LABOUR LEFT BRIEFING

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Reclaim the Labour Party

Liz Davies and Christine Shawcroft, candidates for Labour's NEC Constituency Section

Our campaign for election to Labour's NEC will press our Government to deliver the changes for which people voted for on 1st May 1997: for an enhanced welfare state, investment in public services, and the redistribution of wealth.

As councillors representing some of the poorest wards in the country, we've seen the impact of Tory policies on working people. We know the scale of the challenge facing our Labour Government. The massive improvements needed urgently in health, education, housing, and transport cannot be met unless we redirect resources, through progressive taxation, from the rich to the poor.



Christine Shawcroft

We want to see increases in the state pension, a return to free higher education and a higher minimum wage. The proposal for a minimum of £7,000 a year for an adult in full-time work is a profound disappointment. Labour promised to abolish poverty pay and promised workers effective rights to trade union representation and recognition. So far, the Government has failed to deliver the substance of these commitments, yet the Party itself has remained silent.

If the NEC is to do its job, it cannot act as a mere rubber stamp for the Government. Changes in the Party constitution mean that most NEC members will owe their places to the patronage of the Party leadership. If elected, we will be accountable not to the Millbank Tendency but to ordinary Party members. We're proud of the pluralism and diversity of our team. It stands in marked contrast to the enforced conformity preferred by some uncritical supporters of the leadership.

We are campaigning to ensure that all members have a meaningful voice in the formation of Party policy. Consultation exercises must be genuine: too often, we've been rushed into decisions without any chance of real participation in informed discussion; too often, the opinions of CLPs and unions have been ignored. We will report regularly to CLPs and encourage invitations to attend local meetings and answer questions. We will work to make decision-making transparent. We will nurture debate and defend dissent.



Liz Davies

Our Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance has come together in response to an exceptionally challenging moment in our Party's history. Will our Party remain an independent, democratic movement with its own voice and priorities, or will it become merely an echo-chamber for the Government? A successful Labour Government will be one that listens and responds to voices from below and outside. Our task in the coming campaign and on the NEC will be to make those voices heard.

If the Party ceases to be the champion of working people, of organised labour, and of the poor and the excluded, then it will cease to be an effective instrument for social change, and will lose its moral and strategic compass. The campaign for the NEC is therefore about the soul of the Labour Party and the direction of the Labour Government.

Our message to every Party member is: this election is your chance to make a difference; this is your chance to make sure our aspirations towards social justice and our ideals of equality and democracy are voiced inside the Labour Party and heard by those outside. We ask you to do more than just vote for the six candidates in our alliance. We ask you to make every effort to convince every Party member you know to do likewise, and through meetings, leaflets, and letters to the newspapers, help us place the arguments of the Grassroots Alliance before Party members across the country.

Remember, the stronger the vote for the candidates of the grassroots alliance, the clearer the message to Tony Blair and Gordon Brown.

- **Liz Davies and Christine Shawcroft are standing with Andy Howell, Cathy Jamieson, Mark Seddon, and Pete Willsman as the candidates of the Centre-Left Grassroots Alliance.**

Labour Left Briefing

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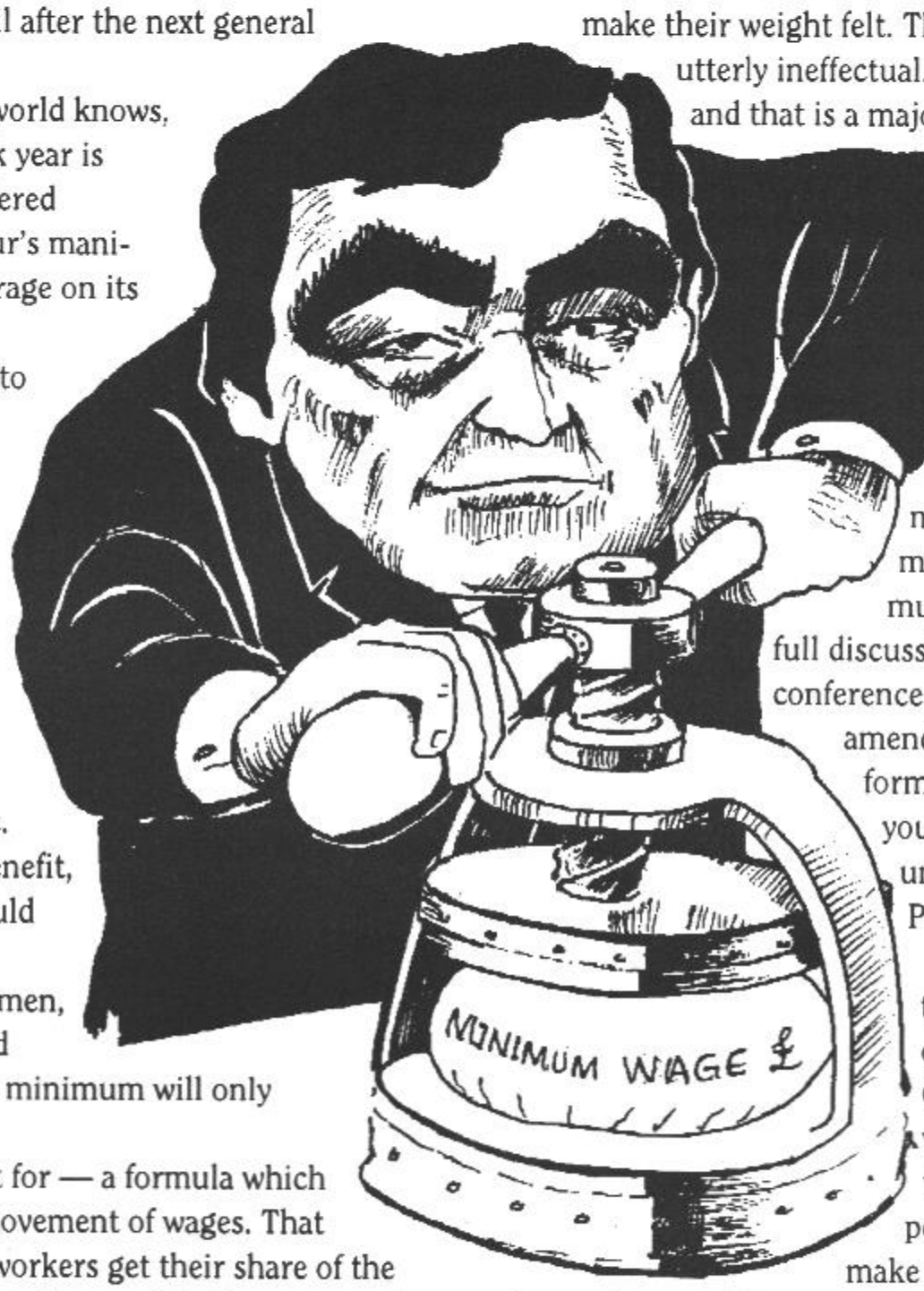
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How not to keep a promise

AT LAST YEAR'S general election, Labour pledged to put an end to poverty pay. Now it proposes to introduce a minimum wage for workers over 21 years of age of £3.60 an hour. By the time it comes on stream next April, it will be worth £3.45 at today's prices. It is likely to be frozen at that level until after the next general election.

As anyone who lives in the real world knows, £7,488 for a 40 hour week, 52 week year is poverty pay. It may, just, be considered compatible with the letter of Labour's manifesto commitment, but it is an outrage on its spirit.

Evidence submitted by UNISON to the Low Pay Commission showed that only 6% of all workers would benefit from a minimum wage set at £3.60, while double that number would gain from a £4.00 minimum wage and nearly one in five would be better off earning £4.42 an hour. For women, the impact of setting the minimum at the lower level is even more drastic. Less than 10% of all women will benefit, whereas more than one in four would gain from £4.42. Nearly 17% of all women, compared to only 7.3% of men, are paid on rates between £3.50 and £4.42. The Government's proposed minimum will only entrench this inequality.



We still need — and should fight for — a formula which ties the minimum to the general movement of wages. That is the only way to ensure low paid workers get their share of the fruits of economic growth. It ties together our highly segmented labour market, which can only be to the advantage of all workers. It gives the low paid a guarantee that they will not fall further behind, rather than leaving them at the mercy of governmental whim.

We still need — and should fight for — a minimum wage that is universal. There is no justification for paying some workers a lower rate for the job merely because of their age. Along with the welfare-to-work schemes, the derisory £3.00 minimum for young people aged 18-21 will promote a two-tier labour force in which young people are viewed as an ever-refilling pool of cheap labour. The Government's approach will institutionalise discrimination and encourage employers to adopt revolving door recruitment policies.

By the next general election, the whole minimum wage exercise may be viewed by millions as New Labour's kiss-off to the working class — not so much minimum wage as maximum lip-service to minimum effect.

It is instructive to recall the process of dilution here. The commitment to a minimum wage was won by a determined campaign emanating from the grass roots of the labour movement. But under Tony Blair, the idea of fixing the minimum according to a formula was rejected, and it was decided to place the matter in the hands of a Low Pay Commission including employers' representatives. Now, in a further shift away from a comprehensive and effective minimum wage, Blair's Government has rejected key recommendations of its own Commission — to the detriment of the young and the poor.

At each stage, the trade unions have whinged, but have failed to make their weight felt. The back-peddling has been endless and utterly ineffectual. Yes, we have a minimum wage, at last, and that is a major working class achievement. But the kind of minimum wage that is now on offer fails to grasp the nettle of poverty pay, and locks us into a dangerously stratified and unstable labour market. Under current conditions, so much more could have and should have been wrested from the employers. Labour Party members should flood MPs and ministers with messages of protest. We must mount a concerted drive to force a full discussion of alternatives at this year's annual conference. Labour MPs should put down amendments to the legislation to secure a formula, a higher rate, and a better deal for young workers. Above all, the trade unions must act, through the Labour Party and in the streets.

Adair Turner, Secretary-General of the CBI, said £3.60 was "at the top end of what was acceptable to business". Clearly, the Government's proposals were shaped by that awareness rather than any concern to protect young people's jobs. The trade unions should make clear that £3.60 for adults and £3.00 for youth are well below the bottom end of what is acceptable to workers. If the labour movemnet does not insist on more now it will get nothing later.

Racism and resistance

THE ACQUITTAL of the Campsfield Nine and the tide of revelations flowing from the Stephen Lawrence inquiry have shed a harsh light on the barbarous mechanics of racism in Britain today.

Why is it that Tony Blair can muster the moral outrage to urge bosses to sack workers convicted of "hooligan" offences overseas, but is content to let the perpetrators of racist crimes in this country run free, to unleash Group Four thugs on asylum seekers, and to allow the likes of Richard Tilt and Paul Condon to run our prisons and police?

Racism remains a central and inescapable challenge for the labour movement. It is a hydra-headed beast whose tentacles reach into workplaces and street corners, ports of entry and prisons, the media and the judiciary. New Labour's policies of social stigmatisation and scapegoating, blaming the poor for their poverty, and maintaining a fortress Britain within a fortress Europe, will only ensure the beast grows ever fatter and more menacing. ❑

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Minimum wage, minimum commitment

Helen Weatherley bends the Government's ear on Labour's proposals on the minimum wage.

SO, no big surprises from Margaret Beckett, announcing the setting of Britain's minimum wage. The Labour Government is now back-pedalling so fast from the election manifesto it's more entitled to wear the yellow jersey than any *Tour de France* cyclist. The idea of a minimum wage should be to guarantee a decent living income for all. Setting the hourly rate well below that level and with all the caveats and cop-outs being put forward, the whole concept has become a nonsense. £3.60 is nothing more than a token gesture.

Most of us expected little from a New Labour Government and certainly haven't been disappointed but this decision plumbs the depths to which they will go to sell out the principles of a party for the working people. What kind of message does it send to everyone who just wants to work to be independent and to support themselves and their families? With the European decency threshold set at more than £6 an hour, our rate sticks two fingers up at a huge number of Labour voters hoping for decency from this Government.

Of course the ideal solution would be for all the suits involved in fixing the level of the minimum wage to try to live on it for a while, and see what the figures they set mean in human terms. At less than £140 per week, that kind of money probably wouldn't pay these people's mortgages, never mind that they wouldn't have been considered for one in the first place.

And why penalise young people? Where is the justice in setting a lower rate for those under 21? I've yet to see the electric bill saying: "Tick here if you're under 21 because your electricity doesn't cost as much as the old uns". Or perhaps Mr Blair is arranging with his pal Mr Sainsbury for all his tills to have an "under 21" button for 15% off the total.

Not content with this blow, the Government is also including tips within the minimum hourly rate. Hairdressing bosses must be laughing all the way to the bank as they see themselves snipping away at their wage costs. Restaurateurs will be polishing the apples for the pigs' mouths while they work out how much cash they can save.

Union leaders have been proclaiming their commitment to a minimum wage as a great victory achieved by the unions. But unless it is a proper living wage, the victory is a hollow one. Union representatives have been involved in setting the rate recommended by the Low Pay Commission and will argue that they had little choice other than to lose out on the whole issue altogether. But if it is the unions who have been the impetus behind the minimum wage, then they have to be the ones to keep up some momentum to achieve a realistic hourly rate and flex some industrial muscle to do so if that is what it takes. After all, Labour bums are firmly on Government seats now, so there's no excuse for playing along supposedly to keep the electorate happy. Why are union leaders still clutching their caps in their hands?

Yet again the Government is showing that it is listening more to the voice of business than to that of the working people. Well, the answer is that we need to get a bigger loudhailer and send the front benches some Earex. So, pass the syringe gun and hope for Blair's sake that's all anyone shoots at him.



PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

Three years ago UNISON demanded £4.15. Unfortunately "half male median earnings" didn't fit on the T-shirts!

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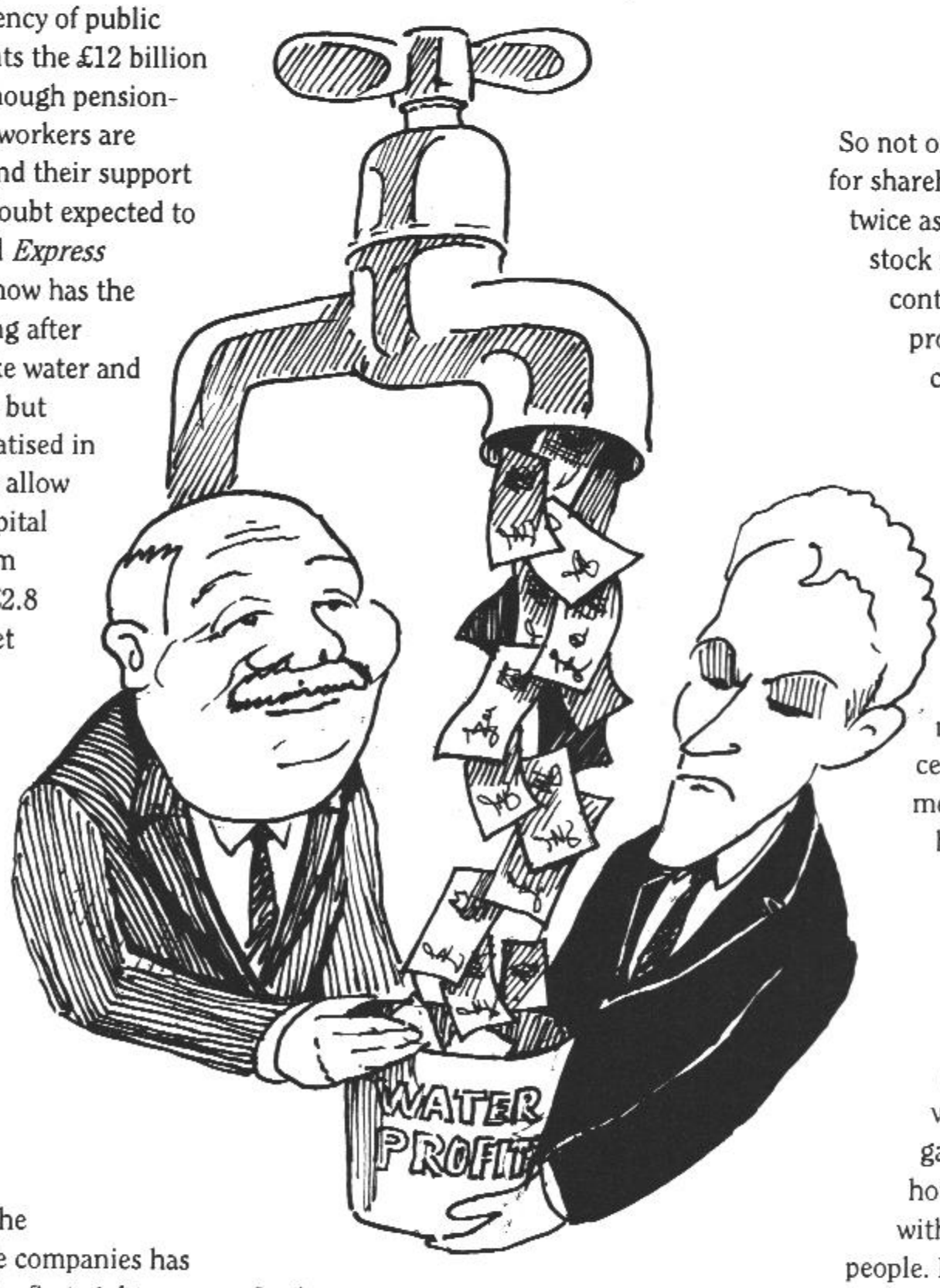
Awash with profit

New Labour, New Privatisation — Blair and Brown's love-in with the corporate sector continues. But as Mark Ridgeley reports, it's the consumer who will foot the bill.

