LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

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Labour Left Briefing

PO Box 2378, London, E5 9QU
Telephone: 0181-985 6597
Fax: 0181-985 6785
Email: LLB@gn.apr.org
Web: http://www.labournet.org.uk/LLB

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AGENDA



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Welfare reform: Labour at the crossroads

AS ANY claimant will confirm, the welfare state is in urgent need of reform.

First, most basic benefit rates are simply too low. According to the Rowntree Trust, current welfare payments leave an average household £36 a week short of an "essentials only" budget. The tax and benefit system Labour has inherited from the Tories is not neutral. It redistributes wealth from the poor to the rich. A study by an academic at LSE has revealed that even if the welfare-to-work scheme is a success, one million more individuals will be pushed below the poverty threshold in five years time unless the Government raises benefits substantially.

Second, this should be financed by steeply progressive taxation. This is the only just and efficient method for society to distribute its common resources and determine its priorities rationally.

Third, we need to ensure that people have the knowledge and confidence to secure the benefits to which they are entitled. A UN committee recently expressed alarm over the one million pensioners in Britain who are entitled to income support but fail to claim it. These unclaimed benefits will contribute almost as much to the Treasury this year as Gordon Brown's windfall tax.

Finally, looking ahead, if we are to provide social cohesion and economic security in an age of "flexible" labour and casualisation, we will need to reduce means-testing and expand universal provision. Universal benefits are the key to binding together a social majority — including the poor — on the basis not of charity but of mutual interest. We also need to increase rights in the workplace, strengthen trade unions, regulate business, and establish a comprehensive minimum wage to ensure that work really does lift people out of poverty.



Tragically, what the Government has in mind is completely different. According to figures secured by Ann Clwyd MP and published in the *Guardian*, the Government will have imposed £3.2 billion worth of benefit cuts — affecting single parents, the disabled, the elderly, children, and the unemployed — before it even begins to implement its own welfare reform package in two years time.

Blair has launched a roadshow to sell the package, and New Labour's disinformation squad is already gearing up for a massive exercise in muddying the waters.

There's the old chestnut about fraud (it is reported that one of Blair's focus groups has revealed that "people don't like scroungers"). There's never been much logic in cutting benefits for those who claim them legitimately in order to punish those who claim them illegitimately. If the same principle was applied to millionaire Inland Revenue evaders, the top rate of income tax would go through the roof! What's more, numerous studies have shown that the amounts left unspent because of under-claiming far exceed the amounts paid out to fraudulent claims. Most importantly, a regime which combines low benefits with low wages is bound to force huge numbers to claim and work unofficially at the same time. Crackdowns on this kind of "fraud" can only end up as wasteful campaigns of harassment against the poor.

It is said that our present welfare state costs too much and is

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unsustainable in the long run. By what mystical measure has it been determined that the £90 billion spent annually on social security is "too much" or that it is growing "too fast"? It amounts to some one quarter of total government spending and less than one eighth of GDP (much less than in most EU countries), and in real terms has grown by less than GDP over the last few years. Is that "too much" to spend for a shared civilised life?

Benefit cuts are not being forced on the Government by financial emergency or some IMF-style rescue package. In fact, the Government expects to run a surplus on the public accounts in 1999 and, as Will Hutton has pointed out, it is currently spending several billion less than the Tories planned to. If reducing the social security bill were the sole aim of the welfare reform exercise, then one would expect the Government to take action to control rents in the private sector, whose deregulation under the Tories is one of the principal reasons for the increased cost of housing benefit. Sadly, this measure does not even appear to be under consideration.

Gordon Brown's cuts in corporation tax will amount to a £2 billion a year hand out to the corporate sector, even taking into account his abolition of ACT, a corporate tax credit. His refusal to lift the ceiling on National Insurance contributions represents an additional £3.5 billion give-away. Meanwhile, the ring-fenced £22 billion a year defence budget, the private finance initiatives, the planned "best value" scheme, the Millennium Dome, welfare-to-work subsidies, and the handing over of state schools to private companies will all put huge sums of taxpayers' money into the pockets of big business. It is these policies that make welfare spending "unsustainable", not any demographic time bomb.

The most insidious claim made on behalf of the Government's misconceived version of welfare reform is that it is a "redistributionist" strategy. We are told that Gordon Brown wants to spend less on benefits in order to spend more on education and the NHS. But, according to figures ferreted out by the *FT*, the NHS will enjoy a rise in real resources of less than 1.5% in 1998-99; it needs a rise of 3% simply to maintain its current level of service. Although education spending will rise by 1.3%, the *FT* reports that: "More spending on schools will be balanced by cutbacks elsewhere in the education budget". Already, local education authorities across the country are being forced to slash budgets. Cuts in other departments, including transport, will be even heavier.

Many Labour MPs seem to be living in hope that Brown, having amassed a huge pre-election warchest, will go on a spending spree in three years time. But even if he wanted to — and it would make nonsense of the fiscal conservatism he has preached so sternly — he would be prevented by a variety of factors, not least the convergence criteria for a single European currency and the impact of the downturn which most economists are now predicting.

Another form of the "redistributionist" argument is that New Labour's welfare reform will take benefits away from the middle class and restore them to the genuinely needy. The recently mooted "affluence test" is clearly designed to placate Labour Party members and backbench MPs, but it is, of course, simply means-testing by another name. For the "affluence test" to have the kind of effect on the social security budget which the Treasury seeks, it would have to reach far down the income scale. Harriet Harman's £1m per year woman collecting maternity benefit has already been exposed (by her own department) as a fabrication. The reality is that the kind of "affluence test" the Government is considering will hurt the living standards of millions of working people. And by far the most efficient and equitable way to claw back common resources from the affluent while meeting the basic needs of the non-affluent majority is to raise the top level of income tax.

Politicians use the phrase "middle class" elastically and opportunistically. Where does the "middle class" end and the "underclass" begin? Over the last twenty years, not only have the proportion of people in the lowest income group increased, so has the rapidity with which households fall into and rise out of that group. The kind of massive extension of means-testing that the Government is considering is exactly the opposite of what is needed. Economically, it will add to insecurity and leave large numbers without the assistance they require to live a decent life. Politically, it will divide the working class, setting marginally privileged people (students, people with disabilities not living in dire poverty, working women) against people with even fewer privileges.

While the "middle class" are being asked to give up their universal benefits, the "underclass" is being told to get a job. Samuel Smiles moralism about the wonders of hard work comes ill from a government which has abandoned full employment as an achievable goal and whose macro-economic policies are anything but expansionary. (Whatever happened to the manifesto pledge to keep interest rates "as low as possible"?). Unlike the French and Italian governments, Blair and Brown seem unwilling even to contemplate any redistribution of available work through a reduction in the working week. In the European Union, Blair has proved a steely opponent of job creation measures or of any loosening of the fiscal and monetary tourniquets. And, quietly, Labour has scrapped its pre-election pledge to adopt the EU standard for counting the jobless. Cuts in benefits, the extension of means-testing, and coercive welfare-to-work schemes will ultimately have a tremendous impact on the entire labour market — to the disadvantage of the majority. Should the British economy enter recession later this year or early next, and global economic developments are making this more probable by the day, the effect of these measures on millions of lives hardly bears thinking about.

It is vital that Labour Party members keep their eyes on the welfare reform package as a whole. All indications are that this package, coupled with the Government's "comprehensive spending review", will amount to a far-reaching assault on the living standards and rights of working people. It promises to push more people into a less regulated labour market, while at the same time looking to private insurers to compensate for an increasingly threadbare state provision. It is a turn away from social democracy towards an individualist US model, in which the "middle class" are weighed down with huge social insurance costs, while the poor either work or starve.

The arguments for Blair's preferred version of welfare reform are incoherent and dishonest, but as a piece of social engineering, the package may prove only too coherent. The Government's hopes for increased growth rest very much on what the Treasury calls an "expanding labour market" coupled with "wage moderation", i.e. more of the lop-sided, inequitable growth we experienced, fitfully, under the Tories. In the end, this vision of welfare reform boils down to a low-wage, casualised labour force regulated by a coercive and parsimonious benefit system and enduring mass unemployment. That is why the Tories are so tempted to support it.

The unity of the Government and the Tories on welfare cuts means that on this issue at least, we have a de facto coalition government. The real argument is no longer between the two major parties but between the New Labour Government and the Labour left.The unfolding welfare reform package represents a huge historic challenge to the Labour Party and the trade unions. Should we fail to mount an effective resistance to it, and at the same time pose our feasible socialist alternative, the poor and the working class will forfeit any meaningful political representation, and British democracy will become even more of a farce.

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Blair backs Unionist agenda

For the Irish peace process the New Year was not a new beginning. Tony Blair backed David Trimble's analysis by producing a basis for talks — agreed with the Dublin Government — which threatens to copper-fasten partition and thus perpetuate the ancient conflict says Brian Campbell, editor of *An Phoblacht/Republican News*.

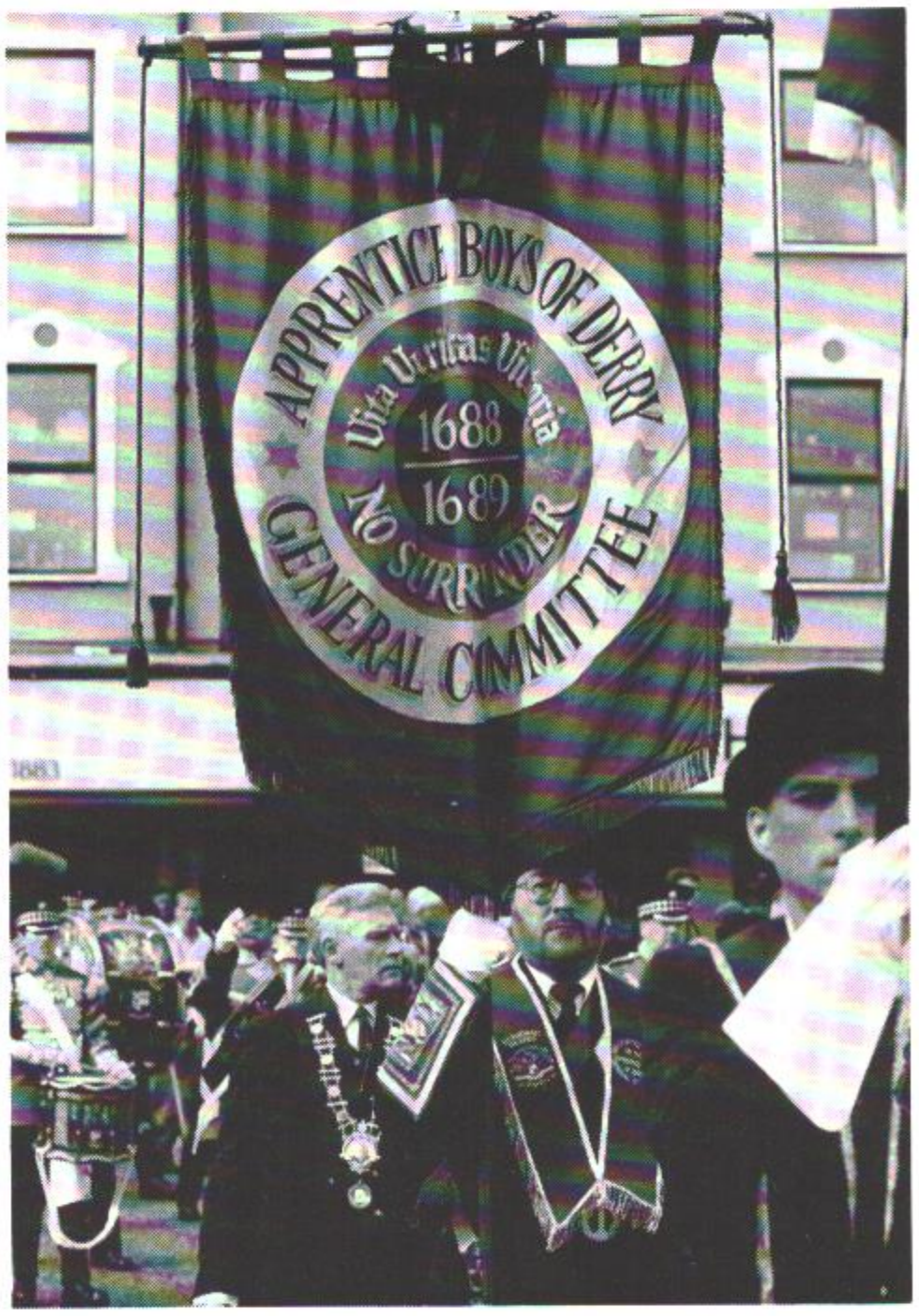
WHEN THE history is written the background to the latest moves in the peace process may not be favourable to Tony Blair. When the talks adjourned before Christmas the parties in Stormont had attempted — and failed — finally to set an agenda. Despite four months of talks, no substantive negotiations had taken place and the parties had not even been able to agree on what they should be talking about. Unionists wanted to exclude issues of policing, demilitarisation, equality and justice. Sinn Fein insisted that everything must be on the table. The two governments then decided that ten weeks of intensive negotiations would begin on 12th January. The governments pledged that they would take the lead in pushing the process forward.

This happened against the background of increasing Unionist and loyalist nervousness about the talks. It had become clear that the talks must produce fundamental change, including, at the very least, all-Ireland bodies. David Trimble's Ulster Unionists have all along refused to engage with Sinn Fein and have adopted stalling tactics throughout. It is as if Trimble recognises that his job has been to hold back the progress of history. Unionist nervousness had surfaced publicly before Christmas when the small loyalist party, the PUP, indicated that they may not turn up for talks on 12th January.

They complained that they were being treated as "bit players" and that there had been "a flow of concessions to republicans". Then, following the shooting dead of loyalist killer Billy Wright inside Long Kesh (the Maze) prison by the INLA and the killing of two Catholics by loyalist death squads, all the Unionist and loyalist parties rushed to condemn the "concessions". And yet, when they have been asked, "what concessions?", there were no coherent answers.

The evidence shows that the surface of the necessary changes — labelled "concessions" by unionists — has not even been scratched. Issues of equality and demilitarisation have been resolutely kept off the agenda by Unionists, with the backing of the British Government's influential security establishment. Not a single prisoner has been released by the British Government. On the ground, military posts have been strengthened and nationalist concerns about the RUC have not even been considered. Inequality in areas such as employment and culture is nowhere near being tackled. Cries of bias were unsustainable. The evidence is simply not there.

Indeed, when the crisis was over the *Sunday Tribune* reported that "UDP activists readily admit that the stream of concessions to the IRA about which their party has complained is more of a perception than a reality." And behind the spurious claims, David Trimble was in regular contact with Tony Blair, urging him to calm this Unionist-inspired "crisis" by backing a talks agenda which would ensure that the process could not lead to a united Ireland. It was a calculated exploitation of the sectarian murders of Catholics.



Will Blair march to the beat of the Apprentice Boys?

PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

The suspicion has to be that the Unionist and loyalist leadership recognised that the talks must produce fundamental change — and soon. There must be a society based on justice and equality, something they are finding impossible to deal with. As 12th January approached the ball was firmly in the British court. Mowlam and Blair had a choice. They could back Unionist and loyalist demands for no change — in other words, follow the fine British tradition of playing the Orange card. Or they could push forward a process which will bring real change. In the eyes of republicans, they did not really have much of a choice. The New Labour Government could repeat the mistakes of the past and advocate an internal settlement. Or they could help produce a changed future. When the talks agenda — the so-called Heads of Agreement — was finally unveiled the all-Ireland bodies (so necessary to signal real change) had lost their "executive" powers and would, in any case, be subordinate to a Unionist-inspired Assembly.

The negotiations continue and the details are to be worked out but Blair seems to have signalled his willingness to back a Unionist agenda. Not a great surprise, but it could be a fatal error. There is an inevitability of change in Ireland — the demographic changes, the north-south economic harmonisation and greater links within civil society all point towards an all-Ireland solution. Blair must accept the urgent need to manage this change, not resist it. ❑

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Jack's juvenile justice

Amid the media furore over William Straw's entrepreneurial activities, his father's proposals for reforming juvenile justice have received scant attention. Alex Taylor examines them.

JACK IS doing in government exactly what he said he would do in opposition, continuing the course of moralistic social authoritarianism mapped out before the election. Say what you like about these Christian Democrats, they didn't lie to get elected.

Consultation papers on "youth crime" were followed by a White Paper in November with its very own soundbite for a title, *No More Excuses,* and the Crime and Disorder Bill was introduced in Parliament to give effect to most of the proposals outlined in the White Paper.

No More Excuses has what passes for a reasoned statement of the Government's case for reforming youth justice. Even New Labour finds it hard to fill 40 pages without saying something sensible and — on the odd occasion when the evidence is undeniable — the White Paper gets it about right.

Among 14-25 year olds, half of all males and a third of all females admit to committing an offence. Being a "criminal" is nothing out of the ordinary then. But surely nice kids with places at Oxford cannot be criminals? So the White Paper conjures up more statistics and a conveniently broad definition to reveal something called a "persistent young offender" who really is different, abnormal and a threat to society.

Another of the "facts" recorded in the White Paper is that youth crime is difficult to explain. The association between known "risk factors" and "actual offending" is unclear. Key influences include "being male" and "living in a family with multiple problems". But some key factors are more key than others. Unravelling the complex construction of modern masculinity or tackling the rampant social and economic injustices left over from 18 years of Tory rule might put the wind up the middle classes. Better then to concentrate on what — without a shred of evidence — is asserted to be "the single most important factor in explaining criminality": the "quality" of a young person's home life. Thus the White Paper establishes poor parenting — Straw's personal obsession and a much more suitable target for the missionary zeal of British Christian Democracy — as the main cause of youth crime.

When it comes down to policy details, there are things to be said for some of the White Paper's proposals. Preventing further offending seems a good aim for a system of youth justice to pursue. After all, no one ever really believed that taking drugs, staying up late and burgling houses (or at least the last bit) amounted to proto-revolutionary activity. Nothing inherently wrong either with wanting to provide more support to parents. (No mention of carers, incidentally, in the wholesome nuclear-family-inhabited world of New Labour.) People doing important and demanding work, often in the worst possible conditions, are rightly at the top of Labour's list of priorities. Nor is replacing the crude retribution of hang 'em and flog 'em Tory penal policy with talk of "restorative justice", "reparation" and the reintegration of offenders into society a backward step.



But these are nuggets of enlightenment in a barrow-load of cynicism and stupidity. The Government should support parents and "strive to create the conditions in which families can flourish". How? Well, by slashing benefits and forcing people to take insecure and poorly paid work. By preparing their children for the cut-throat world of the flexible labour market in schools where "under-achievement" will not be tolerated on pain of "naming and shaming". By persisting with the criminalisation of all drugs that don't either symbolise the blood of Christ or come with a nice logo for a Formula One car and by setting up a social exclusion unit in the Cabinet Office to make sure that everyone can benefit from the "economic success" of punting on foreign exchange markets, reselling rolling stock given away by the Tories, or investing in offshore trusts.

What about the parents and children who just don't come up to scratch? For them, the tough but tender Mr Straw proposes a dismal regime of coercion and moral improvement. Parents who fail to attend "counselling and guidance sessions" (George Orwell, where are you now?) prescribed under parenting orders can be fined. Custodial regimes designed to rehabilitate and educate will be provided for the hardest cases — including unconvicted children as young as ten — despite overwhelming evidence that locking people up is a daft way of helping them to survive outside. And the justice system itself will be given deadlines to meet and targets to achieve in fast-tracking young people from arrest to conviction — almost inevitably at the cost of more miscarriages of justice as defendants are pressured into pleading guilty to save the taxpayer and the prosecution the expense and inconvenience of a trial.

