

Oranges and Lemons

When Unionist MP **Ken Magginis** found Irish flags in the House of Commons cafeteria on St. Patrick's Day he was so incensed that he ripped them down. He returned a while later only to find that they had been re-erected. This time he threw them into the Thames below. It doesn't bode well for a peaceful settlement. ❑

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Who speaks for the countryside?

THE 200,000 people who marched through London on 1st March certainly made the Government sit up and take notice. For trade unionists, there's an obvious lesson. But what are the real issues in the countryside, and is the Countryside Alliance really representative of rural people? Eddie Tucker investigates.

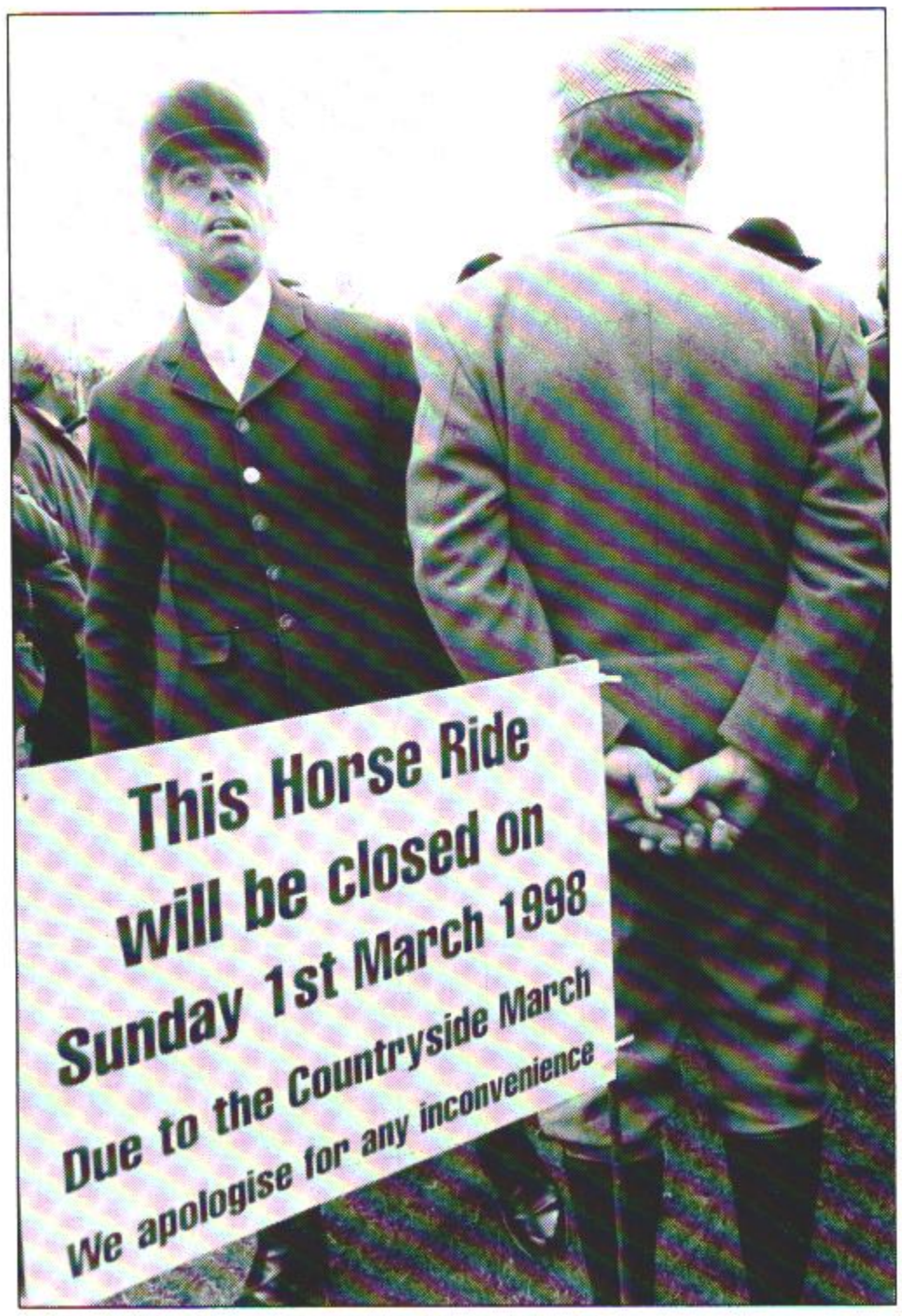


PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

At least the foxes got a break on 1/3/98.