DESPITE a lack of any real experience of how private corporations work, the Government seems convinced that privatisation will somehow improve the efficiency of public assets. Of course, it also wants the £12 billion that asset sales will bring, though pensioners, claimants and low-paid workers are unlikely to see much of it, and their support for the private sector is no doubt expected to keep the *Sun*, *Daily Mail* and *Express* onside and on-message. So how has the private sector fared in looking after previously public assets? Take water and sewerage, that unglamorous but essential public service, privatised in 1989, supposedly in order to allow the industry to double its capital investment programmes from about £1.4 billion a year to £2.8 billion a year in order to meet new EU water quality and environmental standards.

The first thing we all noticed was that our water bills started to go up, a lot. On average, our bills have doubled in cash terms since 1990; before then a single person on Income Support spent 6 to 7 per cent of means-tested top-up benefit on water; now it is over 13 per cent. Consequently, the amount that domestic customers paid to the privatised water and sewerage companies has risen by over £10 billion in the first eight years since privatisation.

So what have they done with our money? First, they made lots of profit. In the last four years the operating profit made from domestic customers increased from £1.8 billion to £2.5 billion a year. These profits alone have more than covered the companies' capital investment spending, which means that they would not have had to borrow money or raise funds through new share issues to finance investments — even though this was the supposed rationale for privatisation. In reality, they have borrowed money, and at very low interest rates as lenders couldn't find a more risk-free business — we all have to pay our bills or suffer the threat of disconnection. So if our bills could have paid for all the investment as well as everyday operating costs, where has the rest gone?



In the last four years alone, £5 billion of the £8.5 billion profits made by the ten water and sewerage companies have been taken out of the businesses in the form of dividends. These are paid to their parent companies (the water and sewerage businesses are subsidiaries), and these parent companies passed on over £3 billion to their shareholders in the form of ordinary dividends. No-one outside the companies, their financial market friends or the inept regulator, OFWAT, is asking what happened to the other £2 billion. The shareholding institutions have received over £9 billion in dividends since privatisation, and this, combined with a massive increase in share prices means that they have received a rate of return on their money which is almost double that of the *FT* All-Share Index.

So not only is this the safest investment for shareholders, it has given them a return twice as high as that for the average of all stock market quoted shares. Not content with this rising and very profitable income flow from us captive consumers, the companies have been trying to get us to cut down on water by pushing metering and thus reducing the amount they have to spend on capturing and delivering water.

Few people seem to have grasped the connection between metering and corporate finances, certainly not the major environmental organisations, who have been lining up with some of the companies to push for even higher prices and compulsory metering. Nor have they taken much notice of the fact that most of those opting for meters are in houses with high rateable values, which have the most to gain, rather than the low income households with children or others with high usage, such as disabled people. Neither do they seem to care that most of the costs of metering are borne by those of us without meters, even though this is an obvious subsidy by poorer to richer households. Water bills are already a form of regressive taxation, and metering makes it even more regressive.

This is not, of course, an argument against improvements in water quality and environmental standards, because in reality the water companies have more than enough of our money to pay for them, especially if they weren't quite so outrageously generous to their shareholders. In short, the water industry has made a pile of money out of this essential public service. It's not even clear that efficiency has been increased. Water companies have shed thousands of jobs but neither the workers nor the general public have had much to show for a doubling in bills. ❑

Hospital chiefs plan beds massacre

John Lister
London Health Emergency

A DEPARTMENT of Health press release on 2nd June heralded an important, if belated, change of policy. After 20 years of severe cutbacks in hospital acute beds, extra money is to be provided along with instructions that up to 2,000 additional NHS beds should be opened up as part of the drive to reduce soaring hospital waiting lists. Over 1.3 million are currently stuck in the queue for care: and without additional beds and resources, the Government could be trying to explain away even more increases as hospitals fill up with emergencies.

Health Secretary Frank Dobson explicitly denounced the "theology" of some NHS officials who believe that bed closures are essential to make the system more efficient. Plans for the closure of another 1,100 beds have apparently been blocked by ministers. It sounds like good news for patients. Unfortunately, this welcome shift comes in the midst of massive, unprecedented plans by health authorities all over the country to slash the number of front line beds and close down popular community hospitals.

One of the biggest planned cuts is in Worcestershire, where health chiefs are proposing to cut up to 35% of acute beds across the county over just five years, in order to balance the books and make way for a costly new privately financed hospital in Worcester. Worcestershire's Public Health Director Brian McCloskey admits that the plan would axe 27% of acute beds — but claims that this is in line with "best practice planning assumptions across the NHS". The operative word is "assumptions": there are no examples anywhere in Britain of hospitals working at this level.

The driving force behind many of these schemes is the Private Finance Initiative (PFI), the Tory plan embraced by New Labour, which hands over the planning of hospitals to management consultants — who are employed not by the NHS but by consortia of private, profit-seeking firms. PFI schemes routinely seek massive reductions in bed numbers, along with huge increases in "throughput" per bed.

The current English average throughput has levelled off at 54 patients per bed per year. But many PFI schemes plan to increase this to 88. The Worcestershire plan implies up to 104 patients per bed — double the current average! No PFI-built hospital has yet opened: but it is clear that these plans, which have no medical evidence to support them, hinge on a desperate gamble with people's lives.

Frank Dobson indignantly denies any knowledge of the details of merger plans and rationalisation schemes across the country. He has recently shown that he can intervene to boot out incompetent bosses at the National Blood Authority. It's time he asserted his authority to halt the looming massacre of hospital beds.

- There has been growing press speculation on the Government plans for a boost in spending as a 50th birthday present for the NHS. Estimates vary as to how much might be on offer — perhaps an extra £3.6 billion over three years. If this much were to be available as genuine extra money, over and above inflation — now running at 4% — it would certainly fill some of the gaps.

But if the new money is simply to be added to the current baseline NHS budget, services will be further squeezed and a new, bigger round of cuts will be triggered. Already a majority of health authorities and three quarters of all Trusts are embroiled in another round of cash cuts as they struggle to balance their books by April 1999.

Campaigners have been disappointed by the Government's retreat over mental health services. After leading pressure groups and lobbyists were led to believe that an extra £3,500 million might be available, ministers have scaled down the handout to a puny £350m a year — barely enough to make any difference at all to a pressurised service.

Recent pronouncements by Gordon Brown give further cause for concern. Levels of spending are set to rise by even less than they did under the last government, with Brown's main aim to deliver a massive cash surplus for the Exchequer each year. Health unions have been told the squeeze on public sector pay will continue to eat away at salaries, worsening staff shortages and clobbering low-paid support workers.

Fifty years after the post-war Labour Government braved the financial pressures of the day to launch the NHS, their latterday equivalents seem to lack the vision, courage and commitment to pump in the resources needed to restore it to health.

NHS 50th birthday — the ideals of Bevan

"One of the first merits of this Bill is that it provides a universal health service without any insurance qualifications of any sort. It is available to the whole population, and not only is it available to the whole population freely, but it is intended, through the health service, to generalise the best health advice and treatment. It is intended that there shall be no limitation on the kind of assistance given — the general practitioner service, the specialist, the hospitals, eye treatment, spectacles, dental treatment, hearing facilities — all these are to be made available free."

— Aneurin Bevan, moving the Second Reading of the National Health Service Bill, House of Commons, 30th April, 1946.

- A free copy of the special 16-page issue of *Health Emergency* celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the NHS is available from LHE, Unit 6, Ivebury Court, 325 Latimer Rd, London W10 6RA.

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Pensioners of tomorrow need to struggle today

Christine Shawcroft, candidate for Labour's NEC, reveals the holes in the Government's strategy for providing security in retirement.

"I WARN YOU not to be old," one erstwhile Labour Leader said in 1983. Fifteen years later, it's looking a far more desperate prospect. While the pensioner of today has to survive on a meagre state income some 50% lower than European counterparts, the pensioner of tomorrow will have to take his or her chances with the stakeholder or citizenship pension.

A Green Paper on pensions is due out later this year. Meanwhile, current Government thinking is revealed in the recently published Welfare Reform Green Paper. This document pledges the Government to retain the basic state retirement pension, but makes clear that it will only be increased in line with prices, thereby condemning those dependent on it to further marginalisation and deeper poverty. In 50 years time today's pension will only be worth a third of its current value.

The ageing population is presented as the problem and private funded pensions are presented as the solution. Yet these are two separate issues which should not be conflated. First, the issue of an ageing population is real but exaggerated. The OECD projects the proportion of retirement age population to remaining population over 20 as rising in Britain from 34% in 1995 to 46% by 2045. (By comparison this proportion is projected to rise to 76% in Italy and 68% in France).

The increase in Britain is affordable under the present pay-as-you-go scheme. Based on Government Actuary's figures over the next 50 years the net effect of increasing the basic pension in line with earnings would be only 0.4% of GDP, and for the restoration of SERPS only 0.8% of GDP. After all, people's contributions are still linked to earnings; why not their benefits?

More importantly, private funded schemes do not create greater national income. There is no magic money. The income stream of privately funded pensions, whether occupational or personal pension schemes, still has to be paid for from the wealth created by current workers.

Proponents present it is axiomatic that "fully funded" schemes give a better return than "unfunded" schemes. (Even the language is used to imply that they are giving you a guaranteed income where none previously existed.) Yet there is no evidence that "funding" raises GDP; it merely represents a transfer of one form of saving to another. Under the "funded" schemes contributions are invested on the Stock Exchange and the returns through capital gains or dividend payments become your future pension (and remember your investment can go down as well as up). If the real problem is an ageing population, the pensions firms will in future need to become net sellers of securities. The costs will still need to be met.

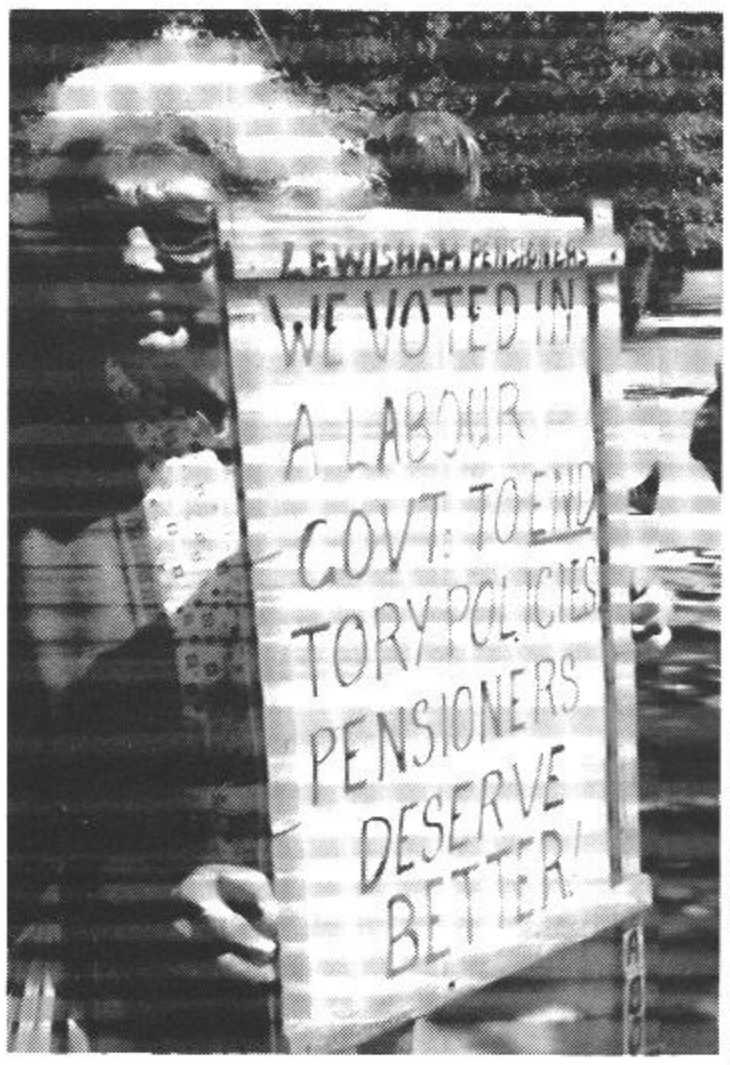


PHOTO: STEVE FRENCH

March for social justice, 30/5/98.

Under the National Insurance/SERPS pay-as-you-go scheme, the payments of today's pensioners are met from the contributions of today's workers. It is a simple and financially efficient scheme whose administration costs are but a fraction of private schemes — even before taking account of their profit margins. The cost of running state pensions is about 1% of pensions paid compared with up to 20% for private pensions. Not only is the state scheme simple and secure, but it represents a binding expression of inter-generational solidarity.

Of course, the proposed change is more than mere cost-cutting. It breaches the principal of universality. It creates a two-tier welfare system — stakeholder pensions for better-off workers and citizenship pensions for the poorest. Universality is vital to reach people in need. To those who raise the spurious concern of millionaires getting state pensions the answer is simple: tax the millionaires. It is more efficient and brings in greater revenue.

But, it is said, the stakeholder pension helps to make us all capitalists. It gives us all a stake in the system. Everyone cheers when the stock market rises and fears when it crashes, because their own pensions are at stake. We all then have a stake in perpetuating rather than transforming the system. Workers have more to lose than their chains — they can lose their pensions as well. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown boast of the virtues of Britain's flexible labour market, by which they mean short-term, insecure, low wage employment interspersed with periods of unemployment. Yet these are the very labour market circumstances which make it impossible to save for a private pension and highlight the benefits of SERPS. Far from modernising the welfare state, the Green Paper looks backward to a form of poor relief.

The one thing most people seek from a pension is security, yet the proposed stakeholder pensions represent a huge gamble. A decent universal pension state funded pension scheme is a concrete expression of core Labour values. It is about the redistribution of income to ensure we all share in the country's rising prosperity. Our answer to the Green Papers should be to fight for re-linking pensions to earnings and fully restoring SERPS — because there is no just and practical alternative. The pensioners movement has fought a great campaign in highlighting these issues — but it is the rest of us who need to worry most. ❑

No delay for the GLA!

The sooner the elections are held for the new London Authority the better, argues Ken Livingstone MP.

THE Government's decision to put off the elections to the Greater London Authority until the last possible moment is a massive mistake. The fact that it was leaked to the BBC rather than announced to Parliament itself raises serious questions.

On the BBC bulletin, Nick Raynsford, the Minister for London, argued that the Government needed to hold off the elections until May 2000 because the legislation is complex. Nonetheless, the Government is ploughing ahead with equally difficult legislation, such as a Scottish Parliament with tax-varying powers. There is no reason why the House of Commons could not meet on a number of additional Fridays to push the legislation forward. This is a matter of political will and I am tired of London taking a back seat. I intend to raise the matter at the next meeting of the National Executive Committee.

It makes much more sense for the elections to take place as early as possible. As any government moves out of its honeymoon, there is the danger that it will make losses locally. That factor may well be exacerbated by the recent slowdown in growth, brought about by the combination of high interest rates and the high exchange rate of the pound, policies likely to precipitate a recession, an unfavourable environment in which to fight the first GLA elections. A senior Tory in the House of Commons recently told me bluntly that it was not in the interests of his party to support my call for early elections. The longer it went on, he argued, the greater the potential for Labour to lose support.

The poor turnout in the referendum on London — 33 per cent — is a warning to Labour in the capital: London is not a safe electoral area. When Labour was in government the last two times, we were wiped out in the GLC elections. In both 1967 and 1977, the Tories won an absolute majority of the votes cast. Although the Tory vote is currently in a state of collapse, Labour cannot bank on the continued electoral success we enjoyed under Major. Underlying Labour's recent electoral success in the capital, London remains a marginal and it should be fought like one.