Managing all this on behalf of a grateful nation will be a new quango called the Youth Justice Board while a network of Youth Offending Teams will provide yet another forum for unholy alliances of professionals (police, probation, social services and so on) to fight, haggle and buck-pass at a local level.

As good as his word before the election, Jack Straw has delivered the goods on youth justice — individual responsibility, family values, managerial efficiency, corporatism — and all at a knock down price. Michael Howard could hardly have done better — and he didn't have a troublesome family to worry about.

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A cup of cold poison

David Blunkett's new ideas are hypocritical and impractical, argues Bob Spooner, Leeds North East CLP.

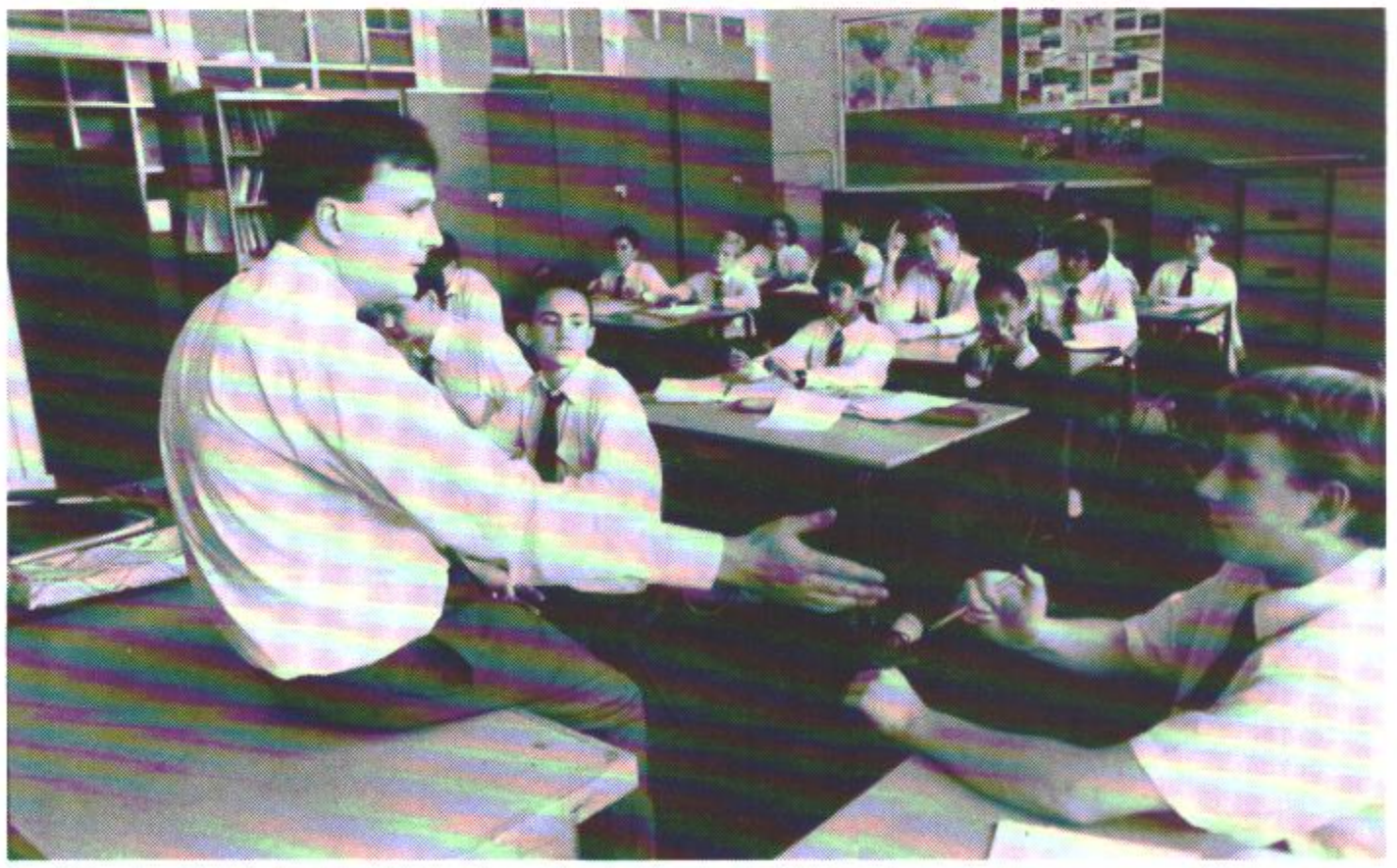


PHOTO: PHIL MAXWELL

"Any more trouble and I'm sending you to see the Managing Director".

THATCHER'S HIDDEN agenda in 1988 was to destroy comprehensive education, bring teachers to heel, promote private education, destroy local authorities and substitute training for education in state schools. Ten years later, the establishment of action zones, or education ghetto areas, will bring these poisonous policies to their logical conclusion. Children who live in them will receive a more restricted and oppressive education than elsewhere, or will have to join the middle class commuters who travel miles to school each day "Harman-style."

For those who are too apathetic to escape the net, the national curriculum will be scrapped and the basics will become the holy grail. As in pre-war elementary and senior schools, they will be doomed to concentrate on those things they find most difficult, and will rebel in droves. These schools will lose local authority protection and their teachers will not be covered by nationally negotiated conditions of work. They can expect to be exploited. They will be run by partnerships, could be privatised, and will be "free" to do just what local businessmen require.

Blunkett will sell our children to them in return for extra money. It won't stop there; these schools will prove prototypes, for the privatisation bug is addictive. Already Blunkett is threatening to turn the educational straitjacket in primary schools into a throttle, by restricting the curriculum in all of them. It can end only with multinationals exerting the same influence on our education as the Catholic Church did in the middle ages. As in poorer countries, those who supply the cash will expect to control social policies.

David Blunkett has the nerve to say that "Zones will offer hope to those in less favoured parts of the country...for greater educational opportunity," when they will clearly be offered less. This may not be as nauseatingly hypocritical as it seems. Blunkett's personal experiences have given him an unrivalled contempt for teachers and local councillors. The pattern of his own schooling gave him no understanding of educational breadth and left him overvaluing exam-oriented knowledge.

This explains why he doesn't know the medicine he dispenses is poison. But the charge of hypocrisy sticks on other policies: these schools will have neither a comprehensive timetable nor intake. They will come bottom of his odious tables; they will be special, not mainstream, schools; their policies will be controlled by non-educational interests and they will slip out of democratic control.

The sad thing is that secondary schools which innovated, and flouted the national curriculum in the interest of their pupils, by teaching to their strengths, have at his behest, been branded as failing schools. They contain some of the best teachers but their merits have been spurned and their approach vilified. Now they can come in out of the cold only if they turn their classes into large-scale remedial groups, a failed policy that confines pupils' vision of the world to their own restricted experiences.

The tragedy is that much more could be achieved with more cash and imagination. Blunkett does not need to go cap in hand to business, nor does he need to hand over control to those who have a different agenda from our national education policy. This cup of cold poison should be poured down the sink. ❑

No tuition fees

Simon Hewitt, Isle of Wight CLP, writes: It may have escaped your notice but December 1st-5th was a week of action against tuition fees in higher education. It seemed to escape the notice of my college union and I'm not aware of anything of significance taking place anywhere else.

The suspicion is that NUS declared the five days to perpetuate the illusion that they were actually doing something to oppose fees. In fact official NUS opposition to fees can be gauged by the behaviour of the NUS speaker at last November's London rally against fees. "Students don't mind paying something towards the cost of their education," he declared, earning an angry response from several thousand students.

The Campaign for Free Education is doing a good job of organising opposition to fees independently of NUS, and last November's national CFE demonstration was well attended. This year's NUS conference will be a real battle, and it will be a test of the left's political maturity to see whether we can unite sufficiently to get a good number of anti-fees candidates elected to the Executive.

The fight against fees must not be confined to the student movement. The introduction of tuition fees is an attack on the principle of universal provision that is at the very core of the British welfare state. Once you make the first step on this slope, you are embracing the logic that could lead to fees for GP callouts or hospital food.

Resist cuts in

Welfare reform — not at our expense!

Alan Holdsworth is a member of the national team of the Disabled People's Direct Action Network (DAN). In December Alan and other DAN members daubed red paint outside Downing Street and chained themselves to the gates in protest at proposed cuts to disabled people's benefits. He was arrested along with ten others.

NON-DISABLED people and their non-disabled families have been living off the backs of disabled people for centuries. They have had better housing and better education while disabled people were incarcerated in institutions, sterilised, abused and denied the basic freedoms that the rest of society enjoyed, ie. life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Disabled people have been the perpetual sacrificial lambs, the natural victims of a society whose members want to forget that they might one day become one of us. Disabled people's rights are still seen by politicians as the icing on the cake, funded by small change from the Chancellor's back pocket, cut back during times of hardship.

The benefits we receive are not an extra, they merely get us to the front door. Even if savings could be made disabled people have their own shopping list. We need funds:

- To make transport accessible so we can get to work.
- To build accessible housing so we are not forced against our will into institutions.
- To replace the charging-for-services policy being implemented by local councils.
- For mainstream education so we don't send our kids to special schools.
- To ensure that elderly people don't have to spend their life savings, give up their homes and enter institutional care.
- To reduce and eradicate abuse in institutions.
- To ensure that disabled people can live in and play a full part in community life as equal not special citizens.
- To make the environment accessible.
- To make information accessible.
- To ensure no disabled person is at risk.

This Government has talked about the stick without holding out a carrot. If we reduce the level of funding going to disabled people's issues, incarceration, poverty, abuse, segregation, fear and inequality will increase to dangerous levels.

Like its Conservative predecessor, this Government knows that there is a time-bomb ticking away which will explode in ten to twenty years and will affect the whole fabric of our society. The bomb is the ageing of the baby boomers of the 50s and early 60s. We are living longer, and the longer you live the more likely you are to acquire an impairment. In the next twenty years the welfare state will self-destruct unless we reconstruct it.

We have just ended 18 years of Tory Government. The biggest enemy to our national security which emerged from this period is the ideology of selfishness instilled expertly by Margaret Thatcher and somewhat clumsily by John Major. Thatcher appealed to the general public's baser instincts, encouraging people to ask: Why should I pay for someone else's kids to go to school? Why should I pay for someone else's health care if I'm fit as a fiddle? Taxation, in this country and others, has become a dirty word. The name of the game now is cutting public expenditure and giving the money back to the individual.

The Labour Prime Minister and Cabinet seem trapped in this ideology. They are so scared, so transfixed, that they see no hope of challenging it if they are to remain in what they see as power. The proposed cuts in disabled people's benefit are disastrous for this country and everyone who wants to live in a free society.

We agree that a reform of the welfare state is absolutely crucial. We agree that disabled people should be on a level playing field with everyone else. We agree that funds should be re-directed to those disabled people at the sharp end of discrimination in this country. We agree that this reform is the big idea.

Tony Blair and his Cabinet have got themselves into a hole of their own digging, and believe me if he keeps digging it will only get deeper. You don't begin the reform of the welfare state, the new Beveridge, by scaring people with hints about cuts, and short-term cuts at that. Disabled people are naturally anxious, and distrustful of a government that, yet again, sees them as sacrificial lambs. If this is how we are going to reform the welfare state, by picking off groups one by one in an atmosphere of fear and distrust, the time bomb will explode in our faces.

In employing tactics of non-violent civil disobedience — such as DAN used outside Downing Street — Gandhi was always careful to give the target a way out. Tony Blair still has a way out. To stop this conflict now, Tony Blair and his Cabinet must:

- Stop mixing up the reform of the welfare state with cuts.
- Enter into immediate talks with DAN and other organisations of disabled people.
- Suspend the obnoxious review of disabled people's benefits until he has consulted with disabled people and their organisations.

When the new Labour Government was

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disability benefits



PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

Disability activists demonstrate at Downing St.

elected DAN and other disabled people's groups were looking forward to working with it on a programme of real and radical change for disabled people. We believed that as disabled people our experience, skills and understanding of the issues that face us day-to-day would be crucial in shaping policy and creating the new Beveridge. Instead, Tony Blair has succeeded like no one before in uniting the disabled people's movement against the Government.

The longer the rumours about cuts persist, the more irrevocable the damage will be done to a relationship absolutely crucial to any government seeking genuine reform of the welfare state. We want to send a clear, unequivocal and urgent message to Tony Blair that it is time to talk to disabled people before all trust in his Government fades.

Failing this, we are in for a long fight and disabled people will be looking across the political spectrum for support. We are urging all MPs from all parties to oppose any Bill put forward. We are urging all members of the labour movement — CLPs, trades unions, individuals — to help us mobilise public support for an honest and open reform of the welfare state. While the traditional charities hold millions in their bank accounts, the disabled people's movement faces this campaign with less than £1000. We urgently need donations from our supporters so that disabled people themselves can lead the fight back.

The collections need to start now. The money will be used to ensure that disabled people can get involved in the campaign and that organisers do not have to go into more debt because they are spending every hour God sends organising.

- Send donations, payable to DAN, to 3, Crawley Road, London N22 6AN. DAN is holding a national day of action on Friday, 13th February. For details call 0181-889 1361.

Resist cuts in

Don't rob disabled people

Mike Oliver, Professor of Disability Studies at the University of Greenwich, argues that welfare can be reformed without robbing disabled people.

ONE OF the first things Margaret Thatcher said when she came to power was that disabled people could not expect to be exempt from any necessary changes that were going to be made in the welfare state. Students of recent political history will be struck by the remarkable similarity with a statement made by Tony Blair in the row with disabled people and some of his own party over planned reforms in the welfare state.

But it would be a mistake to imagine that history was about to repeat itself, for two important reasons. First, unlike the Tories, who were either ambivalent towards or profoundly hostile to the welfare state, Labour is broadly supportive of it. Second, when the Tories came to power, there was no powerful and committed disability movement to defend the interests of disabled people.

Any attempt to force through cuts in cash benefits to disabled people is likely therefore to be a high risk strategy, even for a government with such a large parliamentary majority. In fact, without Tory support I doubt that such cuts could be forced through Parliament, and the damage to New Labour might well be irreparable.

The problem is that the Government, in rightly seeking to reform the welfare state, is listening to the wrong people. The ideas being promoted by a combination of blinkered civil servants, failed poverty lobbyists and reformed radicals are likely to lock disabled people further into dependency on the state rather than to empower them to become fully participating citizens in a new, vibrant democracy — with, as its centrepiece, not a plastic dome, but a modern welfare state.

A central plank in the Government's strategy to reform the welfare state is its welfare-to-work programme which aims to reduce public expenditure by taking people off benefits and putting them into work, hence making more people net givers to rather than takers from society. Disabled people fully support such a strategy — though it would not apply to the majority of them, who are over 65.

As far as the nearly two million disabled people of working age are concerned, it would make more sense for the Government to put this part of its strategy in place first. If successful, it would take many disabled people off Incapacity Benefit and out of the poverty trap and hence reduce public expenditure on social security, which is precisely what both the Government and disabled people want.

Cynics might well suggest that attempts to cut benefits before implementing the welfare to work strategy are indications that the Government has little confidence in the success of its strategy. Such cynicism is unnecessary. As organisations of disabled people have been arguing for many years, strong, enforceable anti-discrimination legislation applying to all employers and across the whole labour market, will ensure that considerable numbers of disabled people take their rightful place in the workforce.

The Government could go further. It could set targets for all government departments and other state organisations (the NHS, local government, universities, etc.) in respect of employing disabled people. Additionally, in its dealings with the private sector it could stipulate similar targets as part of contract compliance. Finally, it could switch the grants it gives to the voluntary sector to organisations controlled by disabled people themselves; their record in employing their own puts the traditional charities to shame.

Such an integrated strategy would take hundreds of thousands of disabled people off incapacity benefit, hence reducing the pressures on public expenditure. Lest anyone thinks that this is over-optimistic, it should be remembered that within a few months of the start of World War II, 400,000 previously unemployed disabled people were incorporated into the workforce at all levels.

Cutting cash benefits to disabled people is a strategy doomed to failure for many reasons. To begin with, such attempts in the past have yielded only marginal savings, as Peter Lilley discovered. In addition, cash is not only good for disabled people but the economy as a whole; for example, Motability buys more cars every year than does Hertz or Avis, thus stimulating the motor industry. Finally, all the research evidence demonstrates that giving disabled people cash is the best way to reduce their dependency on others and the state.

It is understandable that the Government may want to free up more resources for education and health, but to proceed on the victim-blaming assumption that it is disabled people's fault that they are living on benefits is to fly in the face of reality. That reality is that vast numbers of disabled people are socialised into dependency by parts of the existing welfare state. Special schools, day centres, residential institutions, social security payments to keep people in care all perform this role and could all be targeted instead of cash benefits which free people from dependency.

There are political risks to this too. The vested interests of some local authorities, often Labour controlled, who provide such dependency creating services, the special schools lobby, the alliance of the charities and the voluntary sector whose very existence often depends on keeping disabled people dependent would all have to be tackled. But a strong government committed to creating a modern welfare state would have a better chance of succeeding with this approach than by cutting cash to disabled people.

If such a radical programme of opening up employment opportunities and removing disabling welfare barriers were to be adopted, it would be something that disabled people and the Government could unite over. It could play a key role in producing a modern sustainable welfare state for the twenty first century. But if the Government continues on its current course, the welfare state may well become unsustainable and the consequences of that, not just for disabled people, but for all of us, will be unimaginable. In such a case New Labour's legacy may really turn out to

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disability benefits

New Labour — new fear

Ian Malcolm-Walker, Secretary of the Trade Union Disability Alliance and a co-vice-chair of Labour Party Disabled Members' Group (LPDMG), explains the background to the current debate.

IN OPPOSITION, Labour had a shadow Disabled People's Rights Cabinet Minister — Tom Clarke, with a deputy and MPs (including even Alan Howarth) fighting for the cause. In government there are two Ministers for Disabled People's Rights — Andrew Smith and Alan Howarth — but neither is in the Cabinet and both have other responsibilities.

We made progress through the EU Amsterdam Treaty: improvements in access to work, helping disabled people meet extra costs of working and £195m over four years. Disabled people do want to work in open employment when they can. Any help to do so is welcome. But no programme of work creation justifies withdrawal or reduction of benefits. While Smith and Howarth welcomed the Chancellor's money on principle, Harman and Field at Social Security emphasised the cost of our benefits. The Maastricht criteria went ahead with the misnamed *Benefits Integrity Project*. A DSS study — based on a small quota and carried out by junior and inexperienced staff — guessed that up to 13% of those claiming Disability Living Allowance (DLA) were not properly eligible. This has resulted in the selective requirement for those on DLA in the greatest need effectively to requalify even when they have been awarded benefit for life.

Early evidence in the press and from DSS figures suggests many people are having their benefit cut or even withdrawn altogether. Many of these people have had awards reinstated after a review but in the meantime went short and lost other benefits. There was even the case of a child (supposedly exempt) who lost every penny and died days later.

In mid-November, in parallel with the attacks on single parents, the issue of cuts in disability benefits hit the headlines with the Comprehensive Spending Review. While no one knows exactly what is under consideration — and no consultation has begun — the very support and trust of disabled people that helped Labour so much on May 1st is at risk. There are seven million disabled people across Britain, all potential Labour voters.