THE RESPONSE from the Labour Press Office altered radically between the weekend and the Monday morning, when a MORI poll showed that just 7% of the marchers supported Labour. The march was indeed the Tory Party at play and, worryingly, might indicate that the right-wing are now filling the vacuum in protest politics that has developed since the general election.

The Countryside Alliance has succeeded in an almost impossible task: mobilising large numbers of people behind the "save bloodsports" banner. In fact, the march was a ragbag, attracting support from many people concerned about issues like saving rural post offices, cottage hospitals and so on. In the past, the hunters said even less in support of these essential facilities than they did when thousands lost their jobs in coal mines in rural areas. The march also included some people opposed to the right to roam — as well as a substantial minority (30,000 according to MORI) in favour!

The march organisers seemed most concerned about defending the vested interests of the few. Bloodsports, rights of large landowners, demands to increase the subsidy we all pay to farmers, the right to continue to market potentially infected beef — these are not the things that worry most people in rural areas. The biggest problem facing people living in the countryside is trying to find a job; few are available and pay is low. The mechanisation of agriculture means most farms only employ two or three people and poor transport routes and costs of supplies have meant much rural industry has been lost. Even getting to a jobcentre can be a daunting task.

Recent surveys showed a quarter of rural people spontaneously mentioning transport and getting to and from towns as their principal concern; yet the Countryside Alliance was singularly quiet on this issue. The cost of living, with large multinationals (for instance running petrol stations, high street shops and superstores) using the "captive" market to push prices well above those in urban areas, needs to be tackled at government level.

For the first time, a major march was subject to scientific study. A team from Edinburgh University estimated an attendance of between 133,000 and 151,000 (around half the 284,000 claimed). Scotland Yard estimated 250,000 using a method "inspired by scientists to count seals on beaches". Well, there you are then.

Cricket sexists regroup

LLB READERS familiar with the quaint sub-culture of English cricket will have been horrified but not especially surprised by recent revelations of rampant sexism at the Lord's offices of the England and Wales Cricket Board (always abbreviated, without regard for Welsh sensibilities — though Glamorgan were last year's county champions — to ECB). Unwilling to subject themselves to cross-examination, the ECB refused to attend the hearings of the Industrial Tribunal which found the evidence given by ECB receptionist Theresa Harrild to be true, and accordingly declared the masters of English cricket guilty of sexual discrimination.

In a shameless damage-limitation exercise, the ECB airily dismissed the IT findings and effectively branded Harrild a liar. The *Guardian*'s Matthew Engel (editor of *Wisden* Cricketer's Almanack, which passes for "the bible" of English cricket) sprang to their defence, advising readers that "there is truth and there is Industrial Tribunal truth" and holding up one (out of scores) of the examples of misbehaviour cited by Ms Harrild for ridicule. "Men in the office talked of one woman never having had a shag. Is there an office in the country where men don't talk like that?" Which certainly raises interesting questions about the atmosphere in the *Guardian* office.

Engel found the detailed allegations against ECB Chief Exec Tim Lamb (supported by Harrild's main witness, another female ECB employee) "improbable" because he personally knew Lamb (son of Baron Rochester) to be "a careful, even fastidious man". Lamb himself denied he had called women cricketers "dykes" and sought to prove his anti-sexist credentials by telling the world that his 14 year old daughter played cricket and, besides, "I count some of the England women players among my friends."

And these are the people to whom our New Labour Government is about to award a virtual licence to print money — by 'de-listing' home Test matches so that television rights can be sold to the highest bidder, i.e. Rupert Murdoch.

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