Some in the Millbank Tendency are busily fighting the wrong enemy. They were quick to dissociate themselves from the near-unanimous vote of the Greater London Labour Party in favour of an OMOV ballot to select Labour's candidate for mayor. Indeed, instead of exploiting Labour's record during the last GLC, some members of the front bench seem more keen to use Tory arguments to undermine it. For example, in a recent edition of the *New Statesman*, Glenda Jackson argued: "Fares Fair was popular in some quarters, but I hasten to say it was also unpopular. Some people got very angry, asking, 'Why should we subsidise those bloody tourists?'" Those people, of course, were Tory boroughs such as Bromley.

There would be considerable support for John Prescott on the backbenches if he were to tackle the increasingly rudderless direction over London. We want to fight these elections in the most favourable circumstances, as soon as possible, so that we can get on with governing London.

A day out in Millbank Towers

Rebecca Bowers, a Parliamentary Assistant to a Blairite Labour MP, gives a worker's eye view on efforts to mobilise research staff to help clone the model New Labour MP.

MILLBANK IS still trying to control the legions of new MPs through their Parliamentary and constituency staff. Last month I was invited to a day of lectures and workshops on the "new partnership", "winning again" and of course, "stepping stones to the next general election".

We were told that Labour is now a "modern" and "professional" party with, yes, a Business Plan. "I have no problem with the term", Tom Sawyer assured us. MPs are seen as an important resource in this evolution and who better to make sure that the most is got out of them than their staff. "Don't forget it's your jobs that will be on the line too," Peter Mandelson told us with what might have been a smile.

In February a much bigger event was addressed by Blair, Brown and Mandelson, as well as Tom Sawyer and Margaret McDonagh. The QEII conference hall was packed in the morning with lots of new MPs besides their staff and Party workers. In the afternoon workshops (what else) MPs' staff were invited to detail a typical week of activities for our employers and then plan their days more efficiently on a large timetable so as to make time for telephone voter contact and "membershipping". Did I imagine resentment amongst Party workers at the idea that MPs might count going to receptions or on foreign trips as part of their work?

The latest meeting was for South East region only: "we have scaled down our expectations," said the Head of the Elections Unit. They had forgotten, he admitted, that candidates had become MPs with lots of new duties! There was even talk later of the contracts between MPs and their CLPs (if you want to be a key seat you've got to "blitz", ie. knock on voters' doors, for two hours a day for 46 weekends a year and for two weeks in the recess — among other things) becoming more "flexible".

This time, an MP's constituency assistant had been invited to speak about what his daily work actually entails. "And you want me to campaign as well?" he asked. I think he spoke for us all. MEPs' staffs were even more disenchanted with the targeting of next year's Euro election as only a stepping stone.

The constituency assistant told the organisers: "Don't underestimate as a campaigning tool the role of a caring helpful constituency office. That is the MP's reputation." Yes, and don't forget that Government policies are more likely to be effective, never mind popular, if MPs work closely with organisations and groups in their constituency — including of course those in the business sector; help organise and get ministers to address conferences; make speeches themselves and appear at all kinds of events; promote local initiatives by providing them with a Westminster showcase; lobby ministers on behalf of aggrieved interest groups and individuals. These are the kinds of things that staff are paid to help their employers do — by the public purse and not by the Labour Party besides, sometimes, trying to change the law.

Hearts and minds first, voting intentions second. Less of your bullet points and frantic running around and more of those social events and political discussions that Millbank's own surveys reveal is what new members want. A bit less easy to control, of course. But I for one won't want my job if by the next election I am ashamed of what the Labour Party has become.

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Better late than never

John Stewart reports from the London Labour Party Conference.

ACCORDING TO the Greater London Labour Party rule book, the GLLP conference should be held on the first weekend in March, the date decided by the Regional Executive Committee (REC), and the format agreed by an elected Standing Orders Committee. The first GLLP conference for three years was held in mid-June, the date chosen by regional General Secretary Terry Ashton without reference to the REC, and without the Standing Orders Committee meeting. The postponement prevented members taking positions the leadership disagreed with in the run-up to the local elections and London Mayor referendum.

As delegates arrived they were given a ballot paper to decide which two topics (out of the seven in the resolutions book) would be debated and then went to workshops to discuss bland policy documents.

In the plenary session, London Labour Party Chair Jim Fitzpatrick MP was forced to apologise for mistakes on the documents listing nominees for the London executive where some candidates were somehow left off. Apart from this small hiccup, of course, he assured us everything was fine. Geoff Martin, of London UNISON, moved reference back of the chair's report and when this was refused Christine Shawcroft of Poplar and Canning Town CLP formally challenged the chair's ruling. A two-thirds majority was needed for the challenge to succeed and, when the result came in, it couldn't have been closer: 65.59% voted to support the challenge (86.7% of trade unions and affiliated societies).

Later Leonora Lloyd, left candidate for the chair, got 25 % of the vote against Fitzpatrick. The left lost Dorothy Macedo and Jeff Slee from the regional executive, Christine Shawcroft and Barry Camfield retained their places, Raj Jethwa was elected for the first time. In the National Policy Forum elections Lorraine Monk, of the soft-left, and Maggie Cosin, of the hard-right, were elected.

Terry Ashton presented the 1996 accounts, promising the 1997 accounts would be available soon. When GLLP vice-chair Val Stansfield invited questions Teresa Pearce asked why the accounts show £288,052 income as "unallocatable". Terry Ashton claimed the financial records "such as they were" had been destroyed by a former staff member. This is an astonishing allegation and begs the question why nothing had been done about it. His report descended further into farce when Jeff Slee asked him why the conference had been postponed from its original date in March. Ashton waffled pitifully and the conference hall rang with mocking laughter.

When we finally got some debate there were large majorities for resolutions defending the right of conference to meet at least bi-annually and submit motions, and for the right of any London Party member to seek nomination to be Labour's candidate for London Mayor in an OMOV ballot. The last was passed with only two votes against. All the divisions in the conference clearly showed the trade unions to be to the left of the CLPs — a new situation for many of us.

Unfortunately the way the conference was organised allowed no time for debate on racism, cuts in the fire service and the Government's decision to privatise London Underground. Overall the conference confirmed that the Blairites are in control of Party structures and are adapting those structures to shore up their positions. But they don't have the support of a majority of London Party members on all areas — where the left works hard it can still win victories on key votes. ❑

Passed at GLLP Conference

Selecting candidates for Mayor and Assembly

This Regional Conference welcomes the Government's speedy action on the General Election pledge of democratic government for London and congratulates them and the Party in London on the successful outcome of the Mayor and Assembly referendum which overwhelmingly affirmed Londoners' desire for the restoration of their own political voice.

The London Labour Party looks forward to the democratic selection of a Labour candidate for mayor. We believe that Labour's candidate must be selected democratically on the basis of a One Member One Vote ballot of the Greater London Labour Party membership in London. We believe any member of the Greater London Labour Party should be entitled to seek nomination, and we support the following simple and democratic system for selection:

1. Labour's selection should be made by eligible Labour Party Members in London through a One Member One Vote ballot.
2. All candidates who are nominated by a minimum of 12.5% of London CLPs (that is 10 CLPs) will automatically be short-listed so that their names will appear on the ballot papers to select Labour's candidate.

The selection process should be made through full participation and nomination by branches, and locally affiliated trade unions, Co-operative and Socialist Societies.

We seek to attract representative candidates to the Greater London Assembly. The selection process should therefore:

1. Implement a ballot of all members in the appropriate constituency to select nominees for the Greater London Assembly.
2. Implement a London wide ballot procedure to determine order of ranking of the nominees in the event of a PR electoral system.
3. Ensure that there are 50% women nominee candidates.
4. Ensure that ethnic candidates are given appropriate safeguards for representation.
5. Ensure that the preparation of the election manifesto is done with the widest consultation.



National Policy Forum Elections

The Campaign for Labour Party Democracy is urging support for the following candidates:

Scotland: Joanne Lamont (Glasgow Govan) ● **North and Yorkshire:** Eddie Hart (Haltemprice and Howden), Gerald Ramsden (Leeds Central) ● **North West:** Elaine Abbot (Preston) ● **Central:** Russell Cartwright (Luton South), Paul Madeley (Nottingham South) ● **West Midlands:** Cherry Mosteshar (Oxford West and Abingdon) ● **London:** Dorothy Macedo (Finchley and Golders Green), Kumar Murshid (Poplar and Canning Town), Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) ● **South East:** Anne Belworthy (Canterbury) ● **South and West:** Ray Davison (East Devon), Bernadette Hartley (Tewkesbury)

Save Twiggy

One of the biggest laughs on General Election night was seeing ultra-modernisers like Stephen Twigg and Jim Murphy win such "unwinnable" seats that they are bound to lose next time and end their Parliamentary careers. Labour's NEC has stepped forward with a consultation paper on reselection that — amongst other things — could allow such MPs a "chicken run" to challenge sitting MPs in safer seats. A tougher Approved List of candidates (in Scotland this has already led to soft-left MP Ian Davidson being excluded from the Scottish Parliament panel); a trigger mechanism for reselection; and whips sending reports to MPs' constituencies are all included in the document.

● Copies from/responses to: Labour Party Constitutional Unit, Millbank Tower, London, SW1P 4GT.



We want £4.61 !

UNISON annual conference showed the union to be in a fighting mood. Tony Dale, Manchester UNISON, reports.

UNISON conference took a major initiative in voting to organise a national demonstration on the demand for a minimum wage of at least £4.61 per hour. The union's Executive tabled a two page emergency motion criticising the Low Pay Commission's recommendations for a minimum wage of £3.60 per hour with a lower rate for young people. Rodney Bickerstaffe, UNISON's General Secretary declared: "£3.60 at the end of the 20th century in one of the richest countries on Earth cannot be fair, cannot be right and cannot be our future".

The union reaffirmed its commitment to the half male median earnings formula which at present translates into £4.61 per hour. The NEC committed itself to campaign vigorously for this figure and specifically stated that the union's Labour affiliated section (the Affiliated Political Fund) would be used to "lobby the Labour Party in support of UNISON policies on the National Minimum Wage".

An amendment calling for a national demonstration over the minimum wage was victorious despite being opposed by the National Executive. Now all sections of the union need to mobilise to make it as big and effective as possible. UNISON's leadership should name the date for the demo as soon as possible. All trade union and Labour activists should take up UNISON's initiative to build a powerful movement with broad support to demand a change in direction for the Government.

On the Government's *Fairness At Work* proposals, the NEC was instructed to campaign for "replacing the unfair, unworkable 40 per cent voting ballot threshold with a simple majority of those voting in union recognition ballots."

Conference agreed to lobby and campaign for the repeal of all anti-union legislation, voted down proposals for a national demonstration on union rights and agreed to affiliate to the United Campaign for the Repeal of the Anti-Union Laws.

The rights of members to campaign within the union was a major debate. In recent times, there has been a worrying increase in the number of disciplinary investigations launched against members and branches affiliated to the Campaign for a Fighting and Democratic UNISON. Conference voted to ban branches funding "organised factions within the union". However a motion which welcomed the action taken by the NEC against the CFDU and SWP was defeated. The right of branches and regions to campaign for policy change was also reaffirmed and the Hillingdon strikers had all their membership rights reinstated reversing an NEC decision. Changes to the union's disciplinary procedures were debated. Concern over the number of disciplinaries against activists resulted in the NEC's proposed changes being voted down.

The NEC succeeded in stopping branch donations to the CFDU but conference reaffirmed the right of branches and members to organise and campaign within the union.

Liz Davies spoke to a UNISON Labour Left fringe meeting about the left slate for the Labour NEC elections. The meeting displayed that the growing links between union activists and the Labour left are fundamentally important if a broad Labour and trade union alliance is to be put together to build campaigns for properly funded public services, a decent minimum wage and full union rights.

Islington sacks strikers

On 20th May 1998, Islington Council sacked twelve members of UNISON for the crime of going on unofficial strike. Ironically, the same day the Government's *Fairness at Work* White Paper proposed that the sacking of workers on official strike would constitute unfair dismissal.

Islington Council has centralised its housing advice services so that 29 housing advice workers had to reapply for 31 jobs and were tested. The process itself seems to have been fundamentally flawed: different tests were applied to different workers and the result was that all the men and most of the white workers were successful, leaving women, mainly from black and ethnic minorities, unsuccessful.

In protest, the housing advice section went on unofficial strike and gained the support of UNISON at a national level. They were advised to return to work and conduct a ballot for official strike action. That same day, they received letters delivered by courier sacking them. Two days later, letters purporting to have been written before 20th May arrived warning them that they might be sacked. UNISON is now proceeding with a ballot of all UNISON members working for Islington Council. 500 supporters attended a march through Islington and Islington Fire Brigades Union has been writing to the local newspapers in support of the sacked workers.

Islington's New Labour Council seems determined not to negotiate with the sacked workers. Islington Labour Party is still reeling over its defeats in the local elections resulting in a council with no overall control and held by Labour on the casting vote of the Mayor. Undoubtedly one of the major reasons for this defeat was the Council's poor housing services. Instead of scrutinising their own failures, the Council prefers to blame and scapegoat the twelve sacked workers.

MSF demand £6 NMW!

THE MSF conference came up with few surprises. It voted for a £6 minimum wage and opposed much of *Fairness at Work*. Overall, on the policy issues, it was on the left, although it agreed to participate in the New Labour set up of policy forums, etc.

Elections to various positions underlined that activists are fairly evenly split between left and right. This was a rules revision conference, but very few rules were actually revised because the NEC — as usual — had failed to consult the membership in most cases. A proposal to change the status of the reserved women's seats — in order to protect a current right-wing holder — got not one vote in support after it became clear that not even the women's committee had been consulted!

The leadership had little opportunity to manipulate the conference because the left wing president Sharon Allen was an extremely good chair and allowed no nonsense from anyone, including the NEC. Unfortunately, a right winger was elected to take her place, so next year will be business as usual.

Behind the scenes, it was different story. Unity Left had planned its usual social, including a presentation to the recently retired Assistant General Secretary Barbara Switzer. Someone phoned the hotel and cancelled the room. The do was rearranged for the next night, but the leadership changed the times of other events to clash! As Barbara said, it was quite flattering to know that they fear the left so much.

The meeting organised by the Campaign for a Democratic Union was standing room only. Unfortunately, the featured speaker, Dennis Skinner, was unable to attend because of a family death, but Liz Davies, speaking on behalf of the NEC centre left slate, did come and made an excellent contribution.

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Firefighters winning in Essex

"It's a waste of time talking to it," was how the tough-talking Chair of the Fire Authority in Essex described the Fire Brigades Union Executive. Councillor Tony Wright went on, "I would rather resign than negotiate with it...it's going to be a battle of wills now." A normal management-union bust up, but in Essex the firefighters have massive support among the local people they serve and the councillor in charge, whose other words of wisdom include "there is also the question of whether they have broken their contracts and whether we will sack them", represents Labour.

The past month has seen demonstrations, firefighters working with no pay when management refused to allow strikers back to work halfway through shifts, and local papers with front page "no cuts" campaigns.

Wright is eating his words. Within a week he backed down on a threat to cut a vital aerial ladder. The dispute continues in defence of 16 jobs and against cuts of £1.2 million, and in face of bewildering management tactics such as spending £1 million a month on emergency Green Goddesses and admitting that there is a considerable financial reserve ("don't tell the FBU", management said).



PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

National FBU demo, 12/6/98.

Tube strike bites hard

THE RMT on the London Underground (LU) is fighting on two fronts: politically against privatisation of sections of the underground and industrially to secure jobs and conditions. Even before John Prescott's "partnership" announcement, the RMT had held mass meetings, lobbies and demonstrations against the Labour Party's infatuation with private sector involvement in public services. LU managers are wringing their hands, hence the opening salvo on the second front — the 48-hour strike on June 15th and 16th.

Passengers faced with closed stations and a sporadic train service were confused by LU's triumphalist claims of how well they were coping. They would have been horrified to know precisely what it took to run this reduced service. Station staff responded magnificently to the call for strike action. Managers with no operational experience were yanked away from their desks, kitted out with reassuring-looking hi-visibility vests over their suits and sent to stand by the ticket barriers. Other stations were left completely unstaffed — no doubt a foretaste of the future. RMT train maintenance staff did not come to work and some in the craft unions respected picket lines. Trains were prepared and given their daily safety checks by managers who were hurriedly given basic training. Signal cabins were taken over by managers with only a rudimentary knowledge of signal operation.

An RMT activist reports on the Tube strike.

The trains, unfortunately, were driven by train drivers. With some notable exceptions, ASLEF drivers crossed picket lines. General Secretary-elect David Rix put out a personal message of solidarity and support to the striking RMT members; present General Secretary Lew Adams put out a notice informing his members that they were required to work. As drivers are evenly divided between the two unions, it was the ASLEF drivers who colluded with LU managers to provide half the normal service. In some areas where ASLEF drivers respected the picket line, such as at Edgware Road depot, the strike was most effective. There was no Circle Line service and the Hammersmith and City service was barely existent.