Taxation, means-testing or replacement by social services and limiting backdating all seem to be under consideration. Localisation is another buzzword to learn. It means abolishing the care component of DLA and scrapping Attendance Allowance (AA) and providing services through local authorities. This would threaten independent living and a 1997 court case decided that councils could refuse people help because of budget problems. The benefit provides a degree of independence but at a top rate of £49.50, per week, represents care on the cheap. Taxing or means-testing DLA is also being considered.

Disabled people have extra needs whether in or out of work. While disabled people accept that like anyone else they lose their Income Support or Incapacity Benefit if they take up work, they need DLA. The huge stigma and hatred of means-testing, particularly among older people, affects benefit take-up. The extra weekly money maintains independence and reduces demand on NHS and social services. For those disabled people who are working it is often help with mobility costs that makes employment possible. Adverse changes might mean people losing their Motability cars, forcing them to give up work and also adversely affecting the motor industry. These allowances are not intended to replace earnings, they cover the extra costs of disability and level the playing field between disabled and non-disabled people.

Incapacity Benefit is already a cut, having replaced Invalidity Benefit. Now the Government is considering paying it for only 13 or 26 weeks. The Government wants more money for education and health but has promised not to increase income tax and not to increase overall public spending for two years. So the money has to be found elsewhere. But the Government should remember another of its promises: "comprehensive and enforceable civil rights". Those rights cannot be comprehensive without the means to exercise them.

If we are to get less, who gets more? I remember a story from the thirties. A woman addressed a meeting in Glasgow about coping with your money and how to make a nourishing soup with fish-heads. Up stood Willie Gallagher, the Red Clydesider MP. "I have one question", he says, "while we are eating fish heads, who gets the fish?"

Much confusion arises in this debate because of the interplay of concepts of disability and illness. Spin doctors — just like Lilley and Major — ask how can the bill be rising when Britain is getting healthier? One answer is that we are living longer and more older people mean more disabled people. But the issue needs understanding at another level. Disabled people are not ill. In straightforward terms it is stairs in silly places, not a mobility impairment, that stops a wheelchair user getting into meetings. A disabled person is an individual in his or her own right, placed in a disabling situation, brought about by environmental, economic and social barriers that the person, because of his or her impairment(s), cannot overcome in the same way as other citizens.

- Action: pass resolutions in your Party and union branches. Send donations to LPDMG. Join LPDMG — individual party members can join whether disabled or not (though only disabled people may vote). Write to LPDMG, 12 Edensor Square, Parliament Street, Derby, DE22 3RQ.

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be a plastic dome instead of a modern welfare state.

- Professor Oliver is an internationally recognised academic and political commentator, having participated in several major policy reviews in education, health and social services and published numerous books and articles on disability and other social policy issues over the last twenty years. He is also a political activist and his most recent book, co-written with Jane Campbell, is on the history and significance of the disability movement.

Labour v New Labour

The debate on New Labour's cuts to lone parent benefit on 10th December was the most dramatic episode so far in the life of the new Government. *LLB* presents a selection of highs and low from the tempestuous evening in the Commons.

Jim Murphy: Before being elected to the House, for more than two years, I was on benefit. Those two years were among the most depressing in my life. I was not seeking a benefit increase; I needed a job. Fortunately, I got that job opportunity. I went on to further education college and university, and then to beat the Conservative candidate in what had formerly been the safest Tory seat in Scotland. Is that not a great example of welfare into work as practised in Scotland?

Gordon Prentice: Every time that I hear the Minister try to persuade the world outside, it is as though we live in a parallel dimension in the House—as though we do not connect with what people outside are thinking. They think that we are wrong...There are 3,100 one-parent families in my constituency, many of whom are working and many of whom are living in deep poverty...The reality is that in Lancashire, one third of all people who are entitled to family credit do not take it up, for whatever reason. They may be in isolated workplaces, or there may be a non-unionised workforce. Thousands of people could be lifted out of poverty by claiming family credit, but they do not do so. They depend on the non-means-tested benefits—the child benefit for lone parents, which is being snatched away from them...

Patricia Hewitt: We did not promise to reverse the cut that the previous government made in lone-parent benefit. [Hon. Members: "Yes, you did."] Opposition Members should consult our manifesto. We did not promise to reverse all the cuts that the Conservatives made; for instance, the cuts in the living standards of millions of elderly people in this country.

Ken Livingstone: It sounds too much like a used car salesman drawing attention to the small print to continue making generalisations about inheriting the Tories' spending limits. Certainly none of the single parents in my constituency would have paid £5 for the Labour manifesto and read the small print and the get-out clauses...Rather than turning on single parents, when will the Labour Government start taking on people who are bigger and more powerful than themselves?

Lynne Jones: Does my hon. Friend recall that we were elected with the slogans "New Labour, New Britain" and "Things can only get better"? We were not elected on the slogan, "Things can only get better, except for lone parents". I accept that we may not be able to put everything right overnight, but surely we should not penalise the very poorest in society before we make things better for them.

Lorna Fitzsimons: People like me will pass through the Government Lobby tonight, because we believe that this is a short-term measure that will reap long-term gain by creating a modern economy and liberating from poverty all the children and single parents whom I represent...Although £5 on benefit will buy things for the family, in the long term it will not alleviate the poverty trap in which many of my constituents are caught...

Frank Cook: Too much sloppy logic is being applied in an attempt to justify measures that are unwarranted, and, indeed, were previously condemned by senior members of the Parliamentary Labour Party...As I have said, there are ten people seeking every job. One must assume from their actions that the Government are prepared to take that gamble — to gamble on the flawless implementation of their New Deal programme in all areas, and to gamble on there being no downturn in economic growth.

Alice Mahon: The effects of the Bill, if it goes through tonight, coupled with the cuts that went through in November, mean that hard choices will be imposed on some of the poorest people in the country and their children, all because that is what a Labour government—the first Labour government in 18 years—have decided will happen. These are the most disadvantaged families and children in our extremely affluent society. We should not kid ourselves about how those people are managing now—they are living on the margins of society, only just surviving. I am sure that someone will correct me if I am wrong, but I think that it was RH Tawney who described poverty as "someone standing up to their neck in water and a slight wave could drown them". The cuts represent a tidal wave for lone parents...

Will the New Deal eventually become compulsory? If so, it is a piece of social engineering of which Stalin would have been proud...It defies common sense and decency to support the cuts. I simply do not know why we are making them. I do not know what I am missing. There must be another agenda at work, because I am now receiving letters from people who are fearful about losing disability benefit. We are now reading about the benefits integrity project. It appears to be a hit squad, whose remit is to harass claimants and put them off claiming disability benefit. But disabled people and lone parents voted for us in their thousands on 1st May...There is something rather punitive and cruel about the cuts, and something rather arrogant. Of course they will be approved with the support of the Tories, but they will not go through with mine.

What the papers said

"It is one of those quaint parliamentary conventions that a minister stands at the door of the lobby during a vote thanking MPs for supporting his legislation. Labour MPs emerged to find Mr. Lilley at the door compounding their agony by proffering congratulations for putting his cuts into law." **— Andrew Rawnsley, *Observer*.**

"The spectacle of Labour and Conservatives voting together to cut lone parents' benefit revealed the contours of the new political geography precisely; the Tories were less like an opposition than the junior partner in a national unity government - of the right." **— Jonathan Freedland, *Guardian*.**

"The Government has spent more money on receptions and official hospitality than it will save over the coming year from last night's vote to cut benefit to single mothers, according to Whitehall figures." **— *Daily Telegraph*.**

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Feminism vs. New Labour

Councillor Liz Davies, chair of Islington's Women's Committee, examines the background to the disappointing performance of Labour's new women MPs.

WHEN 101 women were elected as Labour MPs last May, many commentators argued that their presence in Westminster would lead to a feminised, softer, more caring politics.

Yet of the 47 Labour MPs who defied the Government Whip to vote against the cut in lone parent benefit, only eight were women. Only one, Ann Cryer, was a newly elected woman MP. 93 Labour women MPs voted to cut lone parent benefit or abstained. In one night, high hopes that the mere presence of more women in the House of Commons might lead to greater rights for women and respect for their needs were dashed.

The new women Labour MPs did not arrive in the House of Commons by chance. The Labour Party's decision to have all-women shortlists for half of the vacant safe or marginal seats was the result of years of campaigning by Labour women, organised through local women's sections, regional and national conferences and trade union bodies. From the early 1980s, the women's organisation within the Party demanded the right to have its voice heard within the Party's broader structures. Feminists in the women's organisation argued for the five women's seats on the National Executive Committee to be directly elected by the Women's Conference, which should also be able to put motions directly to Labour Party Conference. They also demanded more women in Parliament.

During the early 1990s, there were a number of attempts to increase women's representation in Westminster and the Party, such as one woman on every shortlist (which resulted in one woman and several men, on every shortlist) or quotas for Party positions. None of these policies made any discernible difference to the number of women candidates being selected. The policy of all-women shortlists in half the vacant safe or marginal seats was eventually accepted by the women's organisation, at the cost of abandoning its original demands for women representatives to be accountable to the women's organisation. The effectiveness of the women's organisation itself diminished as policy-making conferences began to be held every two years rather than annually, and in recent years were frequently cancelled altogether.

Why did the election of the 101 Labour women raise such expectations in the Party and in the country as a whole? On one level, it is clearly absurd to think that just because someone is a woman, she is likely to stand for women's interests. Margaret Thatcher disproved that long ago. On the other hand, many of the women who put themselves forward for selection did emphasise their feminist credentials. The introduction of all-women shortlists coincided with a readiness to begin listening to women's voices, to take



seriously issues such as women's reproductive rights, child-care, domestic violence and low pay. The arguments of the women's organisation in the Party, and other feminist groups outside the Party, were winning acceptance.

However, all this coincided with the rise of the Blairites and their imposition of political conformity on the Party by measures overt and covert. Many of the women selected as Labour candidates emphasised not only their feminist credentials, but also their loyalty to the leadership, whose support was critical in many cases in winning selection. On 10th December 1997, the new Labour women MPs faced a conflict between their feminist arguments and their loyalty to the leadership and most placed leadership loyalty — and their own aspirations for career advancement — over the interests of women.

The media's interest in the new Labour women MPs has focused on their clothes, hair-style and their treatment by male MPs. Sadly, several women MPs have been happy to go along with this trivialisation (Caroline Flint modelling clothes for *Vogue*, Lorna Fitzsimons giving interviews about sex), providing fodder for the media's current craze for the "new feminism". This, the media tells us, is all about job opportunities for middle-class professional career women, along with a reassertion of feminine glamour and mystique. Camille Paglia hails Diana Spencer and Madonna as feminist icons. Individual opportunities are all; sisterhood and solidarity mean nothing.

The media ignore the real, vital and forward-looking feminism of the huge numbers of ordinary women working on the ground to improve the lives of women collectively. For single mothers, women pensioners, low-paid and part-time women workers and young women finding their way in the labour market, the classic feminist agenda of economic and social equality, individual freedom and collective responsibility for welfare are far from "outdated".

The Government's unfolding attack on the welfare state will hit women hard. Means-testing, as well as outright cuts in the level of benefits, and the pressure to enter the workforce on the most disadvantageous terms, will exacerbate women's poverty and economic inequality. A Labour Government that really wants to improve job opportunities for women would offer well-funded, good quality child-care, create new, decently-paid jobs, strengthen workplace rights, and respect any single parent who chose to devote their time to bringing up children rather than working. This is the message our Labour women MPs should be sending the Government.

- The eight women MPs who voted against the cut in lone-parent benefit: Diane Abbott, Ann Clwyd, Ann Cryer, Gwyneth Dunwoody, Maria Fyfe, Lynne Jones, Alice Mahon, Audrey Wise.

Back to the Poor Law?

Bob Spooner, Leeds North East CLP, exposes the inspiration behind Blair's benefit reforms.

I WAS five when my father lost his job in 1929 and I learned to hate the Tory philosophy that branded the "dole" as shameful. I joined the Labour Party because of its vision of a society in which everyone had rights to food, clothing, housing and medical care. The weakest members of society would no longer go to the wall or be regarded as inferior. The Attlee Government got rid of state charity and I was proud that those without work collected their benefits, with as much right to them as to their pay packets or to fire or burglary pay-outs from the Pru.

The middle-class pseudo-intellectuals around Blair are determined to restore the Tory brand to all social benefits, because although their subservience to the rich is tinged with admiration, they resent and fear the poor, who threaten their peace of mind and, they think, cause their taxes to rise. The phrases "welfare to work" and "a hand-up not a hand-out" carry the insulting implication that lone parents and disabled people are workshy and that a mixture of carrot and stick will make them "get off their beds" and take jobs, which they now refuse only because they are "part of a dependency culture" (Blair-speak for scroungers). The fact that Harman believes she knows better than lone parents and disabled people what is in their best interest shows she has not only taken over the Tories' policies but has embraced their philosophy as well.

Of course the poverty trap acts as a disincentive to work but it is low wages not high benefits that produce it. Spending money on childcare facilities and making it easier for a few disabled people to get jobs has nothing to do with fixing an appropriate level of benefit for those who still need it. The inspiration for these proposals is the 1832 Poor Law, which insisted that any help given to the poor had to be "less eligible" than the worst conditions endured by those in work.

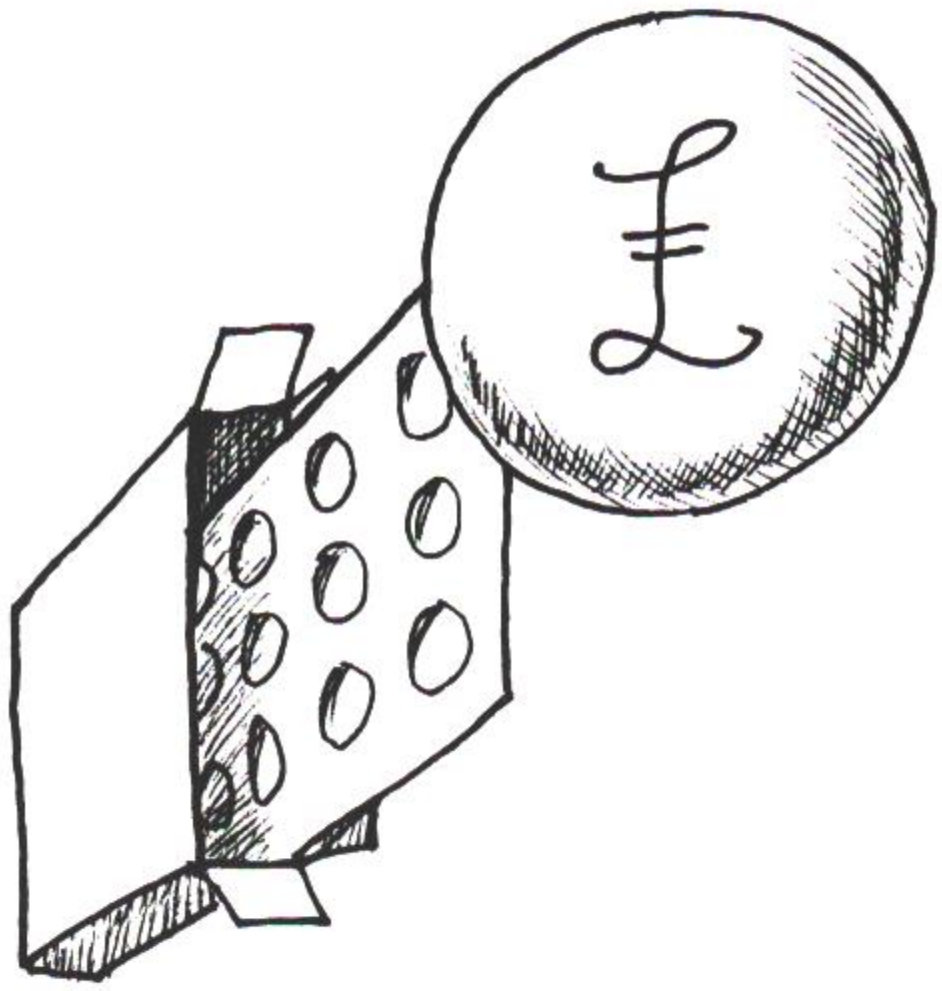
It led directly to the workhouse and now leads to workhouse conditions in bed and breakfast accommodation or lone parent hostels. Of course lone mothers tell Harman they would prefer a good job to inadequate benefit. When she quotes this sentiment to justify reducing the benefits of those who don't find suitable jobs, she reveals how far she has sacrificed her humanity to the table talk of the coterie that dominates Blair's thieves' kitchen.

Blair aims to scrap universal benefits and introduce means-testing instead. Nothing in his education or experience will have taught him how odious this is. It always demeans, is bureaucratic and turns social welfare officers into tyrants; it takes away rights and substitutes the slur of charity. For Blair to seek to restore it beggars belief.

A bitter pill to swallow

Leonora Lloyd, National Abortion Campaign, looks at suggestions that New Labour will charge for the pill.

EVERY £1 spent on contraception saves the taxpayer £4. So why is the Government proposing to charge for the Pill? If this goes ahead, despite the record number of women MPs, it will prove what socialist feminists have always said — politics is more important than gender.



We should be increasing access to free contraception, not restricting it. While women MPs may be able to afford over £6 a month for their supplies, many women cannot, and we have seen with recent Pill scares what happens when women stop using contraception suddenly. The abortion and birth rates shoot up.

But it is not just important for women's ability to control their lives — it makes economic sense as well. Every unwanted pregnancy is expensive for society, whether it ends in an abortion or an unwelcome child. Half of all terminations are on the NHS, where the more expensive methods tend to be used, costing probably around £200-£400, depending on the stage of pregnancy. And full-term pregnancies cost even more.

Quite rightly, pregnant women are entitled to all sorts of benefits, from paid time off work to maternity allowances, free prescriptions and health care, maternity leave and so on, not to mention the costs of the birth itself to the NHS. This is fine if it is a wanted pregnancy, but unwanted pregnancies then lead on to other costs — arranging for adoption or fostering if the mother does not want to keep her child, or for social services and long-term costs to society if she is unable to meet the child's emotional and physical needs.

Of course it is not just women who are affected, nor even just heterosexual men. At the moment, all forms of contraception are free from Family Planning clinics but if the Pill is to be charged for, no doubt other forms of contraception, for example condoms, will soon follow the same path. Then the costs will not just be seen in unwanted pregnancies.

There is still time for the Government to reconsider. The pro-choice, family planning and AIDS lobbies must tell them of the costs to us all if this incredibly stupid proposal is not dropped without delay.

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Welfare roadshow in cul-de-sac

Carol Turner, National Co-ordinator of the Campaign to Defend the Welfare State, reports on Tony Blair's welfare roadshow campaign against universal benefits.

THE WELFARE roadshow launched on 15th January at Dudley Town Hall is tapping into the deficiencies there undoubtedly are in the welfare state, not in order to mobilise public opinion to improve it, but to run it down. In his opening speech, Tony Blair claimed that Britain was split into 'one nation trapped on benefits, the other paying for them.'

The Department of Social Security has produced Welfare Reform Focus Files, a series of documents which are intended as the basis for a Green Paper. A committee of senior government ministers has been set up, chaired by Tony Blair, which includes Gordon Brown, Harriet Harman, Frank Field, Frank Dobson, David Blunkett and Hilary Armstrong. However, the Government has indicated it will not be publishing any detailed proposals until after the case for restructuring is accepted.