Many ASLEF drivers have for so long been conditioned to believe that they have nothing in common with the other riff-raff on the railway. However, supporting the RMT action to stop "public/private partnership" is in their own best interests. If a private company takes over the maintenance of trains, why not the operation of trains next? Even assuming that train operations remain "public", the drivers are not safe. The public company will have to pay user fees to the private track operator. They will find it is a "financial drain" to run off-peak and weekend services. Remember, this is a business, not a service. Who needs so many off-peak trains between Rayners Lane and Uxbridge? Bang go 30 drivers' jobs at Acton and Neasden.

However infuriating, there are always moments of hilarity when people offer their excuses for crossing a picket line. I heard a driver say that he refused to support any strike against a Labour government! This was in marked contrast to excuses offered by some of the handful of RMT members who worked. What we heard from them was despondency that this Labour Government was indistinguishable from the Tories and had a large enough majority to do what they liked. People remember bitterly how Glenda Jackson swore, like Scarlett O'Hara after Atlanta burned, that this would never happen, brandishing a huge pair of scissors across the Underground map.

Despite their huge majority, we can beat the Government's privatisation plans. If we're unable to appeal to a Labour government's principles, as they have been abandoned, then perhaps we have to hit them where it hurts: public popularity. Along with the industrial struggle, the RMT is also continuing with the political campaign— there was impressive support from the Reclaim the Streets campaigners during the strike. This issue needs to be central to the discussion on a London Authority. It needs to become London's poll tax. ❑



Stitched up!

John McIlroy, author of *Trade Unions in Britain Today, Strike!* and *Industrials Tribunals* looks at how the trade unions have responded to Labour's Rights at Work and minimum wage packages..

THE publication of *Fairness At Work* and the recommendations of the Low Pay Commission finally confirm that New Labour will not reverse the substantial defeat unions suffered at the hands of the Tories. The changes involved would trim the edges of the Thatcherite inheritance. Its core will remain. Blair boasted the proposals were token surgery to what will remain "the most lightly regulated labour market of any leading economy". He soothed CBI worries by calling them "a settlement for this Parliament".

Union leaders have few objections. John Monks pronounced the package "a lot better than we expected". But on every disputed point the bosses have won hands down. The unions got precisely what Blair wanted them to get. Yet there are grounds for optimism: what is an important watershed in industrial relations holds the potential for a significant fightback.

The profound, calculated failure of those we have trusted with the custody of our unions is highlighted by the Low Pay Commission's recommendations on the minimum wage. The TUC's policy — blurred by the General Council — remains a minimum wage of "over £4:00 an hour". UNISON's policy is "half male median earnings" — £4.60 an hour. Yet the three trade union members of the Commission (Bill Callaghan of the TUC, Rita Donaghy of UNISON and Bill Gates of the Knitwear Union) supported £3.60 an hour and £3.20 for youth (later reduced to £3!). They might have stood up for established policy and given a minority report. The recommendation, they proudly asserted, is "in line with the views of most businesses" — exactly, that's the problem. The proposals, they purred "were agreed unanimously through social partnership ...they are simple, straightforward, prudent and supportive of a competitive economy".

That's what social partnership gets us: £3.60 an hour, £7,000 a year. How would Bill or Rita like to live on that? How can they support the breadline for other people, including many members of their own unions whose policy is to demand much more? How can they support a figure of 6.5% below the average rate set by the 24 wages councils before the Tories abolished them in 1993?

Their justifications are threadbare:

- If they had recommended more they would have divided the Commission and the level set would then have been less than £3.60 — nonsense. Blair is happy with £3.60, so are the employers.
- Blair might have dissolved the Commission, which is now likely to remain in being — it will as long as it proposes poverty wages.

Rodney Bickerstaffe, leader of Rita's union bewailed: "£3.60, for an hour of anybody's life at the end of the 20th century, in one of the richest countries on earth!" He might have added — "and under the self ascribed radical, reforming Government of a party financed by millions from my low paid members".

Talk is cheap. Why didn't Rodney do something, like ensuring Rita stuck with UNISON policy? A minority report would not have produced a level above £3.60. It could have produced a platform from which to launch a campaign for an adequate level. Isn't that what unions are for? Why should the low paid join unions when they ignore members' policies and support figures that Ken Cameron of the Fire Brigades Union described fairly and precisely as "a disgrace"?

If we take the CBI's rhetoric with a cellar of salt, then the employers also got everything they wanted on union recognition. Yet the TUC acceptance of a 30% threshold was wrong. Opinion polls report a majority in favour of a straightforward majority for those voting in recognition ballots.

If 31% of the electorate was sufficient to elect the Blair Government, and if Blair could hail as "a triumph" a 25% vote for a London Mayor, then a simple majority of those voting should suffice to secure recognition.

The bosses' demand that 40% of the workers involved must vote YES was simply acceded to — despite Monks' last minute capitulation and acceptance of a 30% threshold. So if 55% vote YES but only 70% actually vote, there will be no recognition.

This is worse than it seems on paper. Anybody with any experience of recognition disputes knows how difficult it is to get workers to support a union or join it until it is recognised and they can see benefits and protection in place. So much for the "fast track" (50% membership equals automatic recognition) boasted as a concession by the TUC. In the past, when times were easier for unions, ACAS would recommend recognition when 33% supported the union.

The proposed procedure for moving to a ballot is complex and provides opportunities for employers to interfere. It will be supervised by the Central Arbitration Committee, who will determine the crucial "bargaining unit" — ie. which workers are to vote. But the end result, if unions win, is unclear. The emphasis is on voluntary agreement and partnership. But with many anti-union employers this won't wash. What seems to be suggested is that

Fairness at work?

Tony Blair: £105,000
Margaret Beckett: £89,000
Bill Morris: £71,000
John Edmonds: £71,000
Rodney Bickerstaffe: £61,000
The other Bill Gates: £45,000
Low paid worker on New Labour's minimum wage: £7,000

Fact box

- Companies with more than 20 workers will have to recognise unions where there is a majority for recognition in a workplace ballot and a minimum YES vote of 40% of those to be represented. If more than 50% of workers in a particular bargaining unit are members, recognition will be automatic.
- All members will have rights to representation — whether their union is recognised or not. It will be unlawful to discriminate against trade unionists by denying them pay increases or blacklisting them.
- The Low Pay Commission recommends a statutory rate of £3.60 an hour for workers aged over 20 and £3.20 for 18-20 year olds.
- Workers will be able to claim unfair dismissal at a tribunal after one year's continuous employment, rather than the current two years. Dismissals arising from lawful industrial action can be reviewed by tribunals.
- Maternity leave entitlement will be increased from 14 to 18 weeks. Parents will have the right to 12 weeks unpaid leave before a child is eight years of age. All parents will be guaranteed time off on compassionate grounds.
- The Commissioner for the Rights of Trade Union Members will be abolished and the powers to progress complaints against unions by members transferred to the Certification Officer.

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employers who won't play ball will be saddled with legally binding arbitration — something short of recognition. Finally the exemption of companies with fewer than 20 employees leaves some five million workers with no rights to recognition.

The rest of the proposals are largely as advertised. A right to be represented by a union official, even where the union is unrecognised, is useful, but no substitute for strong workplace organisation. The enhanced maternity and parental benefits are welcome — but required of the Government by EU directives. John Smith's "rights from day one of employment" are finally consigned to oblivion.

Employees will have to work for twelve months before they are protected against dismissal — better than the Tories' two years, worse than Old Labour's six months, the qualification period before 1979. The increase in compensation awards is good but the right to protection against dismissal is only extended to lawful industrial action — those sacked for taking unofficial or solidarity action still stand outside the law. Even if the action is "lawful", under the Tory laws dismissal will not be automatically unfair — the tribunal will review the rights and wrongs of the sackings and the strike.

Any change in the legislation on strikes is absent — although there is the promise of a review of the Code of Practice on Industrial Ballots. There is a commitment to look at "zero hour contracts" and an official procedure for derecognition.

Overall I can only endorse the balanced verdict of the *Financial Times* editorial on the White Paper: "it does nothing to tamper with the key reforms of the Thatcher years". As Blair himself affirms: that's all for this century.

Bill Morris says these changes will turn the tide. They won't. Not in themselves, and not if we leave matters to Bill and his brothers. But the left in the labour movement can and must take advantage of the new climate and the new basis the proposals create to fight for union recognition, a proper minimum wage, the right to strike and take solidarity action and — what will make them all work — strong reconstructed union organisation.

Fundamentally this entails argument and organisation. We have to counteract the assertion of social partnership that underpins these proposals. Blair describes the White Paper as "part of the Government's programme to replace the notion of conflict between employers and employees with the promotion of partnership". The notion of conflict! As if millions of low paid exploited workers don't experience its pervasive reality every hour of the day.

We need to hammer home the case against partnership, the fact that we don't pay Monks or Edmonds or Morris — or Blair — to make our work more "flexible", intensive, harder, more insecure, lower paid. We've already got one boss! We pay them to prosecute our interest against employers whose interests conflict with our own. We pay them to protect us against "flexibility", not facilitate it.

This entails addressing the issue of the accountability of the Bill Callaghans, Rita Donaghys and their bosses, our servants. We should be heartened by the recent removal of Lew Adams from the leadership of ASLEF. Further, we have to organise to develop the demonstrations and campaigns for legal rights union leaders promise but never deliver.

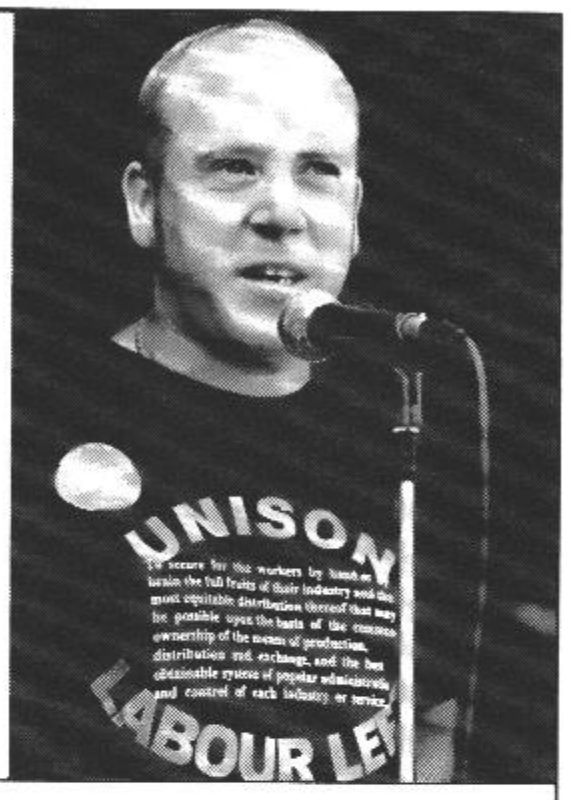
Here the Reclaim Our Rights initiative, which is burgeoning into a united campaign for a wholesale overturning of labour law demands strong support. Such a campaign must be open and democratic with its roots inside the union machinery and able to mobilise it. It must not be a federation of left groups or union factions. This will marginalise it.

Essentially, it must be based on delegates from union branches and committees, trades councils, strike committees and Labour Party bodies. It must mobilise from below on a clear programme of union rights. The potential is there. We mustn't miss the boat this time.

● Contact United Campaign to Repeal the Anti-Trade Union Laws, c/o John Hendy QC, PO Box 17556, London EC2Y 8PA, tel. 0171-638 7521..

the Geoff Martin column

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



● I see that there's been some whinging from some sections of the left over the centre-left slate for the NEC. Now, I'm no fan of Labour Reform. I think that their analysis of the New Labour project is way off beam and that they have failed to understand the nature of the beast. However, we can't afford the luxury of a purist position when we've got the chance of getting three or four hard left comrades onto the Labour NEC.

If that's the outcome of this tactical alliance we'll all be getting the beers in and anything that puts the shits up the Blairites will get my backing.

● Talking of purist positions it never ceases to amaze me that there are still people hanging around the Labour left who seem to think that we can run labour movement organisations, including union regions, like some sort of anarchist commune where rules and discipline count for nowt. I expect this sort of nonsense from the SWP but there are plenty of others who should know better.

● Madstock this year was almost wrecked by a bunch of pissed-up losers who did their damnedest to drive Finlay Quaye from the stage with their mindless chants of "Eng....Err.....Land". It's a pity that Madness themselves didn't do very much to nip this crap in the bud. In truth though the highlight of the day was Catatonia. Take it from me, the best live act that I've seen in the past year or so and well worth catching if you get the chance.

● I've got a couple of quid on Mexico to win the World Cup at 150/1. As I write this, they haven't exactly played yet, but I'm quietly confident. Who am I kidding? We all know that Brazil is going to win it and good luck to them.

● I read in one of the papers that Gordon Brown is supposed to be on a collision course with the public sector unions over pay. They seem to have missed the point that in order to have a collision there's got to be something in the way. It's well known in our house, if nowhere else, that the only time that nurses and other public sector workers have got a decent pay rise is when they've taken industrial action. It's a cast iron fact.

LEADING WITH THE LEFT

RECLAIM THE LABOUR

LIZ DAVIES

The Labour Government will not be able to meet urgent needs for housing, education, transport and health unless it redirects resources, through progressive taxation, from the rich to the poor. I want to see our welfare state enhanced, not dismantled. We must fulfil our commitments on workplace rights, and redress the imbalance in industrial relations created by the Tories.

ANDY HOWELL

The constituency section of the NEC purports to offer members a real stake in the management of their party. This can only happen if constituency reps are responsive to the concerns of ordinary members, articulate these with vigour and passion and exercise their responsibilities with intelligence and care.

MARK SEDDON



Mark Seddon

This year's elections to the NEC will give ordinary Labour Party members a rare opportunity to give their verdict on New Labour's first year in government.

In some respects the New Labour agenda on social and economic issues may have moved the Government to the right of the previous Major administration. I do not believe that this is what all of the millions of Labour voters, old and new, signed up to in May last year.

CATHY JAMIESON

My principles remain the same as when I joined the Labour Party:

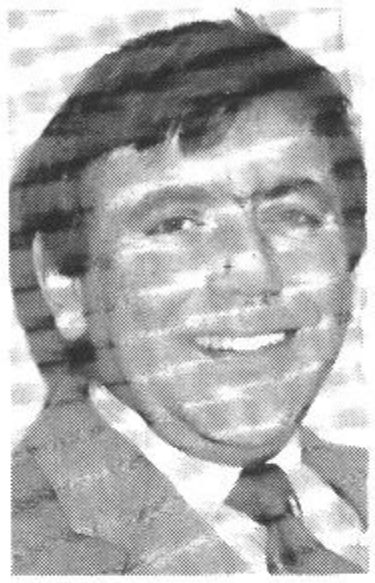
- New forms of public and co-operative ownership, protecting the rights of trade unions, workers, consumers and the environment, will help create a fairer distribution of power, wealth and resources.
- A full employment strategy, a realistic national minimum wage, and decent levels of pensions and benefits for those unable to work due to age, disability or caring responsibilities, will help end the poverty trap.
- A peaceful society, free from the nuclear threat, an end to racism and all forms of discrimination remain my hopes for the future.

CHRISTINE SHAWCROFT

I would like to represent rank and file constituency members on the NEC because I know there is strong support for a properly funded NHS, a safe and integrated public transport system in public ownership, full employment and a national minimum wage starting at half median male earnings, retention of universal benefits, no cuts to disadvantaged groups and no compulsory workfare schemes.

PETE WILLSMAN

The ravages of Thatcherism can only be properly addressed through our socialist and co-operative principles — these are the modern values for the next century. This means redistribution of wealth, tackling gender, race and class inequalities in a systematic way, universal welfare provision and an extension of common ownership.



Pete Willsman

- The candidates of the Centre-left Grassroots Alliance are supported by the Campaign for Labour Party Democracy, Campaign for Socialism (Scotland), *LLB*, Labour Reform, Labour Women's Action Committee, Network of Socialist Campaign Groups, *Socialist Campaign Group News*. This initiative has been welcomed by the *Tribune* newspaper.

Your chan
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Labour G

IN THE coming months, some 400,000 Labour Party members will receive postal ballots for the constituency section of the National Executive Committee, the Party's governing body. As the only electoral exercise involving the whole of the Party membership, the results of this ballot will be a major test of Party opinion, and a unique chance for those who worked to elect

Jenny Fisher
Poplar and Canning Town CLP

a Labour government to make their feelings known.