This approach mirrors New Labour's campaign against Clause IV, as Blair pointed out in his Dudley speech. Indeed, the Clause IV roadshow was also launched from the same venue in 1995. Also like Clause IV, the audiences were carefully selected and media presentation tightly controlled. Party members in Birmingham have reported that while invitations to the event were received two weeks in advance, the venue was only made known to them on the eve of the meeting.

January 15th marks a change in New Labour's approach to the restructuring of the welfare state. Up till now, attacks have been targeted at specific benefits — the cut in lone parent benefit, the proposal to means-test or tax disability benefits, the withdrawal of maternity allowance, and so on. But with the possibility of mobilising very broad opposition on an issue by issue basis — as the Save Lone Parent Benefit campaign demonstrated — New Labour changed tack.

The roadshow represents an assault on the cornerstone of the post-war welfare state — universal provision of benefits and services, based on the principle of social insurance and paid for out of taxation. This is not, of course, to suggest that attacks on particular benefits won't continue to take place. They will. The DSS focus files, for example, while stating "society has a responsibility to help people in genuine need, who are unable to look after themselves", emphasise that "individuals have a responsibility to provide for themselves". This is reminiscent of the USA where security against unemployment, ill health and old age resides in the private domain; the responsibility of the individual and welfare benefits are vestigial, a safety net only for the very poorest in society.

Harriet Harman's recent proposal of an "affluence test" is part of this. The proposal that those above a certain income level should lose entitlement to child benefit, maternity allowances and even a pension is a proposal to means-test benefits which are universal at present. The approach of Harriet Harman and Frank Field to the welfare review has been summed up by some observers as, "cut what you can and privatise what you can't".

New Labour continues to repeat the claim that Britain cannot afford the welfare state as one of the chief arguments for restructuring. However as Anatole Kaletsky pointed out in *The Times* of 16th January, "The first point to note about the campaign to reform the welfare state that Tony Blair launched with his speech in Birmingham last night is that it is not necessary ... the idea that welfare cuts are driven by the forces of demography and the iron laws of financial necessity is simply false."

The truth is that Britain is at the bottom of the welfare spending league of industrially developed countries. Furthermore, Britain's welfare spending is declining measured as a proportion of gross domestic product. By the end of the 1980s, Britain had slipped to 17th out of 21 OECD countries, higher only than Portugal among West European countries.

Nonetheless, the fact that high-earners are eligible for disability benefits, child benefit or maternity allowance is increasingly used as an argument for cutting and/or means-testing these benefits. This is nonsense. As Lynne Jones MP and others have pointed out, why should well-off lone parents, pregnant women or disabled people be singled out for attack when others in the same income bracket are left untouched? Benefits reflect the additional costs incurred by people in these categories.

The only equitable and sensible method of dealing with such circumstances is through taxation of the highest earners and lifting the ceiling on national insurance contributions — not cutting benefits.

Defence of universal benefits and the need for progressive taxation will be themes of the eve-of-budget Lobby of Parliament organised by the Campaign to Defend the Welfare State (CDWS) on Monday 16th March.

- For further details of the Campaign and the lobby of Parliament or for speakers, please contact CDWS, PO Box 188, London SW1A OSG.

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Why New Labour

What we are going to do

By Hugh Kerr, Independent Labour MEP for Essex West and Hertfordshire East.

WHEN WE wrote our critical article on the Labour Government in the *Observer* on 28th December 1997, we knew that the Millbank machine was likely to take rapid action against us. However, they excelled themselves by expelling us three times in a week. Firstly, from the European Parliamentary Labour Party on the Tuesday, secondly from the Socialist Group in the European Parliament on Wednesday and by fax (very New Labour!) from the Labour Party on Thursday.

Naturally we were not given the right to state our case nor is there any right of appeal. Their pretext was that we had joined the Green Group in the European Parliament. We hadn't but merely lodged our resources for our staff and communication budget with the Green Group in the Parliament.

We asked to stay on as Independent Labour MEPs in the Socialist Group but this was refused. So here we are expelled from the Labour Party which I joined in 1959 at the age of 15, and Ken Coates joined in 1956 (unlike Tony Blair who joined age 27 as a career move when he joined Derry Irvine's Chambers). Are we sad? Of course! Sad to be kicked out of a party hijacked by Blair and his New Labour ragbag of ex-Tories, SDPers and British Intelligence spooks.

On the other hand we are happy that we can now get on with some real work of building the resistance to the Blair regime outside the Labour Party, unconstrained by the need to defend the Labour Government.

Ken Coates has joined the United Left

Sympathise — but don't leave the Party

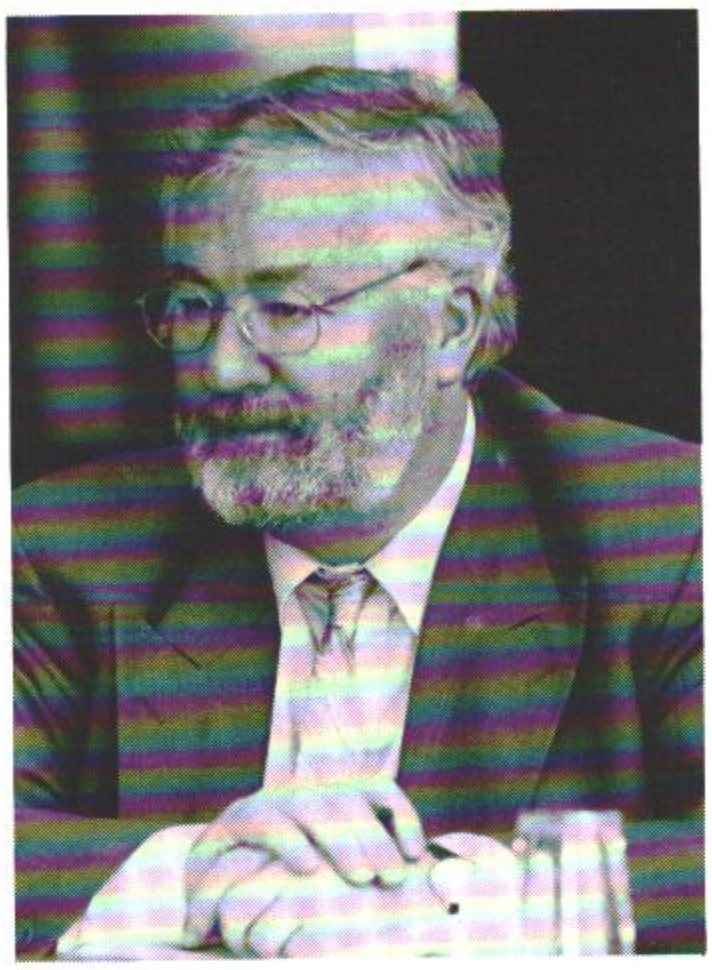
Following the expulsion of MEPs Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr, Tony Dale, Manchester Central CLP, suggests there should be sympathy for their actions.

SOON AFTER the Clause IV debate the Blair leadership began plotting to unseat many of the Euro MPs who publicly opposed plans to get rid of the old clause. The opposition of many MEPs to the Government's benefit cuts has reinforced the leadership's determination to chop them by foul means or fair.

Ordinary Party members and local Party organisations will have little real input into the important decisions on Labour's slates for the elections. The next Euro elections will be fought on a Proportional Representation system. The Labour leadership have used this to bring in a "closed list" PR system, giving maximum control to Party headquarters and minimising the electorate's choices.

Many forms of PR could have allowed greater options, giving voters a choice between a Eurosceptic or Clarke/Heseltine Tory or a left wing or Blairite Labour candidate. Under the "closed list" system the candidates and more importantly their order will be decided by the Party machines. The leadership may let some left-wingers stand but will place them at the bottom of the list — tokenism as Labour candidates outside the first three or four places will stand no chance of election.

During the second reading of the Euro-PR bill Jack Straw, under pressure, promised to reconsider the closed list system — he has now gone back on this promise. At the time MEPs who voiced dissatisfaction with this form of PR faced suspension and came close to more serious disciplinary action. The



Hugh Kerr MEP

undemocratic and over-centralised control of the lists raises serious doubts whether it will be legitimate to describe the Labour candidates in the elections as the political representatives of the broader labour movement — if not, the movement owes them little loyalty.

Any serious campaign by independent Labour/left candidates depends on their challenge being understood by the broader electorate. Benefit cuts and the future of the welfare state will give Coates and Kerr a clear political message to explain to the electorate why they are standing independently of Labour.

Some comrades may have legitimate criticism of Kerr and Coates' tactics. However we should not let secondary disagreements cloud the main issue — the responsibility for this regrettable split rests squarely with the Blair leadership. Even in expelling the two MEPs, Party officials have displayed their trademark arrogance by totally disregarding disciplinary procedures.

Many Party members will fully understand if they decide to stand as independent Labour candidates. Many Party members are likely to vote for them in the elections. However this should not lead left-wing Party activists to decide to leave the Party. We are entering a period of sharper conflict inside the Party between the leadership and the left-wing. There is widespread disquiet and opposition within the Party to many of the Government's policies. The moves to ban dissent within the Party and centralise power are advanced but they are not final. The fight inside the Party is not over.

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kicked us out!

Group in the Parliament and I will be joining the Green Group and we will sit as Independent Labour members in these groups. More importantly in the UK we will use our base and our budget to campaign with the trade unions, the unemployed, the disabled and the poor in a challenge to Blair's welfare attacks.

We will be commissioning academics and think tanks to research, compare and contrast the European experiences and how we can reform welfare for the better in Britain — not hack it to death as Blair plans. In this we do have the benefit of some knowledge. I have taught, researched and written about social welfare for 30 years and jointly founded *Critical Social Policy*, the socialist social policy magazine. Ken Coates is the author of the best selling book on Poverty, the *Forgotten Englishman* and is Special Professor at Nottingham University. We have challenged Tony Blair to debate with us regarding his welfare reform proposals.

We will also be continuing our consultation as to whether we should support alternative candidates in the European, Scottish and Welsh elections in 1999. Proportional representation will give the left for the first time a chance of genuine independent electoral representation. I know that *LLB* believes in staying in the Party and I respect that decision. I believe the introduction of PR will mean that New Labour will have to look over its left shoulder as well as its right — this will help the left in the Labour Party.

I know that Ken and I will be working with you on the ground in campaigns and meetings. Whatever happens, we hope that the left inside and outside the Party will continue to have good relationships. Who knows, when Blair forms his government of National Unity — perhaps we will be able to expel him from the Labour Party and we can all rejoin!

I stand by my manifesto commitments

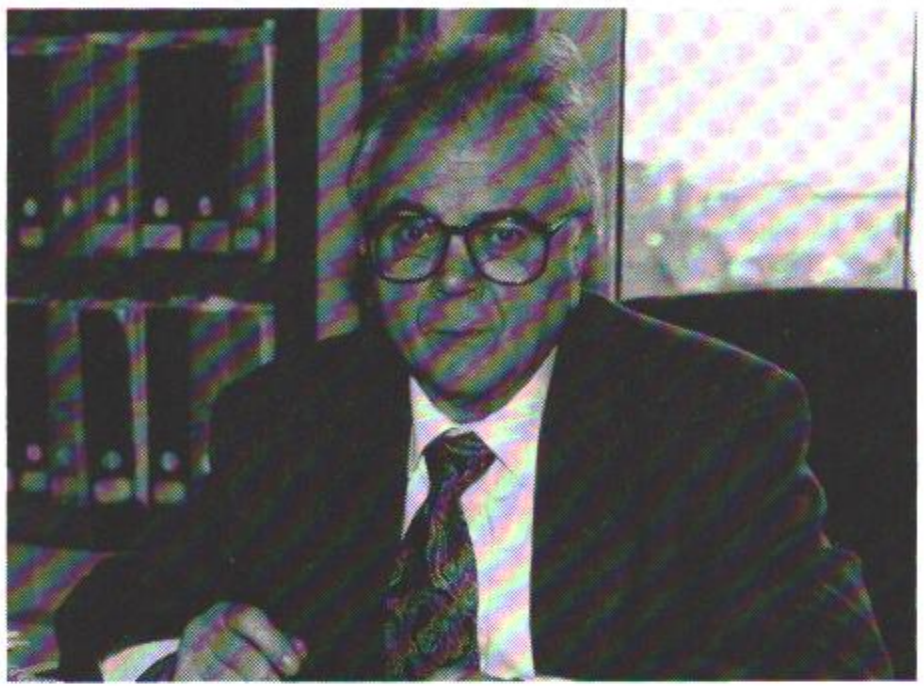
Ken Coates MEP outlines his future intentions.

IN 1994 I was re-elected to the European Parliament by the voters of the North Nottinghamshire and Chesterfield constituency. At that time the Labour Party manifesto, *Make Europe Work for You*, was drafted in the spirit of the Party leader, John Smith. Unfortunately, John Smith died during this campaign and Party policy subsequently underwent a dramatic transformation.

The manifesto pledged newly-elected MEPs to pursue a co-ordinated policy to promote investment, growth and employment. Following proposals in my own pamphlet, *For a European Recovery Programme*, it promised to work for the creation of a European recovery fund to generate new jobs. Further, it promised "the effective application of regulations in all countries in order to ensure that industry is not disadvantaged by unfair competition."

My constituency has very high unemployment caused mainly, but not entirely, by the closure of coal mines in a veritable purge of the industry following the miners' strike. The people endure all the pains of mass unemployment, poverty, indebtedness and loss of hope. The increasingly frail fabric of the welfare state is all that many can rely on for survival.

The reversal of Labour Party policies has brought no alleviation of misery. In some ways the pain has actually been intensified. Cuts in welfare spending have so far fallen on the poor and resources for redevelopment have not been forthcoming. In Europe, the Government has opposed some of the key commitments of left-wing governments and parties, to create jobs and restore social cohesion. This evolution has caused great distress to many Party members, myself included.



Ken Coates MEP

Following the latest reductions in single parent benefit and the renewed assault on invalidity and other payments, I find myself excluded from the Labour Party in England, the European Parliamentary Labour Party, and the Socialist Group in the European Parliament.

Naturally, I am very sad to be separated from old companions and friends. I have spent more than forty years in the Labour Party and have not sought any other political home. I have many friends in the Socialist Group and am indebted to them for allowing me to try to translate Labour's 1994 manifesto into an agreement of the whole European Parliament, in 1994 and 1995 reports. I am profoundly grateful for the support given to the initiative which I and others undertook, the first European Convention for Full Employment. Almost 1000 people, many themselves unemployed, participated in a remarkable exchange of experience and ideas. This work established close and harmonious working relations between three of the major left-wing European Parliament groupings: the Socialists, the Confederal Left and the Greens. It strengthened my conviction that democracy in 21st century Europe will depend on the growing together of these forces, to expand the social dimension, and uphold human rights. I shall continue to work for closer co-operation and convergence between these currents of thought.

I am not allowed to sit in the Socialist Group without the express permission of Tony Blair. I shall sit adjacent to my Socialist comrades, in the Confederal Left group, which has offered me sympathy, moral support, and hospitality. Both Hugh Kerr and I will sit as Independent Labour members, and continue to work together on British issues, most notably, the defence of the welfare state.

Good policies, bad tactics

Alistair Ward sees the expulsions of Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates as a setback for the left on a number of levels.

NEW LABOUR is using a closed PR list system to stitch up the selection of Labour MEPs who have been vulnerable since they magnificently opposed Blair's ditching of Clause IV.

Nearly every *LLB* reader will sympathise with the frustration that Hugh and Ken have endured recently. Everything they say about New Labour is right. But politics is about timing and strategy.

Even though the Labour hierarchy is seen to have prejudged their cases, it is next to impossible to garner sympathy against the expulsions when most Party members will see their intention to stand against Labour candidates as incriminating. Many will feel Hugh and Ken consciously walked into a trap set for them. There is a layer of Party members who support a broad church and oppose witch-hunts. But they balk at defending those who stand or threaten to stand against the Party, and neither MEP appears to have any real support for their move within their ECLP. This puts Labour left comrades on the back foot when seeking to argue that Hugh and Ken's political objections to New Labour's course are correct.

Most importantly, the declaration that the comrades would stand against Labour cuts across developments in the Party. As the Government moves to the right the Party is moving, admittedly all too slowly, to the left. We must not get impatient. It's easy to get mad but we need to get even. We must not accept that Blair is invincible within the Labour Party. We have just witnessed a major parliamentary rebellion on cuts to lone parent benefits. The main debate in society is now between New Labour and the Labour left, with outside forces to right and left of the Party lining up accordingly.

Massive battles loom on the horizon. The conflict is bound to reach a crunch before the next General Election. Blair's *Partnership In Power* changes have forced a wide section from the Party's centre-left to hard-left to begin to work together.

A united slate of candidates for this year's NEC elections is for the first time a possibility. After over a decade of defeats, something new is happening. An alliance of those who fundamentally oppose Labour's leadership is developing. Of course this is the result of devastating defeats but while New Labour controls the apparatus of the Party, the mass of the Party and unions, while too timid and disorganised yet to rebel, do not agree with their politics. Many were so desperate to remove the Tories that they have voted within the Party for things that they disagreed with. Many beyond the ranks of the hard left are horrified at the reality of "governing as New Labour". Yet Hugh and Ken argue the divide is elsewhere. The immediate task for socialist MPs and MEPs is to focus, and dare I say it, actively help organise the resistance of all those who oppose Blair in the Labour Party.

As the Government moves to attack the welfare state a central arena for focusing opposition will be within the Labour Party at all levels — and possibly even within Council chambers. As MEPs or just plain Party members, Hugh and Ken would have been in a powerful position to help build a Labour left revival. We've hardly even started to try to organise the Labour opposition to Blair.

Of course the key component missing from all our equations is the existence of any meaningful trade union resistance. I cannot see any way in which this episode will help us on this score.

Could these events assist the establishment of a socialist alternative to New Labour as some comrades hope? I think not. Ken and Hugh's alternative political trajectories (one to the Confederal Left, one to the Greens/Scottish Socialist Alliance) since their expulsion offer little coherence and example to comrades seeking a new framework for socialist activity. This is because they have acted as individuals. There cannot be a big bang if all your powder has been spent. This event is part of a fragmentation of our forces not a reassembly. Sadly the shards of socialist crystal will be hoovered up into the cleaner bag of history.

Our task now is to work with those who believe that Labour's core values are the redistribution of wealth and the maintenance and extension of a meaningful welfare state and can be encouraged to fight for those principles. We admire your sentiments, comrades, but cannot condone your tactics.

Why Ken Coates had to go

By Mandy Moore, Vice-Chair, North Nottinghamshire & Chesterfield ECLP:

THIS European Constituency Labour Party has condemned the actions of its MEP Ken Coates, supporting his expulsion from the Party — surprising for a left wing constituency. Our October GC unanimously supported Ken's view that the PR system proposed by the Government was wrong. But neither then nor later did Ken tell us about his decision not to agree to the new code of conduct.

At the November meeting Ken was criticised for his tactics, about reports that he would not stand for election again, and especially about his total lack of consultation with his local Party. Asked explicitly to give an assurance that he would consult Party officers in advance if he was considering any important political action he refused.

Then in the December 28 *Observer*, Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr advocated standing "protest candidates" against the Party, saying that they were "consulting" Party members about this. The next day Ken sent members a letter and questionnaire telling us he wasn't going to stand for selection as a Labour candidate, and asking members to say if they thought "protest candidates" should stand against Labour in the coming elections.

An emergency EC and GC followed to call Ken to account. Before Christmas, he and Hugh Kerr had told the President of the European Parliament they were leaving the European Socialist Group, joining the Green Group with immediate effect. Ken also wrote to Pauline Green asking to sit in the Socialist Group as an "Independent Labour member".

Ken has deprived us of our Labour MEP. We won't tolerate a member who shows total contempt for his local Party, not informing let alone consulting us on matters of fundamental importance. We are also not prepared to have a local elected representative of the Party poaching Party members, and calling in the local press for voters not to vote Labour.

The party's over

David Taylor, ex-Secretary Berkshire Area Socialist Labour Party, attended its second Congress as a delegate. Here he argues that this particular episode in regroupment has run its course.

THE SECOND Congress of the SLP, widely trailed as make-or-break for the fledgling party, was deferred several times and eventually took place in the middle of the pantomime season, which turned out to be quite apt. Hopes the SLP could become more than "Arthur's Party" were dashed and the party cannot now play the leading role in political regroupment to the left of Labour. The attendance of around 250 was half that of the first conference and by the end of the first session many of these had had enough and left the hall for good.

Party membership figures were given as 2,200. Due to the SLP's pretend "big party" constitution only those members contained in a constituency party were eligible for a vote at congress; this left 1,200 members disenfranchised. The others had formed or been dragooned into 180 constituency SLPs of which 114 had sent delegates representing 600 members.

Motions to Congress were voted on by a show of hands and when some looked close, card votes were called for. Frank Cave, chairing, intoned the results of these card votes just before the lunch break and an audible gasp of disbelief echoed around the hall. For the motion — 384; against — 3,317! It quickly transpired that a single organisation held a card vote of 3,000 votes, over 75% of those available. This led one delegate to ask the holder of this card to step forward and save conference an awful lot of time by stating his voting intentions on the rest of the agenda.

In the afternoon the 75% card was used to support a motion dissolving the party's black sections. This was too much for some and a string of candidates for the NEC declared that, if elected, they would not take up their seats. These included former General Secretary Pat Sikorski, Carolyn Sikorski, Brian Heron and Imran Khan. At this point the SLP was effectively dead in the water. Overnight negotiations led these people to climb aboard again, with the black sections decision apparently intact.



PHOTO: PAUL MATTSSON

Arthur Scargill at the SLP founding Conference, 4/5/96.

Half the active membership had been campaigning for an open and democratic SLP and a "Democratic Platform" slate for the NEC had considerable support. Some of its candidates would have been elected but for the fact that the 3,000 card vote came into play again. This block vote, held by the Lancs area NUM, was used not only in the trade union section but, incredibly, in the constituency section as well — a feat even Labour Party bureaucrats never aspired to.

The second day opened with less than 50 which swelled to 150 by the close, as many who had already decided to leave drifted in. The low numbers highlighted a nasty side to the SLP as a number of grim men ranted about the correctness of the regime in China and the old Soviet Union. Some even called for more expulsions from the depleted SLP. Arthur Scargill, facing a half-empty hall, shook his head at this, but he has saddled himself with these Stalinist throwbacks and shows no sign of ditching them.

As Labour moves even further to the right and disabled people throw red paint at the gates of Downing Street, the space for a new political formation becomes bigger and more obvious than ever. Most people who joined the SLP hoped that the party was a step towards a broad-based democratic regroupment. Hundreds of people have been re-activated and have been able to work together in a non-sectarian way.

Discussions between ex-SLP members, Labour left wingers, the SP (Militant), various green currents and others promise to continue this process. The Scottish Socialist Alliance has already blazed the trail of socialist regroupment and is to meet with the dissident Euro MPs. Arthur Scargill was right to call for a new mass party, although his SLP may prove to be only an episode in the fragmentation and reformation of British politics. Those of us leaving it are still determined to play a part in building a powerful movement to challenge Blair's neo-liberal consensus. ❑

For a broad-based inclusive movement

Former SLP General Election candidate Ian Driver adds: The second SLP Congress was disastrous, with Arthur Scargill now running one of the most undemocratic regimes ever seen in what purports to be a socialist organisation. Despite such shenanigans, I am still convinced that he was 100% correct to call for the regroupment of the left outside of New Labour.

We have a lot to learn from the SLP experience and the rest of the non-Labour left. These organisations suffer identical problems to those of the Labour Party, namely the exclusion of rank and file members from the decision-making process and the drive to silence dissent. But now the rumblings in New Labour, the organised opposition to Scargill (about a third of the SLP membership), the recent split in the Socialist Party and elsewhere all suggest that a growing number of socialists are disaffected with the traditional authoritarian organisations of the left.

In their place we should establish a democratic, broad-based, inclusive movement with a multiplicity of views, currents and tendencies which span the socialist agenda from left reformism to revolutionary socialism. A number of us have recently come together under the name of the Socialist Democracy Group, to look at ways of starting this process.

- For more information contact Ian Driver on 0171-701 8090.

Never mind the evidence

Mike Davies, vice-chair of suspended Leeds North-East CLP, gives *LLB* the side of the story the National Constitutional Committee refused to listen to when they expelled him.

LAST MONTH I was expelled from the Labour Party by an NCC panel which refused to let me present my defence. Not even allowing a defence to be put, rather than simply ignoring the evidence, seems a New Stalinist tactic.

The prosecution, led by David Gardner, Director of Development and Organisation, presented three hours of evidence. The majority had nothing to do with the charges against me. The panel Chair, Diane Hayter, refused my request to rule out irrelevant material, saying it should be challenged in detail as it was presented. She then refused to hear any such challenges on the grounds that the panel would, in its deliberations later, disregard irrelevant material.

The first part of my defence concerned the credibility of the paid officials giving evidence against me. I was able to demonstrate ballot rigging (eventually acknowledged by Walworth Road), rigging of a parliamentary selection and lying by officials. Once it became clear that I could indeed present hard evidence of consistent misconduct by paid officials, Ms Hayter decided that such material was inadmissible — in stark contrast to her happy acceptance of reams of defamatory irrelevancies from the prosecution.

In a court of law, prosecution evidence must be relevant and the defence has an absolute right to show the prosecution witnesses are liars. In a New Labour hearing you have no rights at all.

The three-person NCC panel included a GPMU member, despite the fact that several of the charges concerned GPMU attempts to make the CLP accept ineligible GC delegates, and misconduct by our GPMU parliamentary candidate.

There is now a tendency for national officials simply to declare members automatically expelled without any disciplinary process at all — and on the flimsiest of grounds. In Aberdeen, Steven Bruce was told he was no longer a member because he had declared he would vote tactically. In Hebden Bridge, councillors Michelle Mayers and Les Siddall were each declared automatically expelled from the Party for sitting on a parish council independently — despite this being a long-accepted practice. More famously, Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr have just been declared expelled without even a hearing.

Under Kinnock, anyone on the left was vulnerable to attack through an NCC controlled by the leader. Blair is dedicated to a new process by which you have no right to a defence — and, increasingly, no right even to a hearing. Remember, you don't need to be on the left to be under attack, being honest or democratic is quite enough.

People's London — or Tory mayor?

The campaign opposing New Labour's plans for a directly elected mayor has taken a significant step forward. Leonora Lloyd, a member of the Greater London Labour Party Executive, reports.

TRADE UNIONS, pensioners' groups, community and political organisations have come together to create a "People's London" campaign working for a democratic Greater London Authority and against a directly elected mayor. A steering committee has been set up to co-ordinate the campaign, an office is to be established and it is hoped to take on a full-time worker.

The campaign will work in direct opposition to the Government's plans up to the publication of the White Paper early in March, after which there will be a decision taken on its stance towards the referendum: whether to call for a vote against, abstention, a write-in or some other response. The fight will continue whatever the response to the referendum, concentrating on campaigning for our vision of a people's London: democratic, inclusive, and properly funded.

It is clear from the proposals floated during the parliamentary debate that New Labour has not listened to the responses to its consultation exercise. It has ignored the debates within London's labour movement. Most of the powers of the new body will come from local authorities, rather than from government, leading to greater rather than less centralisation. The Greater London Authority is seen as advising and overseeing the directly elected mayor, rather than initiating and carrying out policies.

The many quangos that exist in London will be left alone or replaced by others appointed by the mayor, who will have unprecedented powers of patronage. Even some existing democratic bodies, like that which runs the fire service, are to be replaced by unelected bodies run by the mayor. The Government has also given up on any idea of gender equality on the authority, as it has in Scotland and Wales, citing spurious legal problems. Within the London Labour Party, opposition is not being allowed to be heard.

The annual conference, due to be held in February, has been postponed until after the referendum is safely out of the way. Regional Secretary Terry Ashton wrote to affiliates saying that he had taken this decision because the original venue was too small. However, when it was pointed out to him that he had no constitutional right to do this and that the new venue was actually available on the original date, he sent out new letters claiming that he had consulted with Party General Secretary Tom Sawyer, and that the reason was the need to concentrate on the forthcoming referendum and local elections. The truth is, of course, that there were resolutions from the Fire Brigade Union, MSF and others critical of the proposals.

Under the constitution, if 15 members of the Greater London Labour Party Executive call for a special meeting, then one must be held. However, Terry Ashton told one of those who did ask for such a meeting, that none would be held "even if the whole committee asks for it".

When such contempt is shown for its own members, what does this mean for how the Party feels about the wider labour movement and, indeed, the electorate?

- **Alan Simpson's column will return next month.**

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South Korea: the unions, the Net and the next general strike

Eric Lee, author of *The Labour Movement and the Internet* examines the political situation in South Korea and how new technology has been used by the unions.

A DECADE ago, South Korea exploded in a great wave of student and worker strikes and demonstrations. That 1987 struggle forced the regime to democratise somewhat. In 1992, former dissident Kim Young Sam was elected president. But Kim was quickly compelled to follow policies which served the interests of the chaebols (the conglomerates like Hyundai, LG and Samsung) — and the transnational corporations and banks whose loans have fuelled the fantastic rates of growth in the South Korean economy.

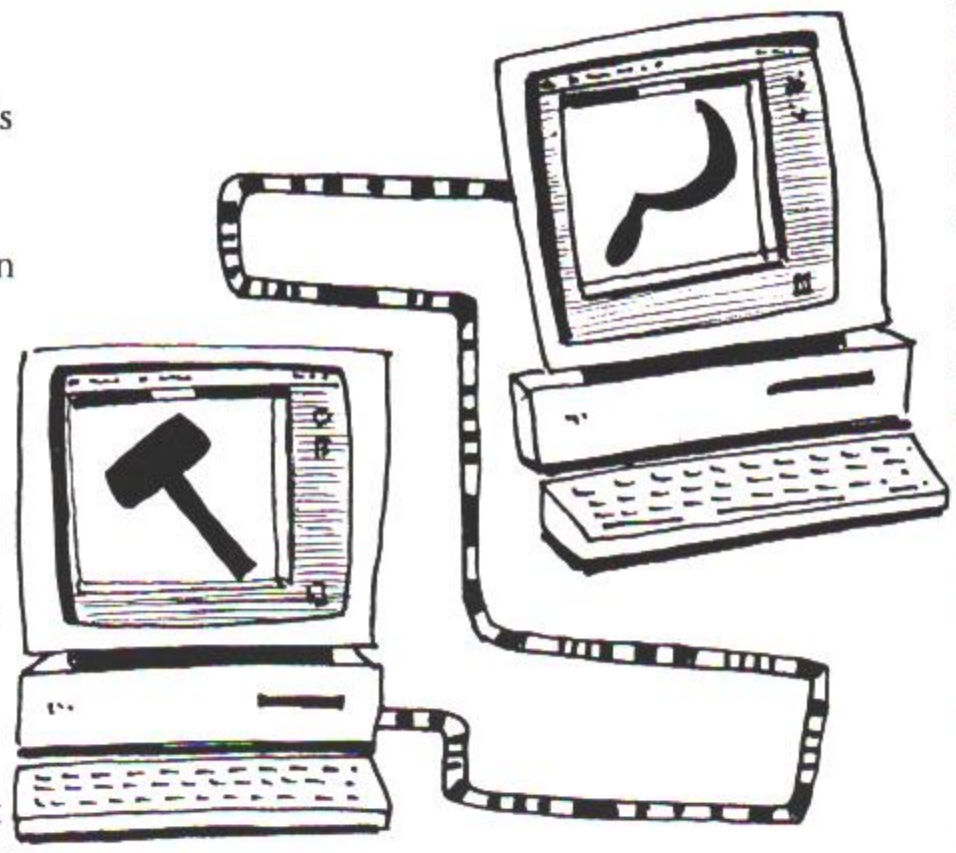
By the winter of 1996-7, Kim was trying to push through a "modernisation" of South Korea's labour laws which would have continued restrictions on trade union rights while simultaneously making it easier for employers to fire workers. His attempt to "reform" South Korea's labour laws was answered by the first general political strike in the country in more than a generation. Hundreds of thousands of workers led by the semi-legal Korean Confederation of Trade Unions (KCTU) walked off their jobs, took to the streets in massive demonstrations, prevented the Government from arresting their leaders and in the end won important concessions.

I visited Seoul last November. I was there as the guest of the KCTU not because I have some particular interest in or knowledge of the Korean situation, but because of my expertise regarding the Internet. (I had written a book on the subject.)

The KCTU and their allies in the various labour support groups have made the most impressive use of the Internet ever by a national trade union movement. Their general strike website with its daily (and more frequent) reports kept the international labour movement informed and involved in their struggle. (It is still online, for those who want to see a living example of how a labour movement can use the network as a weapon: http://kpd.sing-kr.org/strike).

Even after the general strike ended, the South Korean unions continued to use the net — and increasingly the web — to further their cause. They launched an extensive website to promote the sacked workers at Sammi Special Steel, who were on prolonged hunger strike, as well as to fight the introduction of a high-tech national identity card.

By November 1997, they were ready to host an international conference to discuss how the unions in South Korea and elsewhere could use the new media, including both the net and video. For about a week, a handful of us from outside Korea — including Chris Bailey of *Labournet* and myself — and a few dozen Korean activists met and discussed the new technology. By mid-week,



the conference organizers summoned us for a late-night discussion of the formation of a "global labournet."

A month after we left Seoul, presidential elections were held. The hopes of some in the KCTU that the candidacy of their leader, Kwon Young-kil, would bear fruit were dashed as he received barely more than 1% of the vote. (A media blackout of Kwon's campaign didn't help the incipient labour party known as Peoples' Victory 21.)

Instead, the veteran dissident Kim Dae Jung was elected. Immediately after his election, without even pausing for breath, Kim announced that all his campaign rhetoric about "re-negotiating" the bailout agreement with the IMF was just a bluff. Kim committed himself to honouring all agreements made by the previous government, thus guaranteeing a renewal of the general strike.

As I write these words, South Korea is in a state of flux. It has received the largest injection of capital ever doled out by the IMF. Its own officials are already talking about massive increases in unemployment in the months to come, and one after another the chaebols are downsizing and in some cases going bankrupt. Kim Dae Jung is due to be inaugurated as President only in late February. But it seems as if the Korean unions cannot wait. Led by the workers in the financial sector and at Hyundai, discussions of how and when to strike are already taking place.

South Korea's slow evolution into a liberal democracy seems to have been halted by the sudden economic crisis. International capital working through the IMF has imposed conditions on the Government in Seoul which will ensure massive social unrest — and possibly state repression.

The KCTU will once again be leading South Korean workers in struggle. To survive an assault by the state, it will need massive international support. That support will have to be delivered immediately, in real time, as the events take place. The rapid flow of information between the Korean labour movement and the outside world is essential.

The "global labournet" being pushed by the South Korean unionists is therefore not some far-out techno-vision, but a real need. Without vastly improved international labour communications, the South Korean labour movement faces the danger of suppression.

As the next wave of struggle breaks out, we will be there with them and for them, building support, focussing international attention on South Korea, spreading the word, and we'll be doing it online, using the net.

- For more information, visit the "Solidarity with Korea's Labour Movement" website, located at: http://www.solinet.org/LEE/korea.html

United we stand!

Britain's Presidency of the European Union could be a Trojan horse for globalisation and labour flexibility, argues Andrew Coates.

"STOP WORRYING about the Maastricht convergence criteria: Agenda 2000 is far worse." Reagan Scott, Transport and General Workers' International Officer, gave this message to December's Report Back of the European Appeal for Full Employment.

The Agenda takes the globalisers' programme to the heart of the EU. Despite claims from the European office of the TUC, that "best practice" will set the level for Europe's social and labour policy, supporters of globalisation in Brussels believe that international competitiveness demands a reduction in social security spending and an attack on workers' rights. Tony Blair's presidency of Europe could be the start of a step backwards. Euro MPs report pressure from Labour to obstruct social protection and anti-unemployment measures.

In France the governing Socialist Party is fighting the free market model. "Our opponent is globalisation" stated Socialist MP Christophe Cambadelis, during their recent conference. From the 35 hour week (not fully operative till the year 2000) to the creation of hundreds of thousands of jobs in the public sector, the PS has a strategy to improve people's working conditions. Young workers on state schemes are paid at the minimum wage and given full rights.

In contrast, Gordon Brown's New Deal considers that the market alone produces jobs. A compulsory morality of work is to be imposed on the young, single mothers, the disabled, and the long-term unemployed. Yet the problem does not lie with the workless but with those who run the economy. An alternative would be to redistribute working time more equally, defend the public sector from privatisation, and set up imaginative forms of employment, such as the state funded "animateurs" who help humanise public services in France.

The TUC opposed the Job Seekers' Allowance but now seems generally happy with the New Deal for the under 25s. Some organisations for the unemployed are co-operating in the "partnerships" formed to run the scheme, helping send the coerced youth to the "voluntary" sector. Rights and protection are largely absent from a system run at the top by businessmen. In France these guarantees are defended by a large independent unemployed movement. Over Christmas, across the country, they occupied the offices of the ASSEDIC (Employment Agency) to demand better benefits — although the Government has increased money for the over 55s. Modernisers, such as the trade union CFDT leader, Nicole Notat, who runs the main source of dole funds, admire Tony Blair's measures. But they are a minority, discredited by the Socialists' experiment with flexibility in the 1980s.



Given the events in France, it is important that the European left unites around full employment, and pushes the progressive aspects of the French Government's policy elsewhere. The European Appeal for Full Employment, launched by British MEPs, Stan Newens, Hugh Kerr and Ken Coates, proposes a continent-wide reduction in the working week, social investment, and the organisation of the unemployed. It has broad support from the labour movement, crossing over the old barriers between socialists, Communists and ecologists. At the Report Back meeting Ken Coates explained that if all these currents could "stand together" we could "face down all the powers of Europe." This message must be carried to every corner of the British left.

Bosnia between

The visit to Britain of a delegation of women from Srebrenica highlighted not only the greatest genocidal atrocity in postwar Europe — the massacre of 10,000 Bosnian Muslims in July 1995, it also focused attention on broader problems with the Dayton Peace Accord. Mike Phipps reports.

A STATE OF non-fighting might be the best description of the situation in former Yugoslavia. Despite elections and the snail's pace prosecution of war criminals, the reintegrative elements of Dayton have largely remained a dead letter. The recent Bosnian local elections illustrate this. Refugees were allowed to have their votes count for their place of residence in 1991 rather than where they are now. At that time, Srebrenica's population was largely Muslim, so unsurprisingly these internationally monitored elections gave Srebrenica a local government with a Muslim majority. Yet the newly elected councillors are not allowed near the place. So the West carefully supervises an election and then sits back without attempting to implement the result.