The coming together of a united Centre-left Grassroots Alliance has given Party members a clear and practical choice which has been welcomed by many left leaning activists and widely supported throughout the Party. At close of nominations on 5th June (or at least by 12th June, when Millbank mailed delayed lists of nominations to CLP secretaries), twenty candidates had been nominated by CLPs. Candidates of the Centre-left Grassroots Alliance received no less than 128 nominations, over 30% of the total made.

However, nominations do not automatically translate into votes and there are some six weeks of hard campaigning in front of us until ballot papers are issued, currently estimated to be at the end of July. The battle will take place on two fronts.

First, at grassroots level, activists will be canvassing Party members — and it may not

Vote for the Grassroots

LLB page 14

PARTY!

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only be at grassroots level. Ken Livingstone was assured at the NEC that the Party machine would remain neutral in this contest.

However, the *Independent on Sunday* reported as early as 3rd May that Downing Street itself was organising a draft of "Blairite loyalists" to beat off a "new bid for power by the left" and added, "a Number Ten staffer has been put in charge of the campaign, which will be boosted by the hiring of New Labour student activists in the summer. They will work on the campaign at Millbank." It will take a great deal of effort by those who support the Alliance candidates to beat a well-resourced campaign like that.

Second, the battle will be fought in the pages of the national and local press and on the airwaves. Name recognition is vital. Supporters of our team will need to write to their local papers and to the national press to match the number of Party members contacted in this way by those favoured by Millbank. Already, Michael Cashman has been chosen to present a *Newsnight* report on lesbian and gay MPs and was announced as a candidate for the NEC elections before the film.

While most candidates in the election promised in their nomination statements to report back to Party members, only the six candidates endorsed by the alliance gave strong pledges to stand up for the rights, and speak out for the priorities, of ordinary Party members.

We must rally round and make sure these candidates are elected.

Activists' checklist

***LLB* appeals to all our readers to help in the campaign for the Centre-left Grassroots Alliance candidates. Here's what you can do:**

Contacts

For details of constituency co-ordinators contact CLPD on 0181-458 1501.
For details of local meetings or to book speakers for your own meeting, contact *LLB* on 0181-985 6597.
For literature contact CLPD for general leaflets or *LLB* for issue-specific leaflets where candidates have produced them.
For press information, contact the alliance press co-ordinator Tim Pendry on 0181-987 1000 (day); 0171-226 1790 (home); 0802-884 123 (mobile) — or candidates direct as below:
Liz Davies: 0171-359 3043 or 0958-673 840 or 0181-985 6597
Andy Howell: 0976-263 698
Cathy Jamieson: 01294-602 171
Mark Seddon: 0171-278 0911
Christine Shawcroft: 0171-515 3868
Pete Willsman: 0181-854 1726.

Working in CLPs

June/July: Make contact with other Alliance supporters in your constituency (phone for contacts as above). Work out a plan to contact Party members who will support the alliance. Check that their Party membership (and yours!) is up to date. Work out a plan to contact other Party members, including those who don't come regularly to meetings and those who have dropped out (many of whom may be disillusioned by the actions of the Government).

Meetings open to Party members in your area may be useful: phone the *LLB* office for up to date information on what is happening in your area and/or to organise your own meeting. Press release the meeting (before and after) to the local papers.

July: The minute the ballot papers come out (probably the end of July), swing into action and contact all the supporters you have identified to make sure they fill out and POST their ballot slips. You may find it helpful to set up telephone trees to do this.

August: once the ballot papers are out and identified Alliance supporters have voted, contact other Party members to see if they will support the candidates: supporters of other candidates will also be trying to "mop up" the vote.

Points to remember

The Socialist Campaign Group of MPs is backing the Campaign. Contact local Campaign Group MPs for help.
We do not have active campaigns in every constituency: can you help in a neighbouring constituency too?
Write letters to the local papers and specialist papers (eg. the ethnic press, lesbian and gay press) supporting the slate campaign.
Ken Livingstone received an assurance that the Party machine will be neutral in this contest. Forward to Ken any evidence to the contrary.

Trade Unions

Already Alliance candidates have spoken at fringe meetings at UNISON and MSF conferences. Contact the *LLB* office for more details of campaigning for the slate among trade unionists.

Women's Sections

Three of those elected will be women, to maintain quotas on the NEC. Contact the *LLB* office to book speakers for your women's section or for information about candidates' policies on the women's organisation and political issues in the Party.

Finance

The campaign desperately needs your financial support. Please rush your cheques, payable to "Keep the Party Labour", to co-treasurer John Stewart at the *LLB* office.

Alliance

"There's a hard left slate and a hard right slate but no modernisers' slate. Something will have to be done or Tony Blair will end up with an unrepresentative NEC," —The Guardian *quoting a "Labour insider".*

EMU and the ghost of Thatcher

Bernie Moss, author of *The Single European Currency in National Perpective*, responds to last months' article from the *Guardian*'s Europe correspondent John Palmer.

JOHN PALMER'S article was an example of that blend of hollow internationalism with monetarist dogma that I said was paralysing the labour movement. To someone like me who arrived in Britain after Thatcher had changed the political landscape, it is amazing to find the ghost of Mrs Thatcher still stalking the corridors of Congress House as well as the non-economic columns — the economics and labour editors know better — of the *Guardian*. I agree with only two things Palmer says: the need for a mix between fiscal and monetary policy and for lower interest rates, both excluded by the Maastricht arrangements.

Everything else he says is wrong. How can he deny the deflationary purpose and effect of the Maastricht criteria? The single market and currency arose out of the neo-liberal revolution led by Thatcher and embraced by Mitterrand. Harder currencies, higher interest rates and lower public deficits produced lower growth and higher unemployment. That's why Thatcher turned around in 1987 to allow deficits and devaluation. One reason she opposed the Single Currency was that she was gentler on wage earners with respect to deficits and devaluation than Palmer and the TUC would be.

A golden rule for socialists is that, when in doubt, if an economic policy does not clearly produce a positive sum for all, they should side with labour rather than the City. Contrary to monetarist doctrine, most recent studies point to the failure of "competitive deflation" and the continuing effectiveness of devaluation and fiscal deficits in stimulating the economy. Those countries which left the ERM in 1992 did much better than those that remained inside. Boosted by a large devaluation and budgetary deficit, Britain grew 1.5% more than France each year despite a flaccid manufacturing base. The best way to cut deficits and interest rates is to promote growth.

The TUC vaunts the virtue of stability in EMU. I argued that because of structural flaws the Euro, torn between a hard-line bank and wimpish national governments, will be unstable. Even if it achieves internal stability, it will fluctuate wildly — a duopoly cannot achieve equilibrium — with the dollar. There is moreover no solid evidence that exchange rate stability fosters trade or growth; experience shows that it leads to instability and insecurity for wage earners.

Growth requires a modicum of inflation. Fuller employment demands higher inflation in Britain than in other countries because of low productivity and a segmented job market. Only under expansionary conditions can labour mobilise and employers be forced to make concessions. Until monetarists took over, the Labour Party and TUC were always partisans of inflation.

Brian Burkitt (*LLB* May 1998) is perhaps too sanguine about Keynesian solutions, which do not attack fundamentals. Obviously, there are trade and profitability limits to inflation. That is why Labour in the 1970s adopted an alternative economic strategy with measures of import control, financial regulation and industrial and regional policy. If the EU challenged the priorities of global capital as Palmer advocates, it would have to resort to such measures but they are extremely unlikely given its laissez-faire constitution and the attachment of Britain and Germany to the US.

"A golden rule for socialists is that they should side with labour rather than the City"

The aim of EMU is to reduce wages and public and social spending. This is not just my opinion but the instruction given member states by the Commission and original Delors Committee. This is why large European employers say they are so enthusiastic about it. In the single market with capital mobility the lower budgetary deficits demanded by Maastricht can only be guaranteed in the long-run by reduced taxes on business and lower spending. A country like France that disposes of other advantages such as high skill levels and proximity to markets may not immediately suffer the consequences of its higher taxes on business, but everything else being equal capital will flee to tax havens.

ERM and EMU have already produced a



Bernie Moss

dramatic shift of wealth from labour to capital — 10% in France since 1983 — and of taxes the other way (the tax bill on German business was reduced by 40% in the early 1990s). Palmer is mistaken about rising public spending in Spain, Ireland and Portugal. According to Eurostat it is down 6% in Ireland, 4.5% in Spain and remains the same in Portugal since 1994. It would have gone down further but for the inefficiency of deficit reduction. By creating more unemployment, budget reductions often increase relative expenditure even if the level of entitlement as in Spain is diminished.

Palmer indiscriminately lumps Italian Communists and Greens, along with the extreme left in Spain, Germany and Italy, and Ken Coates, as EMU partisans. The European left has been profoundly shaken and disoriented by the triumph of neo-liberalism. The Euro-monetarism of the Italian PDS bears little resemblance to the scepticism of the extreme left. Coates is a sharp critic of EMU, but living in the virtual reality of Euroland he has exaggerated ideas of the EU's socialist possibilities.

The French Socialist MEP, Maurice Duverger, put it best. "The myth of supranational Europe is the way to escape unbearable reality by taking refuge in imaginary worlds." The reality is that the present Government half-supported by the TUC is still keeping to Tory spending limits under the monetarist sign of price stability. If socialists cannot break out of this straitjacket at home, they certainly won't be able to in Strasbourg.

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PHOTO:PAUL MATTSSON

EuroMarch, Cardiff, 13/6/98.

The price of the Euro-ticket

Italian journalist Orsola Casagrande reports on the Cardiff counter-summit's challenge to Euro-leaders.

THE TURNOUT may have been lower than expected but the counter-summit in Cardiff was lively, noisy and positive. While the heads of governments were discussing ways to bring European institutions closer to the people, outside the palace of politics the people chanted their intention to "reclaim Europe". Their concerns and their analysis were in stark contrast to the preoccupations of the official summit.

The official gathering was dominated by the declaration on Kosova. Difficulties arose when it came to discuss the position of Turkey. The European leaders, despite strong opposition from Greece, said they wanted to send a "positive message to Turkey" so that "relations could be put back on track". Obviously this caused some worries among the Greek delegation who feared that it represented backtracking on the commitments made at the Luxembourg meeting. The presidency (in the person of Tony Blair) assured Greece that this was not the case, but the impression is that in some way Turkey is being given a privileged position among the countries eligible to join the Union.

On Saturday 13th June, the day before the Summit actually started, some 3,000 people marched through the streets of Cardiff. Among them were delegations from all over Europe, with one of the largest sent by the French movement of the unemployed. The delegation from northern Italy included five trade union leaders of the metal workers' branch of CGIL (which is the main left trade union federation in Italy) and in particular from FIOM (the more radical forces within CGIL, they were on the front line four years ago against Berlusconi's pension scheme reform). There were delegations from Holland and Ireland: some interesting contributions came from the Irish unemployed action group, unveiling the dark side of the Celtic Tiger.

The counter summit went on in the following two days with meetings and street parties by Reclaim The Streets. On Sunday there was a crowded meeting with Alan Simpson MP, Alex Smith MEP and Denzil Davies MP on "People's Europe". Simpson pointed out that "such a large crowd is really a sign of unreality" because in the House of Commons debate on the Cardiff meeting there was no mention at all about the "other meeting", yet "the Prime Minister is now talking about bringing Europe closer to the people". Most of the debate was dominated by the discussion on the Single Currency. The Labour Government has obviously embraced this goal, and, as a result, as Denzil Davies pointed out, "British government economic policy is being shaped to match the Euro Currency requirements". As all three main speakers underlined, it is ordinary people in the end who will carry the burden of such a policy, in cuts in wages and welfare protection.

There was great concern among the left-wingers gathered at the counter summit about the danger of not being able to "come out" of the dark: "If we don't manage to do so," warned Alan Simpson, "we will have to face a great right offensive." And it would be an offensive whose key words would be "hate and fear of the other" — not only the immigrant, but also the poor, the drug addict: the weakest part of our society.

The justifications for the lone parent benefit cut had set a worrying precedent. The discussion focused on assigning personal blame rather than reaffirming public responsibility. The same is now being done to students, who are asked to shoulder the burden of financing higher education. "What they are telling us," concluded Simpson, "is that you can only have a place in a modern society if you have the money to buy it". ❑

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Nigerian union

Sean Coyne reports on the mass movement gathering momentum following the death of Sani Abacha.

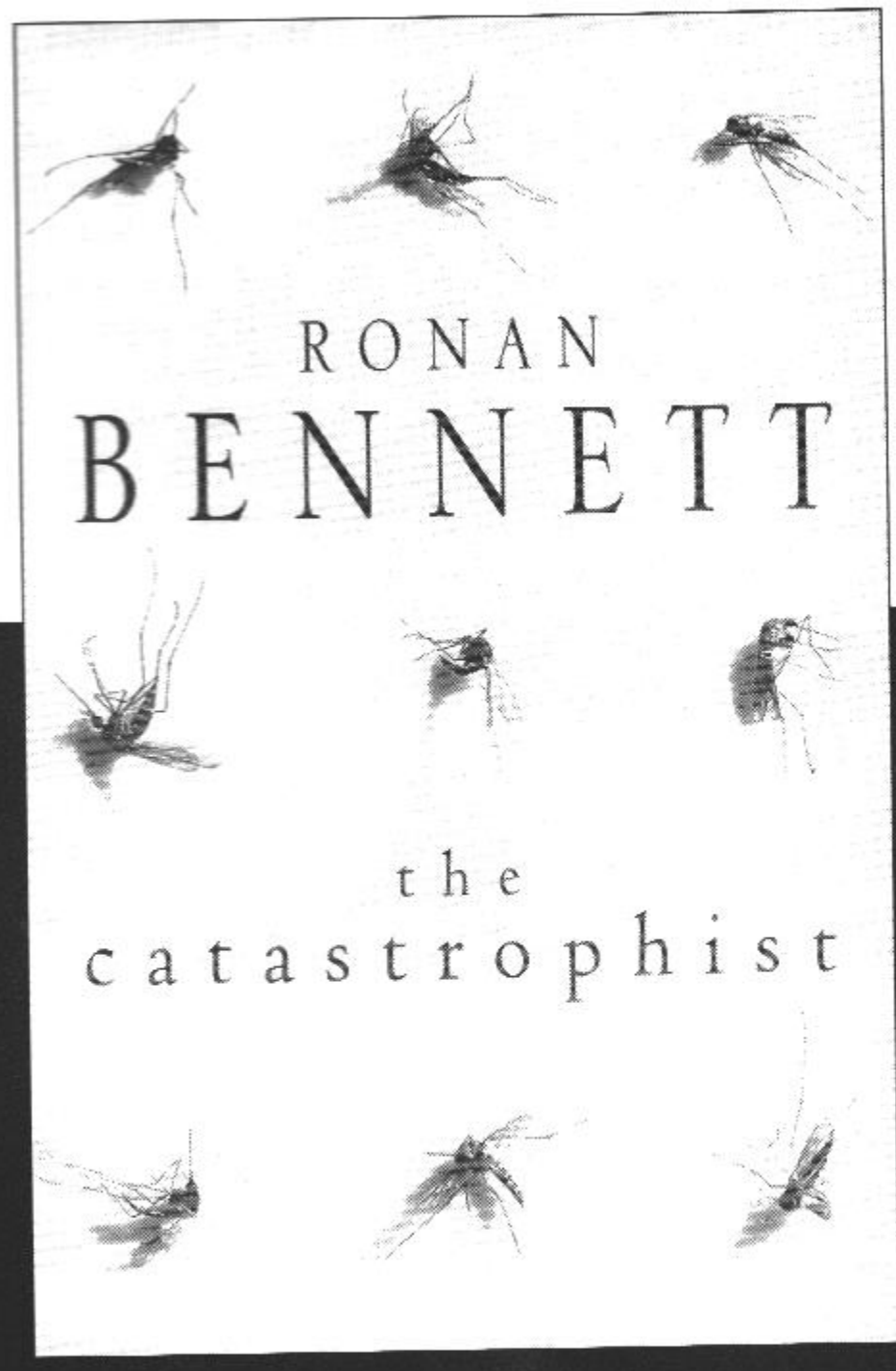
THE DEATH of General Sani Abacha was greeted with celebration on the streets of Lagos and other cities throughout Nigeria. But there was also trepidation. Only the coterie of sycophants who profited from his tyrannical rule paid any attention to the official mourning period, and rightly so. Abacha was a bloodstained dictator. Impervious to criticism right up to the end, he exercised almost total power from his luxurious bunker at Aso Rock. He was contemptuous of the needs of the impoverished mass of the Nigerian people, and squandered millions of dollars, bribing his way towards power and ruthlessly silencing opposition both within the military and in society at large.

His successor is Major General Abdulsalam Abubaker, a "professional" soldier who has not held public office, but who was instrumental in maintaining support for the Abacha project. His first announcement on assuming power caused great concern in trade union and human rights circles. There was no mention of the plight of those in detention, and he stated that he wanted to maintain the timetable of Abacha's discredited Transition Programme to civilian rule.