The West's attitude to former Yugoslavia has changed little since the conflict formally ended. De facto ethnic partition and the distribution of power between the main

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Massacre in Mexico

The massacre of 45 indigenous peasants at Acteal in the state of Chiapas at the end of December is part of a broader offensive against human rights and those who uphold them. Mike Phipps reports.

THE FULL picture began to emerge in the New Year: 45 unarmed civilians, many women and children, shot in the back by paramilitaries. Following the subsequent condemnation from international opinion, the Mexican Government showed itself keen to distance itself from the massacre by dismissing the Interior Minister. The Governor of Chiapas has also resigned.

A change of faces, however, does not imply a change of policy. The PRI, which has ruled for the last 70 years, has no support in much of rural Mexico. In many areas, it consists only of the corrupt local state structure and armed paramilitaries, which together run extortion rackets against the local communities and deliver rigged election results for the ruling elite. The fact that the Zapatistas organised a largely successful boycott of last year's elections in Chiapas was acutely embarrassing for the regime.

Reports have emerged of whole communities being kept in near slavery or being forced to pay huge fines to live unmolested. A Zapatista spokesperson claimed the Government was effectively waging a dirty war against indigenous communities. A recently leaked Defence Department document, *Chiapas Campaign Plan '94*, reveals it was the Government that initiated the creation of paramilitary squads as the principal way of dealing with the Zapatistas. The Bishop of Chiapas has confirmed the paramilitaries were trained by government soldiers.

The duplicity of the Mexican Government is also under scrutiny. In a recent statement, the Zapatista Comandante Marcos asserted that the EZLN (Zapatista Army of National Liberation) had largely suspended armed struggle over the last four years while it was engaged in a process of negotiation and dialogue with the regime. This broke down in August 1996 and has not resumed. Paramilitary activity in Chiapas increased subsequently.

The Clinton Administration condemned the massacre. Yet the US gives the Mexican military extensive covert intelligence support and training. This has been justified by the need to step up the effort against drugs, despite the jailing of prominent Mexican army generals for their role in the trade. The period of US military collaboration has seen a deteriorating human rights record by the Mexican military.

American pressure also played a role in the breakdown of national dialogue between the Zapatistas and the Government 18 months ago. An initial agreement was reached in February 1996, legally recognising traditional indigenous communities as self-determining entities with respect for their cultural practices guaranteed. In August 1996 the Mexican Government refused to acknowledge its signature on this document, spurned new attempts at mediation and presented a new text, wholly unacceptable to the Zapatistas. Behind these manoeuvres lay an American insistence that, as part of the North American Free Trade Agreement, Mexico abolish its traditional land system, and allow US companies to buy up the previously protected communally held lands of the indigenous communities.

The breakdown in negotiations was followed by "low intensity war" by the Government against communities sympathetic to the Zapatistas. The deployment of 25,000 soldiers in the area brought murders, kidnappings, beatings and the forced expulsions of whole villages. In that context, December's massacre was part of the Government's ongoing strategy, albeit the most appalling example so far. Since then, Zapatista sources document several cases of fresh aggression by the paramilitaries in Chiapas. In one instance, PRI paramilitaries took 40 hostages demanding the release of those held for the Acteal massacres.

- The Zapatistas are calling for international action against the aggression and in solidarity with the indigenous people of Chiapas. For more information, contact Mexico Support Group, Latin American House, Kingsgate Place, Kilburn, London NW6 4TA.

war and peace

nationalist parties remain the central policy, justified by the "military realities". Yet the Dayton Accord also provides for the right of refugees to return to their homes — an intangible aspiration as Srebrenica shows. Instead, the West has encouraged — or compelled in the case of Germany — the return of refugees to so-called "ethnic majority areas", rather than their own homes. This completes the work of the wartime ethnic cleansers and legitimises the artificial ethnic entities created by them. Thus the West continues to collude in the search for ethnic solutions at the expense of multi-ethnic societies and democratic rights.

A recent editorial from *Bosnia Report*, now the newsletter of the newly-formed Bosnia Institute, under the headline "Squaring the Circle", concluded: "Everything about the Western policy in Bosnia-Herzegovina today can be seen as an attempt to square the Dayton circle. Ethnic cleansers are supposed to welcome home those they have expelled, and refugees return to areas where their tormentors still wield absolute power. War criminals are supposed to be arrested by their accomplices in crime.

"Racists, national chauvinists and profiteers are supposed to play leading roles in rebuilding multi-ethnic and democratic society, The regimes in Belgrade and Zagreb are supposed to guarantee a state they have been doing their best to destroy.

"The legitimacy of Bosnian statehood is supposed to be upheld, not by the republican institutions that made resistance to aggression possible, but by new and intentionally impotent structures, ruled by ethnic quotas, in which its staunch defenders are permanently outnumbered by its bitter enemies."

MAI: a threat to democracy

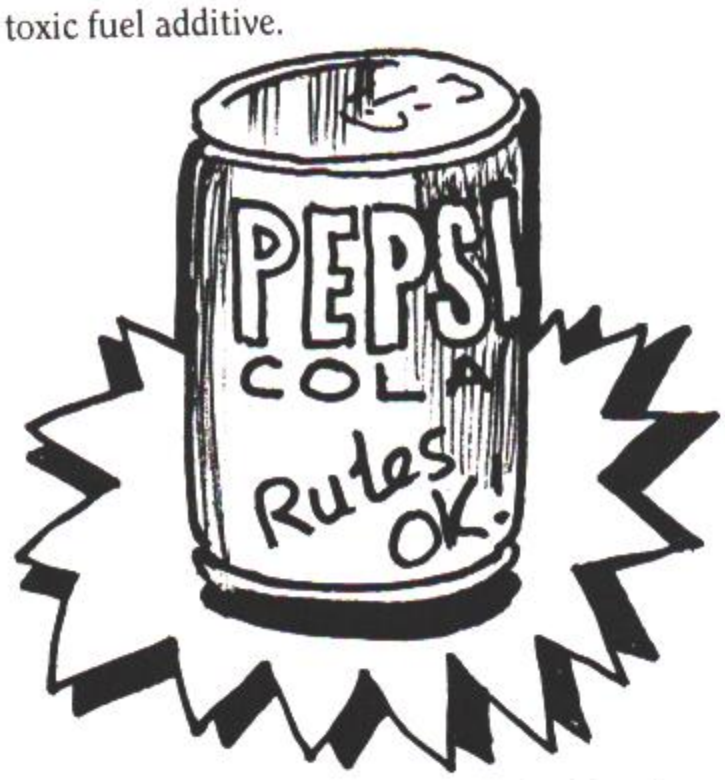
A new treaty aimed at removing any conditions or restrictions on trade and investment by multinational companies is being secretly negotiated by the OECD for worldwide application. Despite the potentially devastating impact on the Third World, New Labour is right behind it. Mike Phipps reports.

THE MULTILATERAL Agreement on Investment has been under secret negotiation by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development — representing the world's 29 richest countries — for over two years. The MAI is basically a set of rules restricting what governments can do to regulate international investment and corporate behaviour. They are designed to protect and expand the power of corporations and other large international investors, guaranteeing them a stable investment climate, easy repatriation of profits and freedom from any obligation to serve local economic needs wherever they invest. The European Union and the USA, the primary backers of the agreement, aim to extend it to developing countries, inviting them to sign up on a "take it or leave it" basis.

The MAI would give new rights to multinational corporations and limit people's democratic right to regulate their local affairs in ways that make good economic and environmental sense. Every kind of investment is covered. So environmental controls on foreign-owned factories, restrictions on international financial speculation and many other kinds of regulations will all have to submit to the agreement's standards. The MAI says that signatories have to give foreign investors "treatment no less favourable" than that given to their own investors. Currently some countries screen foreign investment to ensure it's in the national interest, or restrict foreign ownership of the media and other sectors. Since this is "less favourable" than how local investors are treated, it would be illegal under the MAI.

Equally, governments can't make foreign companies meet certain performance requirements, even if these are imposed on local companies. Examples of forbidden conditions include requirements to use local suppliers, take on local partners or hire a minimum number of local employees. For example, when Pepsi Cola wanted to invest in the Punjab in the early 1990s, the Indian Government imposed strict conditions: local companies would have a majority shareholding in the Indian subsidiary; three-quarters of the total investment would be in agriculture; 50,000 local jobs would be created; 25% of the fruit and vegetable crop of the Punjab would be processed by the project and 50% of the company's production would be exported. These measures, designed to ensure that Pepsi Cola's investment had some benefit for the Indian economy, would all be illegal under the MAI.

The MAI further bans expropriation — widely defined to include even environmental controls. To show how foreign corporations can claim that environmental regulations "expropriate" their investments, a US company has sued Canada for $250 million for banning the import of MMT, a potentially toxic fuel additive.



Free capital mobility is also upheld at the expense of financial stability. The recent economic crisis in Mexico, for example, where the currency crashed, savings were wiped out and wages plummeted, was largely caused by unstable inflows and outflows of foreign investment. To avoid this problem, some countries make foreign investors keep new investments in the country for at least a year. The MAI would outlaw this kind of safety measure, raising the risk that the Mexican economic crash could be repeated around the world.

All of this matters because these rules will be enforced in special international corporate courts. Arbitration will consist of a few trade experts getting together as judges and hearing the dispute in a closed panel, without opportunity for affected citizens to comment. The panel will decide whether governments are violating the agreement, and if so, can advise them to change laws and award damages — possibly hundreds of millions of pounds.

This is a dangerous idea, undermining national sovereignty but more importantly the democratic rights of ordinary citizens who will not have access to these corporate courts.

Any country that signs up to the MAI will find it difficult to extricate itself, despite a change of government. While most international treaties require six months' notice for withdrawal, the MAI won't release a country for five years after it signs and even then existing investment is still governed by the MAI for fifteen more years! Again, the MAI puts investor confidence over a country's right to change its laws.

Where does Britain stand on all this? Clare Short's recent White Paper on international development didn't even mention the MAI. In fact Margaret Beckett's DTI is fully behind it, with a few reservations. Many OECD countries have applied to exempt sensitive or vulnerable sectors of the economy, such as mining, fishing and natural resources — Britain has not. The US, for example, has exempted all state and local government from the MAI, while in Britain local councils will be bound by the agreement.

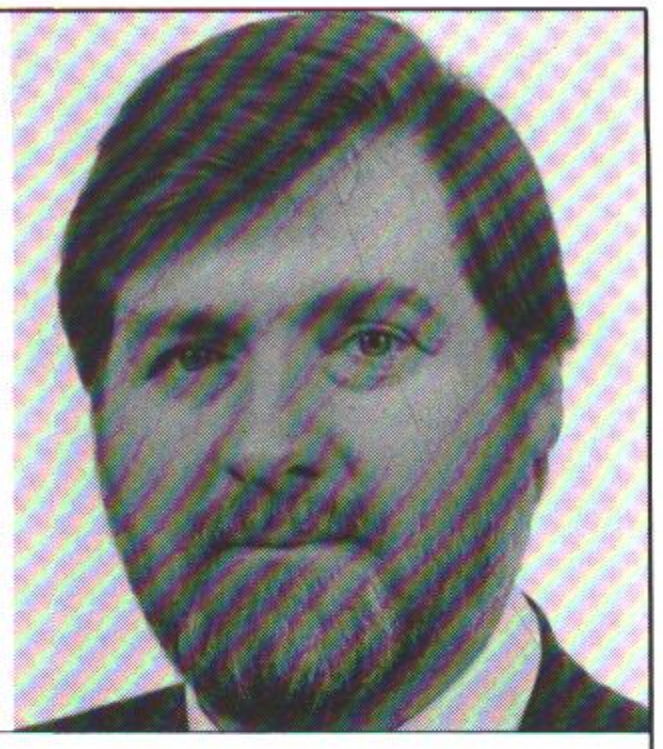
Here one sees the double standards involved. Despite their apparent conviction that the total liberalisation of investment is a desirable aim, the developed nations have asked for extensive exemptions for themselves. The US also wants its power, mining and water industries exempted, for example. Poorer countries will lack the clout to argue for anything like this number of exemptions, even though their fragile economies need far greater protection.

The MAI is therefore a recipe for greater corporate profit and deeper poverty in the Third World. It disempowers elected governments and undermines democracy. A mass campaign of international proportions is needed to oppose it.

- Additional information from the World Development Movement, 25 Beehive Place, London SW9 7QR, telephone 0171-737 6215.

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the Michael Hindley column



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

New Europe, new gimmicks, age old problems

TONY BLAIR'S New Labour Government deliberately started its presidency of the EU with a symbol of movement — the entire European Commission team thundering through the Channel tunnel, only to slow down as the high-speed train hit the antiquated track system from the British coast to the capital. Certainly the EU Presidency provides Blair and his team with what will be increasingly characteristic of his regime, that is, endless and ultimately off-putting gimmicks for "new" everythings. People with longer memories already have the disturbing feeling that Labour has a new Harold Wilson in charge, only unlike the original, this Labour premier has no loyalty or affection to the party which put him in power.

But the movement of the EU is, as the eurocrats would have us believe, one of deliberate and inexorable progress to "an ever closer union" and in six months, any country can only speed up or slow down that set course. We cannot change course, they say, sudden variations are impossible like the proverbial supertanker at sea — though to my mind, and in particular on the Single Currency, the course of the Titanic is a more apposite analogy.

Certainly the iceberg is there for all to see, it is the folly of squeezing fifteen disparate economies into one currency. In May, the members states will have to decide whether they are in or out of the project for 1999. Britain has said "no" but can qualify. Italy has said "yes " but doesn't qualify. The most key players of all, France and Germany, have said "yes" even if it will tear apart their welfare states to get there. Each month sees the highest post-war unemployment statistics in Germany. German manufacturing continues to flee, the recent news that Volkswagen are trying to revive their fortunes by reviving the Beetle eclipsed the fact that the new Beetle will not be made in Germany. Much German investment is already fleeing to Switzerland to the embarrassment of the Swiss Government who fear an unsuccessful Euro will lead to a panic rush to the Swiss Franc boosting it to a level which the Swiss economy cannot sustain.

In France the unemployed have begun to vent their frustration by occupying labour exchanges and the homeless have been occupying luxury hotels. France remains the home of extra-parliamentary opposition and the Socialist Government's intention to meet the convergence criteria set by the Single Currency will keep them on course for more such confrontations.

By the end of the year pundits in Europe will be looking back and wishing that they had not crowed so loudly about East Asia's present economic discomfiture.

MANY in Britain, and I suspect Blair also, still hope that the decision on the Single Currency will be made for them by default and certainly without our direct involvement. But that will exclude Blair from the real influence he craves and his spin-doctors pretend exists, for the other EU leaders simply will not allow Britain a decisive role in the shaping of a project in which they remain spectators. Blair is being pulled in different and irreconcilable directions; the welfare reforms (euphemism for cuts) will increasingly set him against Labour's traditional supporters but endear him to those siren voices on the Tory left who also, like Blair, want to consolidate the Thatcherite gains under the veneer of a more sympathetic "touchy feely" image. His constant call for the Tory left to join New Labour will be answered increasingly with the response to rather join them in a New Project for a New Centre and to a gimmick driven administration that will look attractive, especially when the Titanic of monetary union does hit the iceberg and a New Start will be needed as a cover for the failed politics.

Blair has said that he regrets the breaking up of the old nineteenth century dichotomy of Liberals and Tories, thereby displaying no political sympathy with the origins of his own party. The end of that era, remarkably similar to the present, is well described in Dangerfield's classic *The Strange Death of Liberal England.* His thesis was that only the First World War staved off the collapse caused by the insufficiencies of Liberalism to come to terms with the decline of British imperialism. One factor was the failure to face down the Unionists in Ireland, and the possible retreat from the Anglo-Irish position achieved under Major suggested by the recently floated idea of a "Council of the Isles", which not only panders to the Unionists but also actually revives the notion of British involvement in all-Irish affairs, is an ominous reminder of past, similar failures. Also, Dangerfield cites the inability to understand the rise of militancy of labour which was excluded from the wealth of Edwardian and late Victorian Britain and led to the founding and rise of the Labour Party itself.

If we add to that the growing probability of total collapse in Russia and the subsequent panic in Eastern Europe to get into the EU more quickly than the member states will allow, we have a startling scenario calling for a visionary leadership far beyond that which Blair and his gimmicks of train rides and children's banal characterisations of "Europe" can possibly hope to contend with.

Hoffa legacy haunts Teamsters

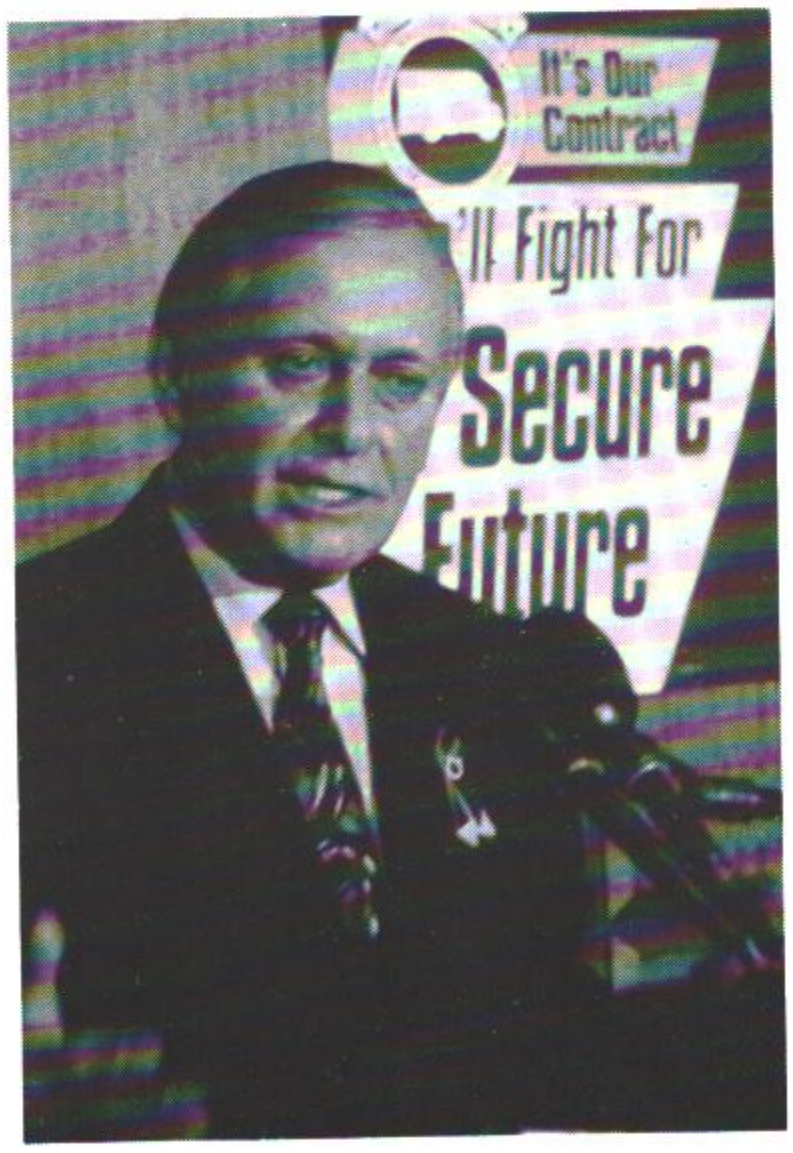
Jane Barrett reports on charges of electoral fraud within the USA's second biggest union and the continuing fight for democracy.

IN AUGUST the Teamsters won a spectacular victory against parcel giant UPS. After a fifteen day strike it won concessions on a pay increase, the company's pension fund, and the creation of 10,000 new jobs. However within weeks the union was thrown into disarray by a ruling that its leadership elections of late 1996 should be re-run.

In November, progressives within the union were further depressed by news that Ron Carey, the sitting President and reform candidate in 1996, had been barred from running for President again. An election date is still to be set as Carey's 1996 election opponent James Hoffa Jnr is now being investigated for possible violation of election rules. In making sense of these developments it helps to know something of the union's most recent past.

In 1989 the then leadership of the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (IBT) struck a deal with the US Department of Justice. The Government's civil racketeering suit, accusing the union of being a wholly owned subsidiary of organised crime, was withdrawn in exchange for indefinite government oversight of union business. The union was placed under federal trusteeship.

Ron Carey



Three of the union's six previous presidents had been jailed, another died under indictment for embezzlement, and one other led a drain on the union's pension funds. An Independent Review Board was established to investigate corruption and to oversee the running of the union, including its elections.

The first such leadership election was held in 1991. It was the first membership election in the union for many years. Ron Carey, a New York union official since 1967, was the candidate supported by Teamsters for a Democratic Union (TDU). The TDU had been campaigning for reform and against corruption since the mid 70s. Most of Carey's slate (though not Carey himself) were TDU members. The slate won reasonably comfortably in a three way contest, though the turnout was disappointing at 25%.

Carey and a new executive set about cleaning up the tarnished image of the union. The leadership's limousines and jets were sold off, and the President's salary was substantially cut. An organising campaign was embarked on and rank and file education became a priority, and for the first time in over twenty five years the union shifted its political support away from the Republicans to the Democratic Party. During the early 90's IBT donated $2.5m to Democrat election funds. However, IBT local and regional structures retained considerable authority and funds. Many remained centres of power for the old guard.

By 1996, when the second membership election was held the old guard had mobilised to put up a serious candidate against Carey. He was Jimmy Hoffa Junior, son of notorious 50's and 60's IBT president who was presumed murdered by the mob in 1975. Carey and his slate won narrowly. Soon after the count was concluded in early 1997, protests were lodged by Hoffa's camp concerning Carey's funds. Months of investigations revealed a complex network of fund-swapping. Three Carey aides were found to have arranged legitimate contributions from the union's general funds to three outside political action groups and then to have diverted money back illegally into Carey's campaign fund. The three pleaded guilty to criminal charges and incurred hefty fines.

In September, the union was ordered to re-run its elections under strict conditions. The Independent Review Board initially found Carey to have been unaware of the transactions but later debarred him from re-running for "tolerating and engaging in extensive rules violations". Most damaging was the implication of a number of other unions' senior labour leaders who are centrally involved in the trade union reform movement. No measures have been taken against them yet. The finding against Carey may well also delay the liberation of the union from federal trusteeship — an obvious prerequisite to the restoration of members' control.

Despite all this the union's progressive leadership is managing to sustain two critical rank and file campaigns — one against Coca Cola and one against trucking bosses. And the TDU appears to remain strong — having held a successful Convention in November, it has subsequently won elections in two key previously Hoffa controlled locals. The Teamsters were also critical in forcing Clinton to withdraw legislation in November that would have given authority to negotiate international trade agreements on a fast track basis and at the expense of labour.

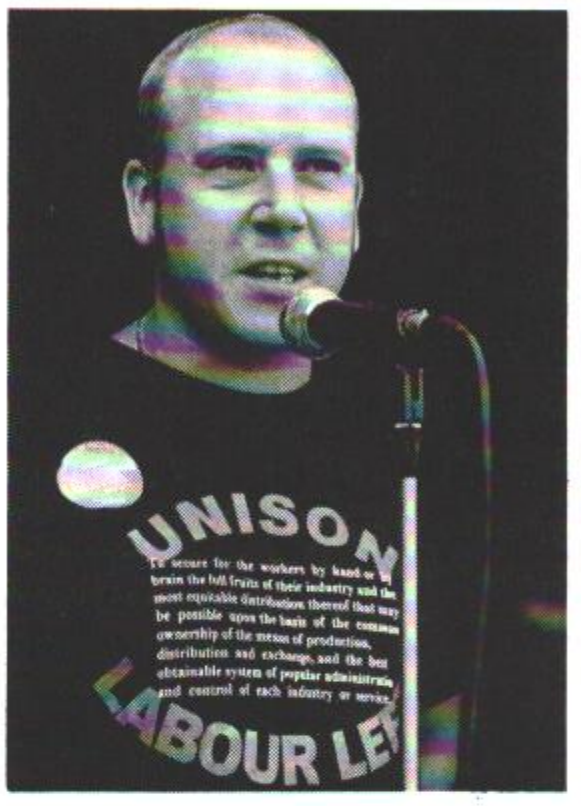
Should Hoffa be cleared of the dozen or so charges against him the progressive camp within the union will have a massive struggle on its hands to win the next election. But a strong election slate is said to be in place and all hands will be on deck to ensure victory for the third time in a row. If Hoffa is barred from standing, as Carey has been, the slate is likely to have an easy victory.

The key challenge facing TDU members in particular and progressives in general within the Teamsters, irrespective of the outcome of next round in the leadership battle, will be to ensure the continuation of the democratisation process within the union at every level. Watch this space!

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the Geoff Martin column

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



● Impending fatherhood means that there are lots of exciting things in prospect for me in the New Year — none more so than the opportunity to attend the "Jack Straw Good Parenting Classes". Presumably this will include important lessons on key issues like the correct protocol for handing your own kids over to police custody and the best way to lecture others on the evils of soft drugs while your own house is shrouded in ganja smoke.

Seriously, posh kids like Billy "Whizz" Straw will always be fascinated by the drug culture — gives them a bit of excitement. The difference is that he's still got the passport to affluence stuffed in his back pocket whereas if he'd been a black kid from Stockwell the police are unlikely to have been so understanding.

It's all this New Labour double standards on drugs that gets my goat. Let's not forget that on the same night that the regime was sticking the knife in to lone parents, Downing Street was packed with recreational drug users at some celebrity bash. It's also well known that several of the key players in the New Labour project are partial to a little bit of Charlie and I'm not talking about Mr Whelan. This whole drugs business stinks of the kind of hypocrisy that the Rev Jimmy Swaggart would be proud of. And anyway if New Labour are so anti-drugs why do they keep sending out so much roach material in their direct mailings? I couldn't think of anything else to use a New Year message from Tom Sawyer for.

● This business of the Japanese Prime Minister apologising for war crimes in the pages of the *Sun* has left me fuming. My old man was on death railway for over three years and had to fight the British establishment for years to get a pitiful war pension despite the horrific illnesses and injuries he suffered for King and Country. So if we're on the subject of apologies where's the apology from the British Government for abandoning the Far East POWs to their fate and for keeping their plight secret for the duration of the war?

Where's the apology from the British Establishment for putting ignorant, upper class officers in charge of trained, working class men, without a clue as to what was going on? Where's the apology for the collusion of some of those officers with the Japanese captors? As more and more of the old death camp survivors die off the Establishment must hope that the facts will die with them. Not while I've still got breath in my body.

● Finally, our neighbours' six year old swears that she saw me on the telly saying that the Spice Girls are the best rock and roll band in the world. I'm going to have to stop bumping into Cabinet Ministers' sons in Clapham pubs!

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

USDAW hypocrisy

While shopworkers' union USDAW quite rightly denounces the refusal of many retail employers to recognise the union which represents their staff, the leadership of that union refuses to recognise the union which represents their own staff!

This astonishing exercise in hypocrisy has now been going on for ten years. The staff believed that when Bill Connor took over as USDAW General Secretary it might lead to some change, but his refusal to modify the stance of his predecessor has led the GMB members involved to decide that more pressure is needed.

Accordingly they are organising lobbies of the USDAW Executive Council meeting on Monday 16th February 12-2.30pm in Manchester (USDAW Head Office is 188 Wilmslow Road, Fallowfield, Manchester; for transport from London contact Sonya McKay on 0171-928 3649) and the TUC General Council meeting on Wednesday 25th February at Congress House in London. *LLB* supporters are encouraged to attend.

Battle continues at Critchley

THE UNION recognition dispute at Critchley Labels in South Wales, is entering its second year. The situation at the former BT factory illustrates the dangers of privatisation. Following compulsory redundancies, a refusal by management to maintain its agreement with the Communications Workers Union (CWU), and an overtime ban, the union was eventually forced into a strike ballot on derecognition.

After two one-day strikes, management threatened dismissal if workers took part in any further action. Four days into a subsequent one-week strike, all 31 CWU members were dismissed.

● To show solidarity, supporters are asked to write in protest to the manager of the Critchley Group at Monmouth House, 26-28 Thomas Street, Cirencester, GL7 2BD, calling for reinstatement and recognition.

Liverpool dockers are calling for a mass picket of Liverpool port at Seaforth (main gate) every Friday starting at 6 am. This will start from Friday 6th February and every Friday following until victory is secured.

Tippett the rebel

David Pope, Leyton and Wanstead CLP, reflects on the life of Sir Michael Tippett.

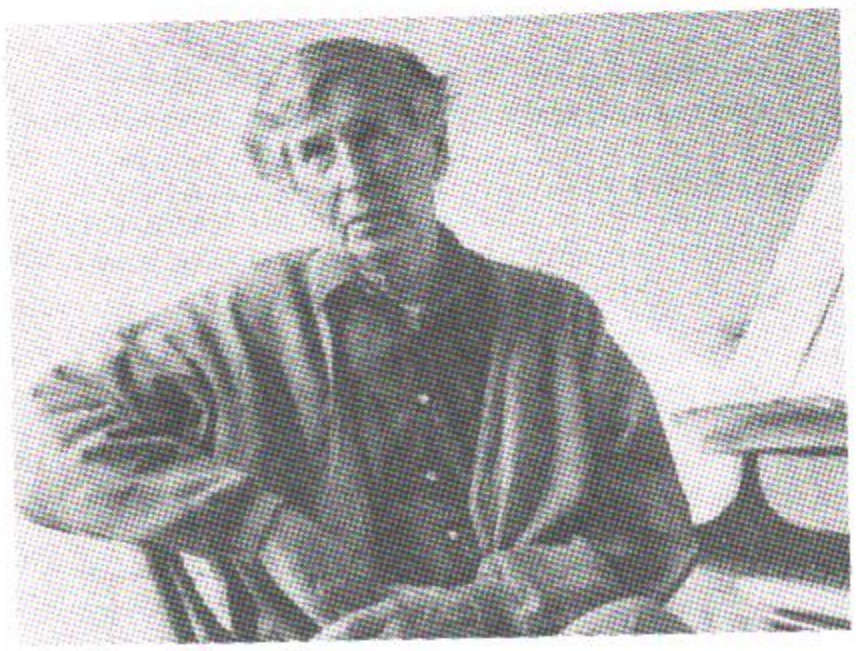
MICHAEL Tippett (1905-1998) was one of our leading composers. Less noted in the obituaries in the national press was his lifelong commitment to peace. He was born into a middle-class, non-establishment family. His mother was a Labour Party member imprisoned for suffragette activities. At the age of nine, he demonstrated his independent thinking by writing an essay on the impossibility of the existence of God. He suffered the ordeal of attending the same boarding school as Tony Blair. At another, happier, school he opted out of religious education and the cadet corps.

After graduating from the Royal College of Music, Tippett took up composition as a career. He supplemented his meagre income with teaching and conducting. In these early days his radicalism was by no means consistent: in the 1926 General Strike, he substituted for striking extras in a performance at Covent Garden.

Tippett began linking his music with politics when visiting the north of England during the Great Depression. He wrote that he saw "for the first time, with horrified eyes, the undernourished children. When I returned to the well-fed south, I was ashamed." He gave up schoolteaching and started conducting amateur choirs. His friendship with the marxist composer Alan Bush led to work with the London Labour Choral Union. The Choir performed for the poor in London's East End — Tippett arranged for them to feed the audience. He joined the executive committee of the Workers' Music Association.

Tippett became interested in Trotskyism but joined the Communist Party in 1935. He was involved with those trying to end its allegiance to Moscow but left in disillusion after they failed. Exposure to the theory of "social credit" led to his writing the play *War Ramp*, performed at Labour Party rallies. It argued that wars are built on a "ramp" of credit, financed ultimately by ordinary people. Drawn to pacifism, Tippett was among 100,000 people who responded to an open letter in the press to renounce war. From this he became an active member of the Peace Pledge Union and eventually its president.

When war broke out, Tippett applied for registration as a conscientious objector. He argued "my first political act was to attend an International Congress of Youth....to discuss methods of raising money to send child victims of the Great War to sanatoria in the Swiss mountains. I was 17 years old. It is not now possible for me to be at war...with those same children." Tippett refused to comply with conditions set by the tribunal and was jailed for three months.



Michael Tippett

The approach of war and personal problems, including the suicide of someone close and conflict with relatives and friends about his sexuality, produced an acute psychological crisis for Tippett. He coped with this partly by turning to Jungian analysis and composed his first great work. He had contemplated an opera about the Easter Uprising but the events of Kristalnacht turned his thoughts elsewhere. He wrote the oratorio *A Child of Our Time*. This heartfelt plea on behalf of outcasts and scapegoats established him as a major composer. From now on, he expressed his views and humanitarianism through his work, particularly his operas.

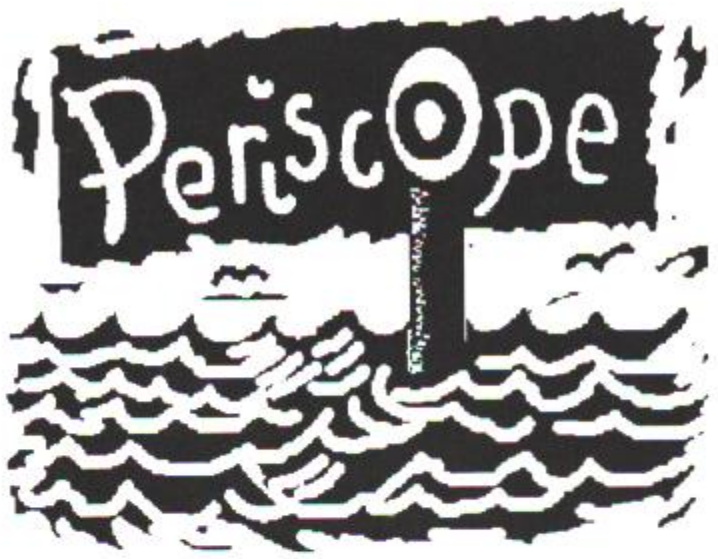
Tippett's music is not always easily accessible. His second symphony broke down in mid-performance at its premiere, his piano concerto was deemed unplayable by the appointed soloist and his operas puzzled many at first hearing. Tippett embraced the influences of jazz, blues and Indonesian gamelan percussion. Those wishing to explore his music should start with the *Concerto for Double String Orchestra*, the opera *The Midsummer Marriage* and the beautiful *Triple Concerto*. Anyone who does will be rewarded.

Dan Carter reviews Power, Corruption and Pies, When Saturday Comes compilation, *(Two Heads Publishing), £9.99.*

Longstanding *LLB* readers who are football fans will remember with fondness the cut-and-paste, fanzine-style origins of both *LLB* and *When Saturday Comes* (*WSC*). Like *LLB*, *WSC* also threw up a number of expert writers in their field — Nick Hornby of *Fever Pitch* fame being the best known. Giving a voice to the under-represented — Newport County and Meadowbank Thistle feature as much as the Liverpools and Arsenals — this collection reflects the things that matter to the fans — the pubs, the obscure statistics, and of course the pies. It covers football's relationship to racism, sexism, Northern Ireland, Latin American dictators, the excess of the profit system and corruption, seriously and with humour — often in the same paragraph.

With its origins in the time before football was fashionable on the left, *WSC* has maintained its cutting edge, despite — again like *LLB* — adopting a glossier and more professional style. In fact *WSC* has probably overtaken *LLB* in its influence over our beloved Sports Minister, Tony Banks. If you've never read football fans' writing before, dip into this — but beware, the combination of humour, politics and sport may well lead you to a freezing Saturday afternoon on the terraces at Doncaster (Rovers or Belles) this winter.

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Bourgeois diversion

Paymaster General **Geoffrey Robinson** has protested loudly at suggestions that the millions he inherited from the mysterious Mme Joschka Bourgeois were placed into a Guernsey-based trust in order to avoid UK tax. Funny, that. A year ago, the man who runs the trust for Robinson, Alan Chick, told City friends that he had been asked by a prominent Labour figure to shift funds offshore in order to reduce tax liability before the election of a Labour government. Incidentally, after Chick's identity was discovered by the *Sunday Times*, he was given emergency coaching in how to handle the media by none other than Number Ten press officer Alastair Campbell.

And we thought we had problems

Still on the subject of **Robinson**, it appears that his takeover of the ***New Statesman*** has cost him dear. The magazine has belatedly filed its 1996-97 accounts, which show a year-on-year loss of £1.8 million, more than ten times the sum it was losing annually under the pre-Robinson regime. About a quarter of the loss can be accounted for by the inflated salaries of editor **Ian Hargreaves** and the Blairite cronies he has placed in senior editorial positions on the once left-wing magazine. The rest is the cost of the *Statesman*'s ludicrous giveaway subscription offers and of the mass defection of its pre-Hargreaves subscribers, two-thirds of whom have cancelled their subs in boredom or disgust. The net circulation has increased by 5,000 as a result of the daft offers, but the new subscribers are fickle: no fewer than 12,000 people who availed themselves of cut-price subs last year cancelled as soon as they were asked to pay at full rate. And New Labour claims that it knows all about business.

LLB in Parliament

LLB's web page featured in the debate on the Greater London Assembly and Mayor, when **Simon Hughes**, LibDem MP quoted from articles by **Dorothy Macedo** and **Leonora Lloyd**. He used them as evidence that not everyone in the London labour movement is enamoured of the Government's plans nor with the anti-democratic nature of the London Party leadership.

Defenceless expenditure

Relic of public schooldom, *If* and *Monty Python* sketches, the Army Cadets could be on their last parade. The **Officer Training Corps**, the elite of the schoolboy wargamers, cost the Government (well, you and me really) some £16,700,000 last year. In the last academic year, just 260 (or around 7.5%) actually went on to join up upon leaving school and college. Having stayed behind to do its maths homework, *Periscope* works that out at a whopping £64,230 (and 77p) per recruit. A possible public expenditure cut we could all support.

Play *Imperialism:* conquer the world!

One of the seedier CD games out at present is called *Imperialism* ("conquer the world! World domination is in your grasp!"). The game for aspiring dictators is offered free in a competition in ... ***Air Cadet* magazine**. Another reason for getting rid of them?

It's payback time!

One of the architects of New Labour, polling guru and Friend of Peter, **Philip Gould**, is at last receiving his just rewards for helping Tony to power. He has just landed a second £30,000 contract with a government department. A long-time recipient of Euro-dosh, channelled via the Labour Euro-MPs, he now has one deal to survey public attitudes to Britain's EU Presidency and another to advise of the state and image of the NHS ("it's crap," I claim my £30k — Ed.). He remains in charge of Labour's internal polling and was responsible for bringing focus groups to British politics.

Out-foxed

One of the glossier bits of lobbying on the foxhunting vote in Parliament was the circulation of *New Labour's Policy on Foxhunting — An Objective Analytical Review* by **Michael Poland**. That couldn't be the same Michael Poland who was Master of the Isle of Wight Foxhounds, could it? You know, the hunt that actually introduced foxes to the Isle of Wight in the nineteenth century so they would have something to hunt.