This Programme was designed to put Abacha into office. The regime had not only hand-picked the representatives of the five political parties allowed to exist, it defined their programmes, selected their leaderships and financed their offices. In a ridiculous and entirely cynical gesture, it had also insisted that each of the parties select Abacha as the sole Presidential candidate for the elections due on August 1st this year. In this way, Abacha would not have to face any opposition, and the election would have been replaced by a referendum.

But the opposition to Abacha's rule was growing daily. Workers and students, women's organisations and human rights activists were coming together to take action. Despite threats from Abacha, tens of thousands took to the streets on May Day, and fought running battles with troops. On June 12th, on the fifth anniversary of the election of imprisoned presidential aspirant Mashood Abiola, tens of thousands ignored the warnings of the new military leader and took to the streets again to demand a return to democracy. General Abubaker responded with fierce repression and hundreds of peaceful demonstrators were attacked by the security forces at assembly points and at the end of rallies. But everyone agreed, something was changing.

Over the last six months there has been a steady building of confidence in the mass organisations, and among smaller but important organisations of civil society. The formation of a new mass-based united opposition in the form of the United Action for Democracy (UAD) has brought together



A novel that captures the complex ricochet between the personal and the political, set in the Belgian Congo at a turning point for Africa

Early praise for *The Catastrophist*:

'Bennett's writing is as lush and sensual as ripe mangos. His characters are complex and sympathetic. The tone, which is perfectly pitched, and the exotic setting collude to evoke an era of colonial decadence' *Financial Times*

'An intensely erotic novel' *Guardian*

Acclaim for Ronan Bennett's work:

'Bennett is one of those rare novelists who give thriller writing a good name' *Observer*

'Powerful and adventurous ... those who miss big books about big things set in big countries should watch his career with interest' Nick Hornby, *Times Literary Supplement*

'What people will love about this book is what they love about Greene and Le Carré' Thomas Keneally

'Bennett handles the clichés of the *peur sans frontières* thriller with panache ... the result is a powerful story' *Independent on Sunday*

RONAN BENNETT'S THIRD AND MOST POWERFUL NOVEL
IS OUT NOW IN HARDBACK

review

leaders released

the largest democratic coalition for over a decade. It is an organisation pledged to mass action, and the building of an active alliance between workers, women's organisations, civil rights activists, students, small traders and the unemployed.

Its leaders have been arrested and harassed but the organisation is moving from strength to strength. It is committed to a non-sectarian strategy based on campaigns with clear demands, openness and unity in action. This is in sharp contrast to the activities of the so-called political elite, the self-selecting failed politicians who have traded any remaining remnant of principle for the crumbs off the dictator's table.

The UAD realise that the only way to take on the anti-democratic forces of the military regime and their apologists, is by building a broad but principled democratic opposition. They appreciate that the mass organisations of workers have a special role to play in the coalition, and that the potential power of the workers' movement, despite timid leadership in some industries, cannot be ignored.

The mobilisations which have taken place since General Abubaker took over are already yielding some success. On 15th June, nine prominent detainees were released from prison, including former Head of State Rtd General Obasanjo, Dr Beko Ransome-Kuti, the leader of the Campaign for Democracy (CD) and perhaps most importantly, Frank Kokori and Milton Dabibi, leaders of the two oil workers unions who have been detained without trial since 1994 and 1996 respectively.

Both Frank and Milton were key leaders in the oil strike of 1994, and their release is the result of a vigorous domestic and international campaign. As one leading trade union activist noted, "The release of a limited but prominent group of detainees will not satisfy the demands of the democratic opposition, but it does show that when we act together, we get results. The release of our comrades gives us all heart to carry on. Hundreds of activists remain in prison, but they can be reassured that the campaign for their release and for a genuine democratic resolution of the crisis will continue. We will not be bought off by Abubaker. We know he was Abacha's right hand man. Only when the military are back in their barracks and a civilian government is restored will we rest, and even then, we will only rest a little."

Solidarity activity with the democratic opposition should be stepped up at this vital time. Union conferences should table emergency motions on the release of Frank and Milton and demand that the Government implements meaningful sanctions against the Abubaker regime. As one UAD leader said,

"Now is not the time for waiting to see what happens next. We have to keep up the pressure. This regime knows that its days are numbered. The economy is in ruins and on the verge of collapse. Popular dissent is rising daily. To paraphrase Comrade Rosa Luxembourg, we have a choice. We can either await further barbarism or take steps to transform society and make sure that military rule is finished once and for all."

Fact Box

Nigeria has a population of 120 million.
It is reliably estimated that a third of all Africans in Europe are Nigerians.
The Nigerian trade union movement consisting of twenty nine unions has over four million members but its National Centre, the Nigeria Labour Congress, has been banned for three years as have a number of more militant unions.
The militant student movement has nearly 14 million members organised in NANS (The National Association of Nigerian Students). Nigerias national debt including interest payments is currently 37 billion US dollars.
Total earnings from oil for the last 30 years have been 225 billion US dollars.
The military have been in power for all but ten years of Nigeria's independence in 1960.

The battle begins !

Brian Campbell, editor of *An Phoblacht/Republican News* looks forward to a new phase in Irish history.

NOW, AFTER AN incredible fifteen weeks in Irish history, the real battle begins. Or, rather, a different battle. Following the Good Friday Agreement, the Referendum and the Assembly elections, the focus of politics has shifted to new institutions.

For Sinn Fein, the task is that of any revolutionary party which enters the institutions of state. Can they use them to drive forward their revolutionary project? Or will they become serial compromisers, all the time forced to water down their demands?

Certainly, the two governments — three if you include the US — hope that the Agreement and the institutions which it has created will produce what any western government desires — stability. They hope — and big business hopes along with them — that the problems in Ireland have been shelved for at least a generation. They hope they have a solution that will keep Ireland out of the headlines for the rest of their political lives. But how solid are those hopes? As with any grand scheme of conflict resolution, the Good Friday Agreement tried to draw a political line around conflicting forces but by doing so it has created an entirely new political reality which has within it a vibrant dynamic for change. Far from being a settlement, the Agreement heralds the possibility of constant change. For progressive forces, it is a target-rich environment.

The first of those targets must be the RUC. A new police service must be part of any new arrangements and that police service must be wholly different in ethos and composition, from the present RUC. With that deep-seated change, one of the pillars of the Orange state will crumble. When young people in Crossmaglen, Ballymurphy and the Bogside can countenance a career in policing, then you will know that the times are changing.

Similar changes must take place in those other bastions of the strong state — the judiciary and the civil service. They too are facing massive reforms. Similarly in the world of employment, there is an urgent need to redress a situation in which nationalists are twice as likely to be unemployed.

How will all this happen? The answer is, with great difficulty. Every change, every single step forward will be an almighty battle to test the wit and resolve of any political revolutionary. This battle will be fought as much outside the new Assembly as within it. Indeed, those progressive forces in the Labour Party who support change will be every bit as much part of the battle as those campaigning in the Six Counties. Mo Mowlam, instead of concentrating on publicity stunts (such as Elton John concerts in Stormont), should be told in no uncertain terms that the only guarantee of lasting peace in Ireland is through the wholehearted implementation of the equality agenda.

A further battleground will be in the all-Ireland bodies, which Unionists have pledged to wreck, even though they represent economic and social reality. More and more there is a trend towards dealing with issues on an all-Ireland basis. The all-Ireland bodies must be expanded and must take in more areas. Again, these will be tough battle grounds. So, far from dispensing with Ireland for a generation, the three governments have injected exciting new life into its body politic. For everyone involved, the battle starts here. ❑

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The Blairisation of Germany

Germany faces a federal election later this year. David Pope interviewed Pit Wurher, foreign editor of Swiss-based journal *Die Wochenzeitung*.

Will the election of a Social Democratic (SDP) Government result in much of a change?

RECENTLY WE have had a government of national unity in all but name. The SPD's big majority in the Bundesrat — the Federal upper house — could have been used to block the Kohl government's policies. They have been reluctant to do this, supporting most government policies. They blocked one reform, to reduce income tax on the rich to about 50%, because most people were opposed to it.

The SPD is likely to adopt a New Labour-type approach in the election. While unlikely to attack the welfare state it is also unlikely to reverse many of the things done by the Christian Democrats (CDU) or to increase taxes on the rich. It won't have the power to make radical changes because of Maastricht, which it supported wholeheartedly. The united Europe project is driven by German capital but some on the left support it to ensure we don't go to war with France again.

How have the unions been affected?

Germany is still a corporate state, with works councils and trade union representatives on company boards. The CDU didn't attack this as Thatcher did in Britain and the unions were able to resist some measures. When the Government tried to reduce the amount of statutory sick pay contributed by employers by 20% there was a lot of resistance, including spontaneous walkouts. The proposal was dropped. The SPD didn't lead the campaign, although it is still the party of the unions. Most union leaders are SPD members but some activists have joined the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS).

Battles have been won where there are active memberships and shop stewards. The media workers, the most left-wing union, won a reduction in the working week to 35 hours and are seeking a further reduction of five hours.

Are there left organisations within the unions?

Not like those in Britain but there are left activists and informal local meetings. In Stuttgart, home of Porsche, Bosch and Mercedes-Benz, up to 200 shop stewards meet monthly, discussing issues like unemployment and the working week. The media workers' general secretary attends occasionally. It's a think-tank rather than an organisation but they're discussing extending their influence. Mergers between unions — there were 16, now twelve and they may contract to seven — may prompt more organisation.

How far is racism on the increase in Germany?

It's increasing but is mainly a problem in the east. Many lost their jobs after communism fell — unemployment in the east is at least 20%. Younger voters won't vote for the left because they associate it with communism. In general, voters in the east are fed up with the arrogance of the west and disappointed with the CDU.

We thought racism was defeated in the 1980s but the CDU raised it in 1990-1 when they were trailing the SPD in the opinion polls, sending leaflets to their party organisation, telling them to raise the question of "German jobs for German workers." Within six weeks it became the major issue in Germany.

The SPD say racism can't be tolerated but it's doubtful they'll make it an issue in the Federal election. I feel they'll make their usual mistake, following the CDU path despite the result of the Saxony-Anheudt elections, where most of the votes for racist parties came from CDU supporters. The SPD took 40% of the vote and the Greens 20%.

Is there a left organisation within the SPD?

Not that I know of. The party is fairly centralised and doesn't have clear left-right distinctions like the Labour Party. There are supposedly two factions, headed by Gerhard Schroeder and Oskar Lafontaine, but they agree on most policies.

There are signs of a left emerging on the issue of crime. The SPD have called for more police and there is a "listening offensive", with more use of bugging and phone tapping. The SPD is following the CDU's lead but some left members say this is going towards a police state. There was dissent when the SPD supported ending the right of asylum and some members left to join the Greens or PDS. The SPD could have blocked this, because ending the right of asylum involved changing the constitution, which requires a two-thirds majority in the Bundestag. They caved in because of media hysteria.

Is there scope for SPD constituency organisations to select their candidates?

They have that right but in practice the decision is taken by the executive committee, with the approval of the regional leadership. On occasions there is a rank and file revolt but this is confined to regions where the left is more active and the local party more independent, such as the area to the south of Frankfurt. Half the MPs are selected by the list system, nominated by the state party.

● *Die Wochenzeitung* is a Zurich-based newspaper with a circulation of 20,000, owned and run by a workers' co-operative. It is not affiliated to any party but covers issues from a left perspective.



Red in High Places

TRIBUNE

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Labour Left Briefing

What's left of the Sandinista Revolution?

As the Nicaragua Solidarity Campaign celebrates its 20th anniversary, there's little of the optimism that accompanied the 1979 Revolution. As new scandals break around the FSLN leadership, Mike Phipps asks what remains of their achievement.

OVER 75% of Nicaraguans are officially poor, 40% extremely so. Between 60% and 80% are unemployed or underemployed. The country has Latin America's highest rate of teenage pregnancies and 750,000 children have no access to education.

The IMF-dictated structural adjustment means that 35% of exports covers the interest on the $5.5 billion debt. More will be owed by 2000 than now even if all of the IMF's austerity targets are met. Arnoldo Aleman, who runs Nicaragua, is intent on replacing NGOs and the executive branch with personalised patronage. The Sandinistas face allegations of unethical financial and political activity. FSLN leader Daniel Ortega's adopted daughter has accused him of sexually abusing her as a child.

Yet the Sandinista Revolution continues to have enormous significance, not just in Nicaragua but throughout Central America. Today democratic, or at least civilian, governments rule the countries of the region with unprecedented levels of pluralism and political rights — simply not possible before the Nicaraguan Revolution. It took Marxist revolutionaries to make liberal democracy a reality in Central America.

In the early century, US military forces in Nicaragua ran even the railroads and banks. They trained and equipped the National Guard, which loyally served the Somoza dictatorship that ruled the country from 1936 to 1979, amassing 23% of the arable land and a similar stake in Nicaragua's industry. The FSLN, founded in 1961, began rural guerrilla activity against the regime in the inaccessible north of the country.

The international context is important to understanding how a revolution could happen on Washington's doorstep. The US's Vietnam defeat led to popular opposition to further US military adventures, bringing Carter to the White House — the first President to have a verbal commitment to human rights in foreign policy. Military aid to Somoza was temporarily cut and the dictatorship was overthrown in a popular revolution that brought the Sandinistas to power, at a cost of 40,000 dead, $1.5 billion worth of physical damage and one-third of Nicaragua's industrial property destroyed.

All Somoza property was nationalised and unmanaged property taken over by 200,000 landless peasants. Human rights and political pluralism flourished; the first free elections were held in 1984 and autonomous government was established on the ethnically diverse Atlantic Coast. Illiteracy fell from 50% to 12% in the first five years as the education budget trebled. Spending on health and housing doubled.

But these early achievements were overshadowed by the cost of the war waged by Reagan. US military "aid" to Central America between 1982 and 1986 was the equivalent of all the aid to the region between 1945 and 1981. The US mined Nicaragua's harbours. The World Court of Justice ordered the US to pay $12 billion of compensation — ignored by the White House. Despite never capturing a square inch of Nicaraguan territory, the contra war resulted in 30,000 deaths and damage worth $15 billion.

In 1983 war damage lost Nicaragua one-third of its exports. The government was obliged to spend 50% of its budget on defence and introduce conscription and an austerity programme to deal with inflation of 10,000%. Economic and social hardship followed. Despite a period of peace via the Contadora Process and the end of the Cold War, the Sandinistas lost the 1990 election to an Opposition promising stability and a better relationship with the US.

The period since has been catastrophic for workers and the poor. 354 companies were privatised, 40% of the public sector workforce lost their jobs, and many rural areas were deprived of gas and electricity. IMF-imposed cuts mean that Nicaragua now spends half the 1989 figure on health. Illiteracy is now 30% due to cuts and education fees. With limited access to credit, farmers cannot plant crops and agriculture has slumped. The biggest source of hard currency became remittances from Nicaraguans working in North America. Nicaragua remains violent — some areas have not known peace for over a generation.

This is the context in which Aleman won the 1996 election. There are clearly minimum economic conditions before genuine political democracy can operate and it is doubtful if these are currently achieved in Nicaragua. At the heart of the problem lies the absence of a political alternative. The Sandinistas are not what they were twenty years ago. Many leaders benefited from the spoils of power — some Sandinista union chiefs are now directors of privatised companies. Attempts to make alliances with agri-business alienated traditional supporters. One common complaint is that the leadership is high on rhetoric but short on programmatic alternatives.

Yet the women's movement, trade unions and community movement continue to be active. Last month doctors struck for higher pay — the health minister earns 140 times the average doctor's salary. In the Revolution's early days, no state official earned more than 15 times the lowest paid state employee. Now the minimum wage is between $25 and $50 a month, while the Mayor of Managua pulls down $10,000 a month, recently increased from $4,500. Ironically Sandinistas voted for his pay hike, indicating how much the party's altered. One activist observed: "Some Sandinistas prefer that a corrupt Liberal run this flea-market rather than someone honest, whether or not it's a Sandinista. They can cut deals with the corrupt one easier, and with that they can launder their own tricky schemes."

Solidarity with the people of Nicaragua will be as vital over the next 20 years as the last, but given the evolving direction of the Sandinistas, it is likely to be more difficult to mobilise. ❑

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Breaking the jingoistic consensus

John Pinto of the Alliance Against Communalism and for Democracy in South Asia gives a personal view on the likely fall out from India's nuclear tests.