The only good Tory...

Tory **David Amess MP** tells of how he got to know John Heddle MP much better during an all-night Commons sitting. He was then "horrified" when he committed suicide a few days later. It's official — spend the night with David Amess and you'll want to top yourself.

AOB

"A remarkably promising start" — *the Thatcherite* ***Adam Smith Institute*** *on the Blair Government.*

"Instead of pretending that a Conservative government would be playing things differently, why not congratulate Tony Blair for doing exactly what a Conservative government would have done ?" — ***Matthew Parris***, The Sun.

"Blair...aims to kill off the Conservative Party by making it redundant. The Tory opposition can only protest forlornly that New Labour is carrying out Tory policies" — ***Jimmy Reid***, Glasgow Herald.

"The free market does not distribute fairly or efficiently: it produces inequality and monopoly...The nineties will not see the continuing triumph of the market but its failure." — ***Tony Blair***, *1987.*

"During the election campaign, Mr Blair showed himself capable of cut-throat cynicism...'We won't spend £60 million on a new royal yacht while patients are lying on trolleys in hospital corridors,' he told a crowd in Edinburgh. Then, turning to the journalist Robert Harris he said...'I always use it. It's been well worth £60 million.' ..." — ***Sunday Telegraph***.

"Mr Blair...urged MPs not to tell the media about PLP debates, though his own speech was officially distributed". — ***The Guardian*** *18/12/1997.*

"The threat by Formula One to relocate its motor racing activities outside Europe in the event of an early EU tobacco sponsorship ban was an empty one, according to academics who have spent 18 months investigating the industry...the research team found that the integration of engineering and other specialist knowledge within "Motor Sport Valley", a 100 mile crescent across southern England, cannot be recreated elsewhere in an acceptable timeframe and F1 managements are well aware of this." — ***Financial Times***.

"How is it hypocrisy? I told Gordon before the election that it was an offshore family trust. I told him that if he wanted me in the Treasury I would support the policy on off-shore funds ..." — ***Geoffrey Robinson***.

"Please be assured that I will actively support all moves in Parliament to ban hunting and to improve animal welfare generally." — ***Kate Hoey MP*** *(one of only two Labour MPs to vote against the bill to ban foxhunting) in a letter to a constituent before the General Election.*

"Michael Foster's foxhunting Bill is a bloody nuisance...I'd rather avoid the issue than be pushed into a ban." — ***Austin Mitchell MP***.

I am a student at Luton University. I am not a member of any political party as I have no faith in any of them. At the last election I voted Lib Dem due to the fact their manifesto seemed nearer what I believe than the Labour Party. The Labour Party seems to have abandoned any principles of decency and become almost Thatcherite. Originally I was a left of centre Conservative. Now due to experiences I find the left-wing of the Labour Party nearer my thoughts than anything else.

Tony Blair has been going too far and does not seem to have any concern for the poor and disadvantaged in society. As a Christian I believe that we have a responsibility to those less fortunate than ourselves. My faith means I also believe in social justice. Redistribution of wealth is also important as we need to protect and give the poor a decent wage so that they can help their families.

We have the wrong Tony B as Prime Minister. A pipe-smoking and tea-drinking alternative would be better.

Graham Topham,
Luton

As a Sub Branch Secretary and State Executive member of the Australian Labor Party and Industrial Officer with the Australian Workers Union South Australian Branch I find your web site both informative and eye opening. Having spent much time in the UK, particularly Scotland, I was excited by the prospect of Labour returning to power and returning Britain to the people rather than the big business friends of the Tories.

I am saddened to read of the ongoing struggle you are now having within your own government to implement left policy at a time when you should be celebrating the return of a Labour government. You appear to have a government even more right wing than our own tory Liberals. I am particularly concerned to read that the replacement of CCT in local government (a move which is only just beginning here) looks to be even worse than the current situation — a very sad state of affairs. Please keep up your good work and know that there are many of us here in Australia supporting you (I just wish we could vote when you need the numbers).

Andrew Knox,
Adelaide

May I thank Dan Carter for his excellent review of *Orangeism: Myth and Reality* which appeared in the October 1997 issue of *LLB*. However, I'd quibble with his opening comment which suggests that the Connolly Association dragged its feet over publication of Peter Berresford Ellis' illuminating lecture. Although Berresford Ellis has been a regular contributor to the *Irish Democrat* for the past decade, his lecture on the Orange Order was delivered at the 1995 Desmond Greaves Summer School in Dublin.

This influential forum for discussion among nationalists, republicans and socialists in Ireland, which takes place in Dublin at the end of August, is run by an independent committee and has its own publishing programme. (The first collection of Desmond Greaves Summer School Papers, edited by Daltun O'Ceallaigh, *Reconsiderations of Irish History and Culture*, was published in July 1994.)

However, in view of the malign impact of the Orange Order's continuing attempts to march through sensitive nationalist areas in the North, and widespread ignorance, even on the left, of the historical origins and role of the Orange Order, the Connolly Association decided to approach the school and seek permission to publish Berresford Ellis' lecture in Britain in time for the climax of the 1997 Orange marching season. This was done, and done promptly.

David Granville,
Editor, The Irish Democrat

Your piece in Periscope (*LLB*, December 1997) entitled "Such Hard Choices" about Disability Living Allowance (DLA) spot checks by the DSS, misses an important point. DLA is paid towards costs arising from personal care and mobility needs. Many people receiving DLA are working but still need the allowance to pay for vital personal assistance and accessible transport to and from their place of work. They may not be eligible for the allowance if New Labour decide to tax or means test it next spring as has been rumoured.

People with paraplegia and other impairments which are fixed and visible often want to work but are refused that option because of employment discrimination. Equally, thousands of people with invisible and fluctuating conditions are being denied Incapacity Benefit — found fit for work by the All Work Test.

Like non-disabled people, disabled people all have different abilities and requirements. What we want are equal rights, through a well-funded benefits system and real job opportunities — both achievable through progressive taxation.

Kate Adams,
Incapacity Action

Socialists both inside and outside the Labour Party should be expressing 100% support for the actions of Ken Coates and Hugh Kerr. They have shown that they are socialists first and Labour Party members second. Commentators from the right and left of the Party have said that their expulsion was inevitable given that they were standing against the Party. Tony Benn compared the expulsions to those of Stafford Cripps and Michael Foot and suggested that Ken Coates will get back into the Party again in the future.

But this begs the question: does Coates want to belong to a party that cuts social security benefits to some of the most vulnerable people in British society? According to their recent article in *The Observer*, neither MEP would wish to be allowed back "into the fold". With this and other recent events, such as sections of the Labour left considering splitting from the Party, we are witnessing the beginnings of a movement and process which will, eventually, lead to the creation of a new socialist party. While this will be a very long time coming, and will involve considerable debate, conflict and strife, it is very encouraging to see its opening stages.

Paul Allender,
Canterbury

Geoff Goss' letter (November's *LLB*) says he was "very annoyed" over my article on DNA and "African Eve". Quite what he was annoyed about I'm not clear about as he says he favours this theory himself.

In fact, recent finds from Australia and Java do not in any way invalidate my case. They merely show that Homo Erectus, one of our ancestors, was actually capable of reaching Australasia nearly a million years ago and must have been more advanced than previously thought. I have no quarrel with that. I certainly never accused these people working on their discoveries of "racism" and can assure him there is no more virulent scourge of "political correctness" than myself! I recognise that our real opponents are not other scientists testing alternative theories but the whole slew of US Christians, Catholic obscurantists and Muslim fundamentalists worldwide, who argue that God made the world, a few thousand years ago, and to teach evolution is a mortal sin.

Sadly, the crux of his complaints seem to be that socialists "should not need a scientific proof". Here I profoundly disagree. Science is our beacon and guide. If racism had a scientific basis, all the arguments over "human nature" would be hard to refute. It doesn't — and we should not be afraid to use science to demolish superstition and bigotry. I am not opposed to racism, or speciesm because it's "nasty" but because it is illogical and against all our interests as socialists.

Keith Veness,
Holloway

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CORRESPONDENCE

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



Labour Left Briefing
PO Box 2378
London E5 9QU

There are two descriptions which should be applied to the Blair Government:

(1) Post social-democratic. This means that the traditional theory of social democracy has been superseded: namely that within the confines of liberal democracy a social democratic party shall in the medium to long term seek to advance the welfare of the working class. Pre-Blair the debate (Kautsky, Bernstein, Crossman to Bryan Gould) was how that should be done. Blair is now free floating in that he has no conception of linkage to the working class or social progress in his political schema. The Labour Party is to become merely a means of getting elected and career advancement of those involved.

(2) Proto-Thatcherite. The greatest success of the Thatcher years was the creation of a Labour Party in its own image. Blairism is Toryism by proxy. Neither of these descriptive concepts in my view should cause socialists to abandon the Labour Party as a site of struggle. This is not a principle based in stone but merely stated with reference to current conditions.

Peter Bowing, Hungary

Jack Straw says at present there is no evidence to force a change in the law on cannabis. Mr. Straw obviously has not done any research on the issue himself. In the last hundred years there have been at least a dozen major studies of marijuana policy. All of them found that marijuana prohibition is a disaster which ought to be repealed. You can find the studies Mr. Straw missed at http://www.druglibrary.org/schaffer — *Major Studies of Drugs and Drug Policy*. The collection includes the largest studies ever done by the governments of the US, the UK, Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands.

Clifford A. Schaffer, California

I am not surprised that John Humphreys found it impossible to get a proper reply out of Harriet Harman. I have been waiting nine months for even an acknowledgement concerning my letter about the changes to the Social Fund Maternity and Funeral Expenses [General], and Social Security [Claims and Payments] Amendments Regulations 1997.

The changes to these regulations were proposed by the last government at the end of last year and came into force on 7th April. As a listed respondent in the report of the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) on this subject and a councillor for a very deprived area of Leeds, naturally I was keen to put my views across and discover our Party's views on this matter in the process. I requested that the changes should be revoked if we formed a government — given their iniquitous effect on the poor. In particular, the changes to the Funeral Grant Regulations for those on benefit were vindictive. The SSAC Report states that "7,000 people per year will lose entitlement to benefit because of the introduction of the 'immediate family' test", in relation to funeral expenses.

Despite the promise of a reply "within 24 hours" I am still waiting nine months later. Given the lack of any official response and the disgraceful decision on lone parent benefit, I must assume that Ms Harman and New Labour are fully supportive of these Tory changes.

A simple yes or no answer would do.

Cllr Ian Coulthard, Leeds

Katabasis, a small independent press, is launching a new series of prose and poetry anthologies. *LLB* readers are invited to submit unpublished poems or short pieces of 'reportage' for the first two titles, which will be *Work* and *Home*. For the *Work* anthology, we would be particularly interested in reports of experiences of the effect of neo-liberal policies: flexibilisation, casualisation, redundancies, strikes, etc.

Please submit poems and prose for *Work* to me at 10 St Martins Close, London NW1 OHR and for *Home* to Kathleen McPhilemy, 28 St Margaret's Road, Oxford OX2 6RX. Please include an sae and be patient, as putting the books together will take some time.

Dinah Livingstone, London NW1

It is now clear what the intention was in raising the question of pensions at the election. Any dedicated follower of Beveridge knows that all you have to do to make a pensions system work, is to fix the "fair" rate for each person, use the statistical tables to discover life expectancy, then multiply the average wage by the required fraction to see how much everyone pays each week. All the silly talk about people living longer so we can't afford it, is nonsense designed to hide the fact that they want to continue driving workers into the hands of the insurance sharks.

Of course if everyone paid the 11% originally fixed, the fund would be almost in credit, but while they exempt all earning over £20,000 from paying the full amount it will never balance. While 11% is rather steep for the low-paid, if you have the income you should pay your share. Anyhow the pension has never been brought up to the strict relationship to wages laid down by Beveridge and recently it has got further and further behind as the cost of living has gone up.

Brian Bastin, Salisbury

I read the December edition of *LLB* and I am impressed with the standpoint you take. As a previously avid supporter of the Labour Party, in the light of the welfare cuts, I feel personally disenfranchised. I feel, as do many people I have spoken to, that an alternative is necessary to this Neo-Victorian Liberalism that Tony Blair promotes.

I am a student and feel sympathy for those who will be denied free education. I have sympathy for lone parents too. My mother, an ex-Blairite, is becoming increasingly frustrated. Your magazine is very encouraging.

Melanie Vance, Gorton

The vote in Parliament on Single Parent Benefit was 457 to 107. These figures do not reflect the views of the people — in fact they are almost the wrong way round.

The whips told off the Labour "rebels". This is grossly undemocratic. People with strong opinions should write to those "Labour" MPs who joined the 457 and apply some counter whip-pressure. It is these MPs votes which are seriously damaging the reputation of the Labour Party.

Geoff Wexler, Cambridge

Campaign to stop deportations

John Stewart, Treasurer of the National Coalition of Anti-Deportation Campaigns, reports on campaigning successes and details two cases still to be won.

WHILE DEPORTATIONS and removals from the UK continue to run at frightening rates (over 5,500 per year on average between 1991 and 1996 — over 100 every week) it is significant that where campaigns against deportations have been fought they have usually been successful. Since Labour's election in May we have seen victories for the Ogunwobis, the Onibiyos and Bridget Tong in London, for Prakesh and Prem Chavrimootoo, Mohammed Bashir and Mohammed Siddique in the Midlands and for Florence Okolo in Manchester. The common thread linking all these cases is that they had high profile campaigns behind them. In most cases the people faced with deportation have nothing left to lose and everything to gain from campaigning — the lesson is clear, campaigning does make a difference. Here are two cases where we could make that difference.

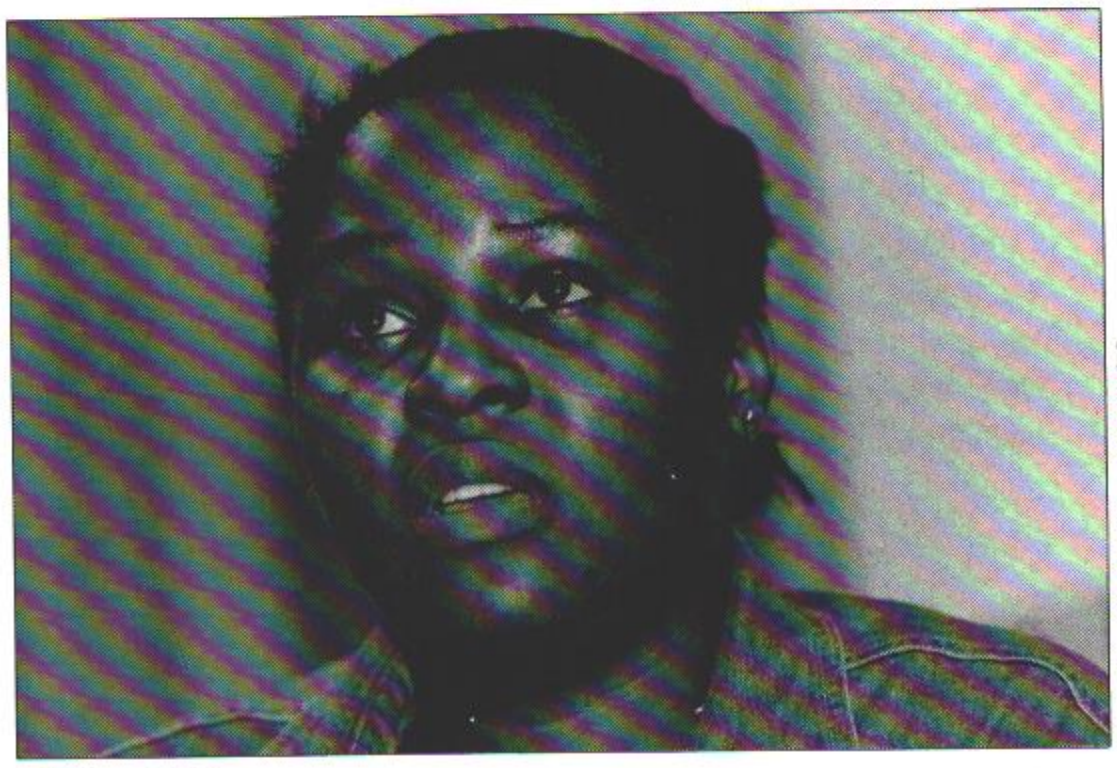


PHOTO: DUNCAN PHILLIPS

Gillian Achu

Gillian Achu and her three young sons, Wale (6), Larry (3) and Abideai (4 months) from Islington, North London, are facing deportation. The family were briefly held in detention at Tinsley House in December, an experience which shocked and traumatised them. Detention is intolerable for a single mother forced to flee her country of origin for her own safety. Ms Achu is threatened with removal to Nigeria though she left there eight years ago after being ostracised by her family (who have now disowned her) for refusing to be part of an arranged marriage to a man she did not like, never mind love. Gillian is fully settled here and Wale, Larry and Abideai, who were all born in Britain, have medical and social needs which are safely being met.

A campaign involving the local community, teachers and parents at Hargrave Park school, where Wale and Larry are pupils is supporting the fight to keep the Achu Family here. It is asking Home Office Minister Mike O'Brien to think twice about deporting Gillian to a place which is no longer her home, and where she would not be welcome and would probably face reprisals from the local chief she shamed by refusing to marry.

O'Brien should be ashamed of himself for trying to deport three children to a country they were not born in and have never seen. O'Brien, Wale, Larry and Abideai, have one thing in common: they were all born in England and if O'Brien claims England as his home then all things being equal, England should be the home of Wale, Larry and Abideai as well. Jeremy Corbyn, MP for Islington North, is also supporting the campaign. He stated that in view of Gillian and her family's very human needs, exacerbated by the age of her 4 month old baby, the Government must view her situation with compassion.

The campaign held a public meeting at Hargrave Estate TA Hall in mid-January where Gillian and her supporters spoke about their situation. Other campaigns of people facing deportation also addressed the meeting and agreed to discuss forming an Islington Anti-Deportation Group to support each other in campaigning and to draw on the experience of other successful campaigns in the area.

- For more information about the campaign ring: 0171-219 6173 or fax: 0171-219 2328.

Lian Hu Su, a Chinese truck driver and some of his friends helped students to escape from the police and army, following the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1989, by smuggling them away in their trucks at night. When some of the other drivers were arrested Lian fled to England and applied for asylum. This was refused by the Tories even though they had condemned China for the brutal and bloody suppression of the Student Movement for Democracy. Lian lodged an appeal but this was never completed. Lian Su remained suspicious of anyone "official" for a long time and still does not trust people easily.

Lian's wife Yan and their three children, Miaohung, a girl, and boys Ginghung and Zhaohung, joined Lian and they made their home in Tameside, Greater Manchester. They remain as independent as possible, Lian choosing to work long hours as a chef so that they can pay their own way. After the initial culture shock the children settled very well and made new friends. They quickly learned English and seem on track for academic success.

Fresh moves to remove Lian from England began in May last year. The family are certain that if they return to China, Lian will be imprisoned and possibly tortured and executed. It was only recently that the family started to seek legal help and advice.They are now under the wing of the Greater Manchester Immigration Aid Unit, who envisage that the family only needs time for the proper representations to be made. At the time of writing the family are waiting for fresh evidence from China.

- Contact address: Su Family Must Stay Campaign c/o GMIAU, 400 Cheetham Hill Road, Manchester, M8 9LE.

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