SINCE THE Indian nuclear tests on 11th May, opposition to nuclear weapons has been growing in India. Over a hundred Indian scientists opposing the production and deployment of nuclear weapons signed a statement reminiscent of atomic scientist Leo Szilard's 1945 petition to President Truman opposing on moral grounds the use of atom bombs against Japan. There have been small anti-nuclear protests in most major Indian cities. A national anti-nuclear organisation called MIND (Movement in India for Nuclear Disarmament) was formed to campaign for the following objectives:

- India and Pakistan must put an end to all nuclear testing
- Neither India nor Pakistan should produce or deploy nuclear weapons
- India must declare that it will never use nuclear weapons under any circumstances
- India must return sincerely to the nuclear disarmament agenda

In New Delhi on 9th June, over 400 academics, scientists, defence experts, lawyers and artists participated in a "Convention against Nuclear Weapons". Parties of the left such as the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and Communist Party of India have come out with statements against the introduction of nuclear weapons.

There appears to be a division within the anti-nuclear camp on whether India should immediately sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in their current form. The Communist parties and the Indian scientists' statement, in particular, argue that India should continue with its principled policy of calling for a review of these treaties so that a genuine basis is created for universal disarmament.

> ***"These nuclear tests have undone the consistent position that has been taken over the years on nuclear disarmament. While making it clear that we had the relevant technological capability, India had nevertheless not taken steps towards weaponisation in order not to initiate a nuclear arms race in the sub-continent.***
>
> ***We wish to recall here, emphatically, the horror that is nuclear war. We stand firmly with the long tradition of eminent scientists who have consistently argued against the induction of nuclear weapons."***
>
> **— From the Indian Scientists' Statement on Indian Nuclear Tests.**

Many commentators have pointed out the link between nuclear weapons and the communalist agenda of the Hindu nationalists. The ideologues of Hindu nationalism have long dreamt of creating a chauvinistic-militaristic Hindu state. Since the 1960s they have argued that India should possess nuclear weapons. For a Hindu nationalist state to succeed they need to create a permanent divide between Hindus and Muslims. To achieve these ends they need to mobilise the majority Hindu population around an aggressive anti-Muslim platform directed domestically against the minority Muslim population and externally against "Muslim Pakistan".

The left of centre Indian magazine *Frontline* has provided an important platform for the expression of anti-nuclear sentiment. In an article entitled 'The Hindutva weapon' the Marxist literary critic and cultural theorist, Aijaz Ahmed, questioned the anti-imperialist claims made by some apologists for the Hindu nationalist BJP government's nuclear sabre-rattling. He argues that weaponisation would serve US interests by ensuring that China is forced into an arms race with India.

Furthermore, as a result of the popularity for the BJP generated by the tests, he predicts that the government would be able to carry through massive liberalisation and privatisation of the economy Russian-style. Having provided his Hindu nationalist supporters with the nuclear bomb — the ultimate lingam (phallic symbol) — to worship, Prime Minister AB ("Atom Bomb") Vajpayee can now turn to give puja (offerings) at the altar of "market economics" without much interruption. That is, unless reds, greens and anti-communalists join together to break the jingoistic consensus of nuclear nationalism in India.

● For more info visit: South Asia Against Nukes at http://www.mnet.fr/aiindex/NoNukes.html aor Non-nuclear South Asia at http://members.tripod.com/~no_nukes_sa/

Mugabe must go

Sean Coyne reports from Zimbabwe: Thanks to a catalogue of corruption scandals, a rigorously reactionary economic policy, lack of democracy and the ostentatious lifestyle of the President himself, Robert Mugabe and his regime have lost all credibility with the workers, peasants and students of Zimbabwe.

The Zimbabwe Congress of Trade Unions (ZCTU), led by its charismatic General Secretary Morgan Tsvangirai, has been in the forefront of mass mobilisations against Mugabe's austerity measures. Recent general strikes called by the ZCTU drew enormous popular support, and effectively closed down the country. The government responded by attacking peaceful demonstrators, threatening the use of banning orders left over from the Smith regime, and deploying thugs to intimidate union leaders.

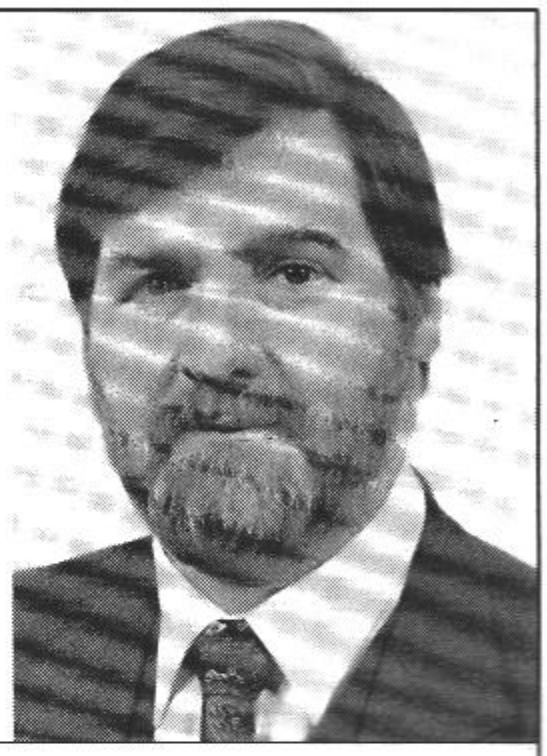
Three months ago Morgan was attacked in his office by unidentified assailants and narrowly escaped being beaten to death. Soon after, the Bulawayo Office of the ZCTU was mysteriously firebombed. Many trade unionists suspect state involvement in these attacks.

The handling of the economic crisis in the country has underlined the absence of democracy. Mugabe rules effectively by presidential decree. Workers, peasant farmers and students face continuous impoverishment as Government ministers, their private business friends and their cronies grow wealthy. The ZCTU is now mobilising its members for a five day general strike, and has made common cause with students and other sections of civil society. Most worker leaders now say it is not a question of "whether" Mugabe will have to step down, but "when".

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the Michael Hindley column

Michael Hindley, Labour MEP for Lancashire South, assesses the state of China today.



IN THE middle of the main square in Shenyang, a major town in the Manchurian rust-belt, stands a towering statue of Mao imperiously pointing towards Beijing. He does so in deliberate imitation of the Manchu Qing Emperor who set out from here to conquer China in the 1640s. Shenyang and surrounding Manchuria are redolent of great epoch-making battles. The Japanese defeated the Russians here in 1905. Japanese greed for Manchuria's coal, iron and rich farm lands precipitated the Asian part of the Second World War and in the Chinese civil war which recommenced on Japan's defeat, Shenyang was once again the scene of a great battle as Mao's Red Army surrounded the Nationalist forces — hence the statue in the square. Manchuria's steel mills became the centre of Soviet-style socialism and its Communist Party more resembles the classical urbanised, industrialised proletariat of Marxist texts.

Manchuria is now at the epicentre of the new "Leap Forward" in Chinese policy. The last Party Congress saw a dramatic shift of power in favour of Premier Zhu who has moved decisively to take on the massive vested interests in Chinese state-owned public sector especially in heavy industry. It is Thatcherism with Chinese characters, or as accurately and wittily described "Market-Leninism". This is most apparent in the steel town of Anshan which has a steel plant once employing 200,000, aiming rapidly to halve that. The entire town lives and unfortunately breathes steel. The firm wants to go upmarket from crude steel rod production to more specialised steel. The staggering boom of skyscraper construction throughout China seems to offer an endless opportunity for such expansion.

But what will happen to the redundant workers? The answer from the local government officials, plant managers and Party bosses is eerily reminiscent of the steel belts of Europe and the USA in the early 1980s: retraining. But the Chinese have no state welfare system and the industrial enterprises have been the cradle-to-grave provider. So far the redundant workers are promised a continuation of salary and benefits but many still believe the promises that somehow the economy will pick up and eventually there will be work for all once again.

Not everyone believes the message of hope and trust, however. From Hong Kong, Tiananmen Square veteran Han Dong-Fang's radio programme tells a different story. Han was a railway worker imprisoned after the massacre and finally released because of ill health. He steadfastly refused to take refuge as a professional dissident in academia and runs a bulletin and radio show on Chinese labour issues. Every week he receives phone calls, faxes and emails chronicling spontaneous reactions to massive layoffs.

Han has been labelled a "revolutionary" by the Chinese government, ironically now a term of abuse in China, but as Han points out his radio programme offers steady advice worthy of any constructive western trade unionists who accept that the world of work has to change but only in consultation and agreement with the workers. Han's message is stay off the streets where you are vulnerable. Tiananmen taught many that lesson, to stay in the factories and demand the implementation of China's labour law which promises workers disclosure and negotiation rights.

BACK IN Anshan, when asked to explain how Chinese privatisation works, the official message is that some kind of shareholder capitalism is evolving. The reality is that the massive plants are in debt and the banks cannot foreclose because that in turn would cause collapse in China's fictional banking system. Workers are owed back-pay and it is this debt to the workers which is being converted into notional shares — a shaky foundation for a brave new world.

On the Manchurian coast you encounter virtual reality China at the port of Dalian, a boom town with a golf course at a nearby Disneyland-style resort. There is feverish speculation in building, much of it based on the now groundless promise of profiting from an (until recently) booming South Korean economy just across the water. The state has invested heavily in this boom in a traditional pump-priming manner hoping to drag foreign capital after it. Dalian's "Victory Store" has a range of goods which would dazzle inland China but the prices are way-beyond the range of the Chinese in work.

Zhu has given himself three years, an inordinately short time. When asked to comment on the Russian revolution, an old Mandarin said with remarkable foresight that he did not give Communism long, perhaps a hundred years or so. Perhaps it is as a warning that the Communist Party has left Mao standing there in the main square at Shenyang.

- Michael Hindley recently travelled to Beijing, Manchuria, Macao and Hong Kong with a delegation from the European Parliament.

Han Dong-Fang's *China Labour Bulletin* is available from PO Box 72465, Central Post Office, Kowloon, Hong Kong, fax: 00 852 2359 4324, email: clb@hkstar.com

Eileen Gersh

memorial meeting

July 4th

Conway Hall (Brockway room), Red Lion Square, Holborn, London

6.00pm to 10.00pm

speakers from 7.00

Food and drink provided

Forward to Market Leninism?

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Rising East

Chris Knight (Chair, Barking NATFHE) reports on the recent occupation at the University of East London.

ON 18TH MAY, posters commemorating the 1968 May events in France adorned the building where I work. Unexpectedly, 30 years after those events, we were suddenly occupied by 200 students. They had just heard our Vice Chancellor refuse to back down on cuts including 80 staff redundancies. The Mathematics subject area was to close. Half the language teachers would go. The cuts would hit the student medical service, computer technicians, print-shop workers and the student union. The students stormed into my place of work, spreading sleeping-bags along corridors and piling huge barricades of furniture against the doors.

Next morning, a large crowd had gathered outside the banner-draped Brooker building. No-one could enter unless to assist with the occupation. In the evening, NATFHE and students were set to lobby a Board of Governors meeting. We banged drums as the governors arrived in their flash cars. As a grey management suit emerged to say no-one could meet us, a female student slipped through the half open door, followed by her companions. Abandoning the doomed meeting, the Vice Chancellor had to address the lobby, transferring to a large hall for the purpose. Sacked staff at last had a chance to tell the truth about their so-called voluntary departure, some on the verge of tears. What is "voluntary" about being told "Go quietly and receive £35,000 — or be sacked anyway and get £5,000?" The pattern of sackings seemed arbitrary, and desperately damaging to our University. The students were angrier than ever.

On 20th May, NATFHE voted to support the occupation and to respect student picket lines. Next morning, the campus was picketed from 7.30 am, staff and students stretched in human chains three deep across each entrance. No scab got through. At 8.40, a vanload of police arrived. "This is an illegal picket. Clear the road or we'll arrest you!" No-one moved. 20 minutes later, back came the police. "How much longer do you need to block the road like this?" We replied that by 10am we expected to have achieved our main objectives. The police let us carry on. At 10am a vanload of police again arrived to supervise our abandonment of the picket. We obliged. It was the climax of the occupation.



PHOTO: ANDREW WIARD

A crowd of about 1,000 now marched from the gates inward towards the massive central administrative and teaching block. Students had already shinned up drainpipes, entered by a window and opened an entrance. In the corridors, the drums sounded deafening as everyone poured in. University security staff, caught on the hop, were successfully refused entry. Management personnel and other staff were asked to leave.

Under student control, lectures were soon resumed. Management complained: "The demands of the occupiers have shifted from "no budget cuts" to "we intend to take over the management of the University". The Vice Chancellor wrote to all staff: "I am advised to tell you that by carrying out teaching of classes you are aiding and abetting the breaking of the law, since the Court has now confirmed that the Brooker building is illegally occupied." We continued to teach. Among guest lecturers at the teach-in was a Liverpool docker, followed by shop stewards from the neighbouring Fords Dagenham car works.

The police lacked forces for an eviction until 7.00 am on June 2nd, when the Tactical Support Group arrived — all 200 of them in 22 vans plus hydraulic crane for rooftop work and van-loads of bailiffs. Under strict instructions to minimise media coverage, they behaved correctly. Students on the rooftop kept drumming for 20 minutes after columns of helmeted cops had broken through barricades and smashed down internal doors, climbing towards the clock tower. As the two sides met on the roof, there were jokes all round. NATFHE's red flag was cut down and courteously returned. Evacuating the buildings appeared almost stage-managed by occupiers and police, each side needing to be seen to do its job. To the disappointment of the media, there was complete unity and discipline among the occupiers as they emerged and no arrests.

With the occupied buildings released, we were all surprised to discover the sense of empowerment and anger now stronger and more widespread than ever. UEL students have given a significant lead, triggering what promises to be a fierce and sustained industrial dispute over the future of education under New Labour. The main campus unions have voted to ballot for industrial action. Despite management allegations of illegality, NATFHE is being strongly backed by Regional Office.

Our Vice-Chancellor has been warned: don't even think of reprisals. We have fixed Wednesday 14th October for our next Day of Action against cuts in education; there are signs it may be a London-wide event.

● The Autonomous University of East London has a web page at http://www.UEL_occupation.mcmail.com).

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World Cup — no escape from politics

Cathy Jamieson
Candidate for NEC

FRANCE WERE 2-0 up against South Africa when I heard I'd made it onto the list of 'approved candidates' for the Scottish Parliament. Watching the match en route to a long-planned World Cup holiday, it seemed a bit incongruous to be responding to a message to phone the Scottish Labour Party General Secretary urgently.

I never saw the third French goal, being busy explaining that I couldn't make it to the publicity event for approved candidates in Glasgow the next day. My trip had been planned for the best part of a year. At least I was on the list, consoling myself that being at the Scotland v Norway match might give me credibility with voters!

As we'd left Scotland in the aftermath of yet another glorious defeat, we reflected that the clear winners were shops making record profits as demand for football strips far outstripped supply. The losers, of course, were the supporters who found outdated strips, which would normally have been consigned to the sale rails, displayed at full price.

Winners in Scotland's political battle appear to be the SNP with opinion polls showing Scottish voters favouring independence. While it is too simplistic to draw direct links between the fervour engendered by football and voting intentions, the hype surrounding the World Cup has been a factor. People want drama and excitement, to have something to look forward to. Football temporarily gives them an escape route from day to day problems and for Scottish fans normal team rivalries have ceased. They've a common cause, creating at best a sense of positive identity, at worst an opposition to all things "English", especially what they perceive as too much emphasis on "middle England".

But nationalism is not confined to Scotland or Scottish fans. A whole variety of old prejudices and new alliances are evident: British fans supporting Cameroon because Germany was behind Austria might be predictable, but what about elderly Frenchmen getting behind the Jamaican Reggae Boyz fighting back against Croatia?

Some rivalry has been good-humoured, swapping kits and flags: Norwegian tops worn with kilts, Scottish tops with Viking helmets. The violence and underlying racial tensions which marred the England v Tunisia game show that much needs to change if the game is to be enjoyed by ordinary people without anyone feeling obliged to apologise for their nationality or the behaviour of the fans. I intend to enjoy all the matches, and the international atmosphere.

It would be great if politics took a rest during holidays — it doesn't. In France, supermarket prices — over the top for World Cup souvenirs — are in Euros as well as francs. Unfair allocation of tickets means genuine fans can't afford inflated prices charged by touts and companies only interested in a quick profit.

It's just not possible to escape the politics of life at home or abroad. I'm proud to be Scottish. I want my team to win. I also want to see the Scottish Parliament take radical steps to deal with poverty, unemployment and social injustice — and that's what I'll be campaigning for when I get home!

Loony Left football tournament

John Stewart, midfield magician, reports: Forget all the hype about that other football competition going on in France — the only tournament any serious socialists should have been following recently took place on Clapham Common in June. The periodic Between The Lines Loony Left Cup was the biggest and best so far.

Sixteen teams entered the 7-a-side tournament but, as always with the left, some turned up late and others didn't show at all. Dynamo Semtex sent their apologies and Reclaim the Streets, who entered a North London and South London team, only managed enough players for one team between them. The others had presumably gone off to occupy a road-building project!

The re-worked league soon sorted out the proletarian revolutionaries from the student intellectuals as the all-conquering BTL advanced, inflicting historic defeats (well 1-0, 2-1 and 1-0) on Sons of Emil, Class War and Nations Vibration. A world historic defeat was suffered in the semi-finals as BTL were beaten 2-1 by aspiring Bonapartists Stockwell Diablos. Despite heroics performed by BTL editor Ray Whittaker, BTL were unable to defend the trophy they won last year. In a local derby Spartak Stockwell beat the Diablos in a closely fought final.

Despite being moved from our pitch half-way through the tournament by some extremely big Australian rules footballers the Loony Left Cup was again a success.

● If you are interested in playing in the tournoi, contact us at Between the Lines, Box 32, 136 Kingsland High Street, London E8 2NS.



Hit Racism for Six

Six-a-Side Cricket Festival

Saturday 29th August, 10am-8pm
London Postal Region Sports Club
Forest Road, Hainault, Essex

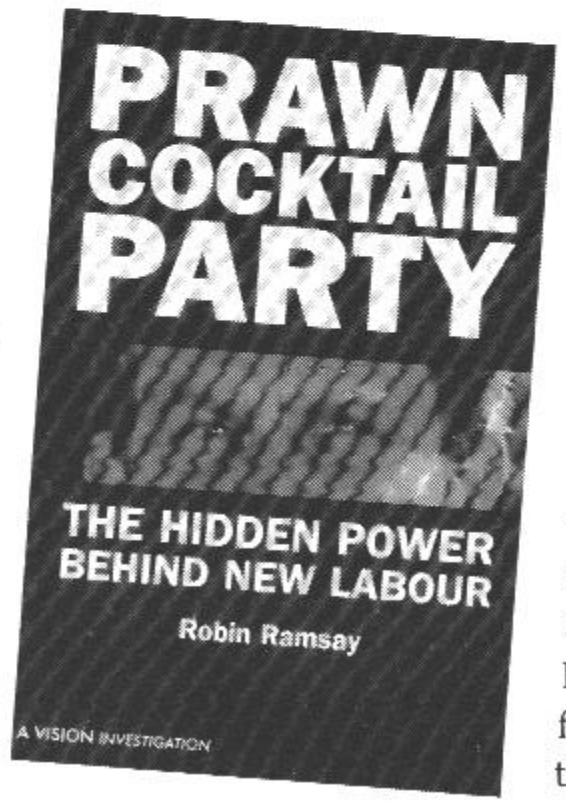
- **Trophy and prizes (celebrity guests)**
- **Food and fun for everyone!**
- **Enter your team now**
- **For details contact: Hit Racism for Six, CSDR, Roehampton Institute, London SW15 3SN**

Prawn cocktails or pink Thatcherites?

John Stewart reviews Prawn Cocktail Party: The Hidden Power behind New Labour *by Robin Ramsey, £9.99 from Vision Paperbacks*

LLB readers familiar with Ramsey's excellent work over the years on the para-political journal *Lobster* and his earlier 1991 book *Smear*, with Stephen Doril, an account of security service plotting against Harold Wilson's Government, will have looked forward to *Prawn Cocktail Party* with keen anticipation. True to form he serves up more detailed accounts of the machinations and conspiracies of those in power against elected politicians and the labour movement. Ramsey details the struggle of what he calls the "overseas lobby" — the Treasury-Bank of England-City of London nexus to exert influence on Government policy at the expense of the domestic economy.

From "Operation Robot" in 1952, when Treasury and Bank of England officials tried and failed to persuade the then Conservative Government to move to full convertibility of sterling and float the pound, Ramsey argues there has been a continual struggle to liberate the movement of capital at the expense of the domestic economy — basically manufacturing industry. This culminated in victory for the overseas lobby with the election of the Thatcher Government in 1979 and the removal of export controls and other deregulation measures.



In the process he gives us some interesting details of the tensions between Thatcher and the bankers' representatives in her cabinet around Lawson and Howe. There is more on the security service and CIA penetration of the Labour Party and trade union movement. One example given is the influence of the British American Project for a Successor Generation — a CIA front set up to promote US interests in Britain — its supporters include ministers George Robertson, Mo Mowlam and Chris Smith.

Ramsey sees the European Union as a kind of transnational plot to promote freedom of movement for capital at the expense of manufacturing industry. He favours the arguments against EMU put forward by Peter Shore, Austin Mitchell or Bryan Gould rather than those advanced by the left. He talks, in terms most *LLB* supporters would agree with, about Tony Blair and New Labour being frontmen for finance capital, but not about the potential of working class people to liberate themselves from the hardship imposed on them. Rather, Ramsey would prefer an alliance between the Labour Party leadership and domestic British businessmen in manufacturing industry against finance capital. That of course is where we came in one hundred years ago.

What's left? Not much!

Mike Phipps reviews What's left *by David Powell, published by Peter Owen, price £22.50.*

WHEN AT THE last meeting of my CLP General Committee, I delivered a closely argued critique of the Blair Government's first year in office, I was accused by one right-winger of indulging in — in Nye Bevan's words — "an emotional spasm." The context, you may recall, was the 1957 Party Conference when Bevan, having been appointed Gaitskell's Foreign Secretary, voltefaced on a decade of opposition to Atlanticism and denounced unilateral nuclear disarmament. Just two years earlier, Gaitskell had spoken privately of the "extraordinary parallels between Nye and Adolf Hitler."

Colourful stuff, faithfully recorded in David Powell's *What's left*, which comes with a thoughtful foreword by Tony Benn: "The Russian Revolution failed because it never managed to develop the democratic traditions that were needed to make it durable. But the Social Democrats failed too, because they finally capitulated to the pressure of market forces and became apologists for capitalism themselves."

These class contradictions are the key to any understanding of Labour's history. Powell's weakness is that, idealistically, he sees "the central dilemma of socialism" as the choice between being a party of dissent and a party of government. This is a common misconception: that Labour only sells out when it's close to power. In reality the record of capitulation goes much deeper. The outbreak of the First World War illustrates this. Thirty eight million working days were lost through strikes in 1912; Ernest Bevin was right to suggest that, had war not broken out, there would have been "one of the greatest industrial revolts the world has ever seen."

The Parliamentary Labour Party overwhelmingly supported the war, despite its opposition beforehand. In a series of pathetic cave-ins, opposition to war became opposition to conscription; this in turn was reduced to opposition to conscription of married men, itself approved by the PLP in 1916 as long as it was accompanied by "the conscription of wealth." Long before it got near government, Labour's leadership had adopted a policy diametrically opposed to the interests of the working class. Nor can such betrayals be explained away on account of the war's popularity: the leadership was equally willing to court mass contempt in pursuing a capitalist policy, as the huge benefit cuts of 1931 and the adoption of monetarism in 1976 show.

From being detailed and engaging at the outset, Powell rushes through the last 35 years of the Party's history in as many pages. Not surprisingly, this has its imbalances: for example, the author seems almost as obsessed as the leadership and the media with the negligible role played by Militant in the Party's move to the left in the early 1980s. Equally his focus is often on the sharpness rather than the substance of internal disputes. While it's a truism that divided parties don't win elections, the political basis of unity is of capital importance, as the last few years show. A brave attempt, but a flawed book.

Colonialism, debasement, destruction

Seamas Keenan reviews The Catastrophist *by Ronan Bennett, published by Headline, price £14.99.*

INTO THE WHITE paradise that is the Belgian Congo comes James Gillespie, novelist, sceptic, ex-soldier, ex-Irishman, in pursuit of Ines Sabiani, radical, crusading Italian journalist. Former lovers in a more temperate climate, Gillespie is desperate to recapture Ines' love, believing, in his possessive, frightening way, that this is his final chance for salvation. Ines, like the black Congolese, desires independence, and her developing strength and confidence create a resentment in Gillespie that mirrors the resentment of the white colonials who cannot believe the ingratitude of their slaves.

Ines involves herself in the Congolese freedom struggle, becoming friendly with Patrice Lumumba and the activists of the Mouvement National Congolais. Gillespie, jealous of her commitment, and of the revolution that is taking her away from him, hangs out with CIA agents and Belgian businessmen. Agonised, detached, capable of dismissing both sides of any equation, he tries to excuse his non-involvement by stressing the necessary impartiality of the writer. Even when he is forced to act, his actions are merely gestures, their integrity questionable.

Certain artists have always taken refuge in their ability to remain aloof from the political struggles of their time. Others have confused their own tangled lives with those of a struggling community. For all his self-ennobling meditations on the nature of art and the responsibility of the artist, there is a moral shoddiness about Gillespie. He uses art as an excuse. At the heart of his superficial soul-searching is concealed a deep lie and a deeper selfishness.

Colonialism in The Congo is possession, debasement, exploitation and destruction. The red blood of the murdered Congolese plumps the rivers and the soil, and the colonials, with their cocktails, tennis and desultory sexual affairs, chill the very air of Africa. The Congo is a land where the whites refuse to see a people's humanity, and expect from their subjects only a slavish shameful mimicry of white values and white aspirations. For Ronan Bennett, these colonial impulses can also find expression in the cloying desires of a man who cannot accept that his lover no longer wants or needs him.

The Catastrophist is a wonderfully subtle, beautifully written, examination of colonialism, the nature of power, and the psychically destructive consequence of dead love. It dissects, discomfortingly, the dark deceits that we all hold in our hearts, and the little lies that hold our lives together. It confirms Ronan Bennett's reputation as a novelist willing to interpret the inextricability of the personal and the political and questions the devices employed by "artists" to protect themselves from their responsibilities in the real world.

Geoff Martin's column in last month's *LLB* made humbling reading. Here is a man who can get pissed, watch his team win a major European football competition in Sweden, and still be up bright and early the next morning to rough up a Vulcan and a Blairite on national radio. Geoff mentions his new daughter Katie. So, is he superman, or just another crap dad with socialist principles and a heroically supportive partner?

Bill Dixon, Acton

While it was refreshing to read *LLB*'s positive review of your arch enemy Paul Richard's book *How to be your own spindoctor* (June *LLB*) it was pretty juvenile (nee reactionary) for Eddie Tucker to make fun of what Paul Richards looks like.

At least Paul conducts himself in a sober and dignified manner — something which Grant Mitchell clone Martin has never done.

Catherine Goss, Basingstoke

I find it amazing that the response to Blair's makeover of the Labour Party has been so muted. The Party is now representative of Labour in name only and has more in common with a conservative party than one of the centre left.

My observations are based on the record of the Party since May 1997: continuation of Tory privatisation policies, a sustained attack on the welfare state with the aim of replacing it with US-style workfare, lukewarm union reforms (the 40% ballot threshold represents a victory for business), privatisation in education through the introduction of Education Action Zones, continuation of Tory policies towards the elderly and lone parents and the introduction of student fees.

Those of us who profess to be socialist and remain within the Party are looking for a clear lead from the left MPs that they have not jettisoned all their principles.

Cllr. Keith Mallinson, Hammersmith

Despite the parliamentary votes on the Higher Education Funding Bill on 8th June, the campaign on student fees is only just beginning.

New impetus for this campaign, which has floundered on occasion due to the indifference of NUS, was sparked off by the lobby of Parliament on 13th May. Never before has the student left looked so united, although they were united against Labour Students in NUS, and President Elect Andrew Pakes was barracked. The new start must broaden the argument and recognise that this fight is the same as the pensioners' or any other campaign against public spending limits.

Some student unions are also planning "can't pay, won't pay" schemes against fees and future large-scale activities will be used to attract media attention to our arguments.

If Messrs Blunkett, Byers, Wilson, Howells et al are sitting comfortably, then we'll begin...

Duncan Hall, Skipton

CORRESPONDENCE

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



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I am very pleased to see *LLB* promoting a united left slate for the NEC, but I am rather shocked that the policy demands of the slate are so weak. Where are the demands to repeal all anti- trade union legislation? An alliance for democracy is inadequate in the circumstances. What's happened to *LLB*'s socialist conscience and why couldn't Michael Cashman be included on your slate — he seems pretty good to me.

Pete Fulwell, Maida Vale

Abdul Kadir must stay!

ABDUL HAS been in the United Kingdom for most of his adult life. He arrived here in 1982 with false papers, fleeing political persecution. Wrongly advised not to apply for political asylum, he worked in a restaurant where he had a horrific accident in November 1993. A colleague lost his life and Abdul had his right leg amputated just below the knee. He also suffered brain damage and now has epileptic fits. Abdul remains in the care of a neurologist at Middlesbrough General Hospital and takes anti-convulsive tablets.

Abdul claimed political asylum in 1994 but was refused due to a lack of evidence. There is no future for Abdul as a disabled person in Bangladesh. His only chance of survival and hope for the future is here in Britain where he is sure of assistance from both his uncle and cousin, both in regular employment.

The Government recognises that unscrupulous "immigration advisors" are operating in the United Kingdom, giving wrong advice and taking money under false pretences. Home Secretary Jack Straw has announced a long overdue licensing system for all immigration advisors. But victims of wrongful advice should not be punished as in Abdul's case.

Mo Mowlam MP supports Abdul's application to stay and said in a letter to the Immigration Service in May that there were "compelling grounds for allowing his application for compassionate reasons".

Abdul needs your support to sustain his campaign. Please raise it in your organisations. Make cheques payable to "The Abdul Kadir Campaign". Write to Mike O'Brien at the Home Office, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, London SW1H 9AT sending a copy of your letter to the campaign at the address below. Quote Home Office Ref: K468921.



PHOTO: SHEILA GRAY/FORMAT

Abdul and supporters.

- Contact the Abdul Kadir Campaign, c/o NECFAR, 308 Linthorpe Road, Middlesbrough TS1 3QX, tel: 01642-211 117.

Free the Campsfield Five!

Sue Lukes, Islington North CLP, calls the Home Office to account for the detention system that created the Campsfield riot last year and the trial that ended on 17th June.

"THE PROSECUTION was dropped and the accused walked free," said Home Office Minister Mike O'Brien, replying to questions about why the Campsfield case had collapsed. It was yet another lie. The nine defendants were cleared of rioting in the privately-run detention centre last year because the testimony of the Group Four guards was so "weak" that the prosecution QC said that he could not "invite the jury to convict on that evidence". Repeatedly, guards and an immigration officer in the centre were shown to have lied to try to implicate the nine men, and were contradicted by the video evidence.

One defendant, a 17 year old, "celebrated" the second anniversary of his detention for claiming asylum on the day of his acquittal. Two of them were granted refugee status while awaiting the verdict — hardly "bogus" applicants. The others are still waiting. Campaigners and lawyers fought to defend basic human rights, knowing that the prosecution was only brought at the insistence of Home Office Ministers.

O'Brien felt it was more important to defend the interests of the companies that make millions out of private jails. He recently called a press conference to respond to damning criticism of the Campsfield regime by the Chief Inspector of Prisons. Flanked by spokespeople from Group Four and Wackenhut (who run another immigration detention centre), he announced the renewal of their contract. By then he must have known about the alleged racism and abuses at the centre. But, astonishingly, he went on to visit Campsfield specially, after the trial had started, to present an "Investors in People" award to Group Four for excellence in training and human resource management!

Like his hosts, he has trouble distinguishing fact from fiction. The accused have not walked free as he claimed — five of them are still in a high security prison, temporarily denied access to their lawyers. Another was so affected he was ruled mentally unfit to plead and is now in a psychiatric institution. All of them have been detained, lied about by Group Four, the press and politicians, and faced prison sentences of up to ten years. The five still in prison and threatened with deportation are Stanley Nwaidike, aged 22, Sambou Marong, aged 17, Harrison Tubman, aged 19, John Quaquah, aged 32 and Enahoro Esemuze, aged 26.

These men should be free, and they should stay here as they cannot return home safely. Contact MPs, trade unions, Labour Party branches and anyone who will raise a voice for them now. The Campsfield trial has shown us how immigration detention can only be run unfairly, arbitrarily, abusively, violently and on the basis of lies and fictions told by the ministers, officials and companies who run it: end it now.

- Contact Close Campsfield Campaign 111, Magdalen Rd, Oxford, tel 01865-558 145. http://users.ox.ac.uk/~asylum has a full account of the trial.

Dover multi-cultural arts festival

As part of the campaign against the National Front in Dover a festival is being organised in the town on Saturday 29th August 1998. The festival will be held in Pencester Gardens from 11 am to 6 pm and will be free to all. Any groups or individuals wishing to participate in the festival or help organise it are asked to contact Craig Hudson: 01303-262 039 or e-mail: Craigh204@aol.com.

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